



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

**Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,**  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
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12<sup>th</sup> October 2020

Deputy Pearse Doherty  
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Dublin 2.  
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Dear Deputy Doherty,

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 26901/20**

*To ask the Minister for Health the reason there is no diagnostic pathway for adults with query diagnosis of autism; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**PQ 26902/20**

*To ask the Minister for Health if holders of a full medical card can receive HSE funding towards the cost of an external assessment for adults with query diagnosis of autism; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

An extremely wide range of individual differences is represented within the Autistic Spectrum Disorder categorization, from individuals who also have a severe learning disability to those with average and above average intelligence. All share the triad of difficulties in reciprocal social interaction, communication, and a lack of flexible thinking.

ASDs impact on all areas of functioning and have enormous implications throughout the lives of those affected across the entire ability range. Services provided and the model of care provided is tailored to the individual needs and requirements of the person with ASD. Hence, the academic literature does not support one particular model or pathway of care for people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, be it assessment and/or intervention.

With regard to children who may be presenting with a possible Autistic Spectrum Disorder, they can present either through; the Assessment of Need process under the Disability Act, 2005, through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), or through Community Services.

Regarding Therapy Services, for those children and young people with non-complex presentations, these are provided through Primary Care Teams in Community Healthcare Organisations. For those with complex presentations (i.e. two or more disabilities), Therapy Services are provided by either Children's Disability Network Teams and/or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Teams (e.g., where a person with ASD also has a co-morbid mental health disorder).

It must be noted that regardless if the person presenting is a child or an adult, there is no standard agreed ASD assessment.

In this context the revised Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need is now in operation and works to ensure that there is a standardised approach to assessment across all areas.

### **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.

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.

### **Services for Adults with Autism**

HSE Disability Services has been allocated c. €2 billion in 2020. This funding is providing Disability Services throughout the country to children and adults with physical, sensory, intellectual disability and autism, including Residential, Day and Respite Services; Home Support & Personal Assistant Services; Early Intervention Services and Multidisciplinary supports for children and adults, including persons with ASD.

Some individuals with autism live independent lives within our community and others may require services such as a personal assistant or home support. Many individuals with autism due to the complexity of their presentation may have a primary diagnosis of intellectual disability or a co-morbid mental health component. In this context, it is important to note that the provision of supports and services across the range of Residential and Day Services work with people presenting with ASD.

With regard to the query if holders of a full medical card can receive HSE funding towards the cost of an external assessment, a medical card issued by the Health Service Executive (HSE), entitles the recipient to receive certain health services free of charge. A dependent spouse or partner and children are also covered for the same range of health services. Please see the following weblink which gives information regarding services covered by medical cards:

<https://www2.hse.ie/file-library/medical-cards/medical-cards-national-assessment-guidelines.pdf>

In some instances, families source external assessments for various reasons, though these tend to be for children for example, as they may facilitate access to educational supports such as special schools or classes.

It must be noted that in many cases external assessments are uni-disciplinary assessments i.e. completed by one professional e.g. a psychologist. In general, HSE or HSE funded services use a multidisciplinary approach to assessment i.e. a number of professionals e.g. psychologist, speech & language therapist, occupational therapist etc. are involved in the assessment, specifically to ASD assessment. While services

will take account of the private uni-disciplinary reports, they will also undertake a multidisciplinary assessment where appropriate, to confirm a diagnosis and to determine the necessary interventions.

Importantly, the qualifications, garda clearance, professional registration and quality of work of the providers of assessments including providers of external assessments must be validated prior to being accepted.

Yours sincerely,



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



Seirbhís Sláinte  
Níos Fearr  
á Forbairt

Building a  
Better Health  
Service