



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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16th November 2020

Deputy Michael Moynihan,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House, Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: michael.moynihan@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Moynihan,

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

PQ: 33452/20

To ask the Minister for Health the action being taken to reduce waiting times for assessment of need; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ: 34247/20

To ask the Minister for Health the number of children as of 31 October 2020 or latest date available that were awaiting a first assessment from the HSE under the Disability Act 2005 by LHO in tabular form.

HSE Response

The Disability Act (2005) provides for an Assessment of Need (AoN) for people with disabilities. Any child suspected of having a disability, born on or after June 1st 2002 is eligible to apply for an Assessment of Need that will detail his/ her health needs arising from the disability. Since the commencement of Part 2 of the Disability Act in June 2007 the Health Service Executive has endeavoured to meet its legislative requirements as set out in the Act. However, it is acknowledged that the numbers of assessments overdue for completion remain high, although there had been some improvement in these figures in 2018 and 2019 prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Assessment of Need is reported on a quarterly basis, so the latest information available is end of Quarter 3 2020. The Table below provides the number of applications for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act that were overdue for completion on the last day of Quarter 3, 2020 broken down by CHO Area. The information is based on data extracted from the Assessment Officers' System Database (AOS). 6,058 applications are overdue for completion with 185 of these on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations.

Applications overdue for Completion

CHO	Total Overdue ¹	Overdue/ Exceptional Circumstances ²	Overdue/ No Exceptional Circumstances
AREA 1	138	0	138
AREA 2	91	3	88
AREA 3	587	3	584



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AREA 4	1031	32	999
AREA 5	625	24	601
AREA 6	262	19	243
AREA 7	1095	1	1094
AREA 8	714	45	669
AREA 9	1515	58	1457
Total	6058	185	5873

¹All assessment reports that were not completed within 6 months of application or within 3 months of Start Stage 2 and before the end of the quarter are included in this report.

²The number of Assessment Reports for which an extended time-frame was negotiated with the parent on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations. Consent to extension is only valid if agreed extension date has not already passed.

Overall Reform of Children's Disability Services

The Disability Act requires the HSE to provide a consistent approach to Assessments of Need across the country. The HSE acknowledges that this has not been the case and that approaches to assessment and waiting times have varied.

To help address this situation, the HSE has implemented a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Assessment of Need process to ensure that;

- children with disabilities and their families access appropriate assessment and intervention as quickly as possible
- the approach to Assessment of Need is consistent across all areas.

In line with this procedure, an Assessment of Need will include a Preliminary Team Assessment that will identify initial interventions and any further assessments that may be required. This preliminary assessment will usually be undertaken by a children's disability service that are also tasked with delivering intervention. While not required by the Act, diagnostic assessments will continue to be provided, as appropriate, and these will be captured in the child's Service Statement as part of the Assessment of Need process.

These changes are intended to alleviate the current situation where children in some parts of the country may wait a number of years before they can access an assessment. During this waiting period, they often have little or no access to intervention or support. It is intended that the changes in the SOP, particularly the new preliminary assessment, will facilitate children with disabilities to access assessment in a timelier fashion.

The HSE believes that the implementation of this SOP and the planned reorganisation to Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs), will have a positive impact on the lives of the children and young people who require our services.

The recent allocation of €7.8 million to address overdue Assessments of Need will further support the HSE and its funded service providers to meet the legislative timelines for Assessment of Need.

This funding has been allocated to CHO areas based on the numbers of overdue AONs at 30th June 2020. Each CHO area has developed a plan to address this backlog through a combination of:

- Restoration of relevant clinicians to children's disability services
- Waitlist initiative utilising existing clinicians working overtime at weekends or evenings
- Procurement of private assessments
- Commitment to filling maternity leaves
- Recruitment of Additional Clinical Staff for fixed term contracts of 6 months from 1/9/20

The HSE acknowledges the challenges in meeting the demand for children's disability services and is acutely conscious of how this impacts on children and their families.

A number of service improvements are being introduced that, when implemented, will help improve access to services for children with disabilities and developmental delays. The overall programme of improvement is the ongoing roll out of Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (PDS). This requires the reorganisation of all current HSE and HSE funded children's disability services into geographically-based CDNTs.

PDS is doing this by forming partnerships between all the disability organisations in an area and pooling their staff with expertise in the different types of disabilities to form the CDNTs. These teams will provide for all children with significant disability, regardless of their diagnosis, where they live or where they go to school.

The HSE is establishing a total of 91 Children's Disability Networks across each of the nine CHOs comprised of Specialist Inter-Disciplinary Teams to work with children with complex disability needs. Each Network will have a Children's Disability Network Manager with specialist expertise in providing children's disability clinical services. The appointment of these managers will facilitate the establishment of the Children's Disability Network Teams later this year.

This PDS reconfiguration and the elimination of AON backlogs will facilitate reconfigured teams to provide child and family centred services in line with the PDS model.

Yours sincerely,



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



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