



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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23rd September 2020

Deputy Patrick Costello,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: patrick.costello@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Costello,

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 22758/20

To ask the Minister for Health the way in which the additional €2 million allocation was spent in 2020 to improve autism health services.

HSE Response

The presence and threat of COVID-19 in Ireland has resulted in significant challenges for service providers, families and most importantly, people with disabilities. During these challenging times disability services and supports such as residential services, day services, home supports, Personal Assistant supports, respite services and children's services were either suspended or delivered in alternative ways in line with Public Health guidance. The HSE is aware that the changes in service delivery have resulted in significant stressors being placed on children with autism and their families.

Children's Disability Services were stepped down in March 2020 in line with government recommendations to minimise spread of COVID-19. Through the pandemic, services continued to be provided on the phone/online and also, face to face for some children and families with high prioritised needs, taking all of the required infection prevention and control (IPC) precautions and in line with HSE's Alternative Models of Support (Non-Residential)(March 31st).

The priority for the HSE now is the safe resumption of all services that were ceased or curtailed. On July 31st, the HSE issued the Guidance to Support Resumption of Children's Disability Services <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/newsfeatures/covid19-updates/partner-resources/guidance-to-support-resumption-of-children-disability-services.pdf>

This guidance applies to all Children's Disability Network Teams and those services planning reconfiguration into CDNTs. The Guidance clearly maps the pathway of access to services and supports, commencing with on phone/online supports, and where that does not meet the needs of the child and/or their family, moving to face to face interventions and what is required to do so safely.

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.

Review of the Irish Health Services for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

The implementation of the recommendations arising from the *Review of the Irish Health Services for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2018)* were temporarily put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

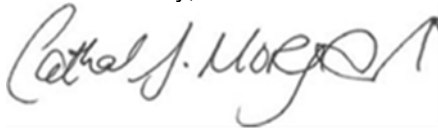
This programme of capacity building and public awareness has a budget of €2m of new investment specific to the needs of this vulnerable group.

The HSE welcomes the €2 million funding secured in Budget 2020 for the Autism Plan. In accordance with the National Service Plan, the additional funding secured will be used in a number of priority areas:

- To implement a programme of awareness raising that can provide a better information resource for children and parents about what supports are available;
- To deliver a campaign to assist in creating awareness of the challenges, needs and experiences of people with autism;
- To build capacity and competence amongst key professionals working with autism – including a national training programme for clinicians and the implementation of a tiered model of assessment in order to improve access to and responses by services for those with ASD.

The HSE's ASD Programme Board has begun work to implement the recommendations of the Review that includes a more streamlined clinical pathway for service users; collaborative working with parents; tiered assessment; more structured transition planning and ASD training for staff.

Yours sincerely,



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