



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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16th November 2020

Deputy Sean Sherlock,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: sean.sherlock@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Sherlock,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ: 32575/20

To ask the Minister for Health the status of taxi services for the disability sector at present particularly in circumstances in which persons were collected from their home before the pandemic.

DOH instructions: Referred to HSE: The issue of transport to day services via taxi is a service matter. Grateful if you could respond directly to the deputy, addressing this.

HSE Response

In line with public health guidance, at the outset of the pandemic, adult day services, along with many other services, were significantly reduced to limit exposure to COVID-19.

The HSE acknowledges the impact and effects of the closure of day centres for adults with disabilities during the current COVID-19 pandemic and is fully cognisant of the stress this can cause to people with disabilities and their families.

To mitigate the difficulties, the HSE engaged with providers to ensure that where possible, some level of service was maintained, based on prioritising those with the greatest needs. In this respect, Providers continued to provide outreach supports to people in the greatest need.

Prior to the onset of COVID 19 there were approx. 19,000 adults in receipt of day service supports throughout the country.

Day service locations closed in mid-March but service supports continued for day service recipients albeit in a different way. In that regard reports for June showed:-

- Almost 5,000 of these adults received a full 24/7 service which includes individualised supports
- A further 4,000 adults received face to face supports albeit at a reduced level (Covid safety)
- Of the 1,000 day service locations nationally, HSE funded day services continued to provide supports at almost 300 locations to support people who were in a priority category with families under significant pressure.

One of the core principles of day service supports is community inclusion and active citizenship. Whilst adults with disabilities attend a service location – generally this location acts as a hub and where possible supports are provided in the community and people are supported to access a whole range of community based services. The closing down of society and lack of access to the community led to the development of new ways of working by the service provider sector, including a range of programmes focusing on mental health and wellbeing, physical exercise e.g. Yoga, Pilates etc. Adults in receipt of Rehabilitative Training in some instances had their normal daily programme delivered remotely so it was full service delivery for this group but by remote working.

The HSE worked closely with service providers through representative organisations such as the National Federation of Voluntary Service Providers, Disability Federation of Ireland and the Not for Profit Association and Inclusion Ireland, who represent people with intellectual disabilities and their families, to develop a Framework for the resumption of day services and a guidance document to support this.

Day Service locations commenced reopening in August for all recipients of day services.

Due to social distancing guidance, the capacity in day service locations has been reduced and therefore the quantum of service provided to people that receive day services is reduced.

There are some locations that have been retained as COVID isolation units but funding has been provided for Service Providers to source temporary locations as replacements for the duration of COVID-19. Where day service locations are being used as isolation units, day service staff are providing outreach support to the service users that would usually attend these locations.

Additionally, since the beginning of September, young people that left school this year and require a HSE funded day service, are being introduced to their new day service.

With regard to the specific question regarding the status of taxi services for a person to attend day services, and bearing in mind that the provision of transport services is not part of core services within disability services, attention is drawn to the following guidance available at:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/guidance-to-support-the-framework-for-resumption-of-adult-disability-day-services.pdf>

Please see Section 6 regarding transport.

The availability of safe transport is essential to the delivery of Day Services across the country. Service users must be facilitated to travel to the centres and need to be able to access other community facilities when they arrive.

As services resume it will be necessary to identify how transport can continue to be provided in as safe a manner as possible and strictly within social distancing and other COVID-19 precautions.

While family members are to be encouraged to transport the individual to Day Services, this will not always be possible depending on the family circumstances and in these cases, there will continue to be a reliance on bus or taxi transport.

Transport providers, including taxi services, will have to demonstrate that their transport services are safe and that all COVID-19 precautions have been established and observed. A risk assessment and action plan needs to be developed locally prior to providing transport on a bus or taxi (See Appendix 6 of the guidance above Risk Assessment of Transport).

Service users' will and preference should be considered to determine if a blended form of Day Services would meet their need and potentially reduce the requirement for transport provision. Residential Service users may wish to receive a greater amount of their Day Service supports in/from their home environment supported by day service staff.

It is however likely that some service users will still require transport and this will have to be managed by the providers in line with the COVID-19 restrictions.

Additional Funding

Additional funding of €10 million is being made available to support the resumption of day services and enhanced home support services for disability service users. The €10 million funding is being drawn down from the National Action Plan on COVID-19 - €7.5 million will increase the level of day service provision and €2.5 million will provide intensive support packages for children and young people with complex/high support needs.

The €7.5 m allocation for day services will be utilised to increase staffing in disability day services so as to increase the quantum of day service provision to in excess of 14,000 adults. Pre COVID the majority of these adults were in receipt of a full five day service but since the day services have resumed in August social distancing has reduced the capacity in each day service location and people are getting a 2/3 day service. The additional funding should provide one additional day's service for each of these adults.

The HSE and Service Providers recognise the critical need and importance of disability supports for people and their families. The impact of COVID-19 on people's lives has and continues to be very significant. Our collective aim is to restore services in a safe way and in line with the very significant investment made by the State and funded agencies and we will continue to work with service users and their families/carers to ensure that we achieve this aim.

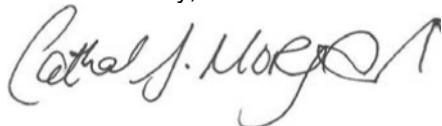
Reference is drawn to the following HSE weblink which provides updates and guidance for disability service providers, including 'service resumption planning guidance':

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/>

Attention is also drawn to the following important web links which provides up to date information resources in respect of covid: www.hspc.ie

<https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/c36c85-covid-19-coronavirus/>

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Cathal Morgan,
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations**