

27th October 2020

Deputy Holly Cairns,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2.

PQ ref 30339/20

“To ask the Minister for Health if funding will be provided for the provision of transport to and from disability support services in west County Cork that have been reduced due to social distancing and other Covid-19 protocols; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Cairns,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. Both Paddy and Michael Barry are known to Disability Services, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare.

Regrettably, due to Covid 19 crisis and the associated Infection Prevention Control and Social Distancing Guidelines, many services across Cork were severely impacted and resulted in either services ceasing operations on a temporary basis or services being offered in an alternative way to endeavour to support clients and families presenting with the highest risk. Our service providers have advised that this included in many instances an impact on transport arrangements for service users.

It is important to note that the COVID-19 crisis has impacted on the way in which services are currently delivered. The Disability Services have been working with our service providers to ensure the safe delivery of services as they resume, taking account of public health and infection control requirements. We have planned for reinstatement of services in line with the government roadmap on reopening the country along with the guidance from public health and infection control. The reinstatement required extensive planning and had to factor in the complexities and vulnerabilities of the people we support. This guidance requires services to be delivered differently to support people's needs taking account of the maximum capacity achievable within day services to allow for continued social distancing measures to be observed within the challenges and restrictions arising from the presence of Covid 19 in Ireland. Furthermore, our service providers have been working to provide alternative supports and services which facilitate and maintain services that could be delivered safely; providing outreach and telehealth solutions, using technology where possible to meet the greatest needs and phone contacts and physical attendance to day service locations in priority cases. The Disability Services and service providers will continue to engage with service users and their families to plan for these changes as services continue to resume.

With specific reference to service in West Cork, the service providers advise that they have altered their service models to provide more outreach services including the provision of additional hubs in a number of communities throughout the area to reduce the need for transport, while providing people with services in their local communities.

I wish to advise that Disability Services in Cork Kerry Community Healthcare are provided with limited annual funding for the provision of day services to young adults in our region. These funds are fully expended in the provision of staff, materials and all overheads and where necessary the rental of suitable premises, there is no provision within the annual funding allocation for transport. It is the position of the national HSE office that the provision of transport is a matter for the Department of Transport. It is noted that historical arrangements exist. With the onset of Covid19, many existing transport arrangements have ceased or have changed significantly

In the context of Covid 19, Disability Services was recently notified of additional once off funding to assist service providers in the context of service resumption. The National Disability Office have set out specific access criteria for this funding. The Disability Services team are working through these specifics with the service providers in relation to the allocation of this funding and the associated service capacity impact. It is envisaged that the funding received will create short term capacity to deliver and enhance onsite day service provision. Examples of once off utilisation of this funding may include transport, booking of sessional rooms or expanding the footprint of a location to allow more people to attend the location at any one time.

Disability Services is acutely aware that the Covid pandemic and associated reduction/cancellation of services has resulted in significant stressors being placed on families and individuals with disabilities across Cork Kerry Community Healthcare. We continue to engage with our Service Providers to ensure that the maximum possible service level is resumed and maintained, based on prioritising those with the greatest needs.

I trust this clarifies the situation for you.

Yours sincerely



**Ms. Jackie Daly,
Interim Head of Disability Services,
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare**