



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
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4th May 2021

Deputy Kathleen Funchion,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House, Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: kathleen.funchion@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Funchion,

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 18368/21

To ask the Minister for Health the number of children and young persons from 0 to 18 years of age by age group that have a blind or vision impairment diagnosis in Ireland in tabular form.

PQ 18369/21

To ask the Minister for Health the number of children and young persons from 0 to 18 years of age that have a blind or vision impairment diagnosis in Ireland by CHO in tabular form.

HSE Response

Disability services are provided based on the presenting needs of an individual rather than by the diagnosis of the individual or the actual type of disability or service required. Services are provided following individual assessment according to the person's individual requirements and care needs. Care and/or services provided are tailored to the individual needs and requirements of the child/adult with profound sensory disabilities.

Historically many children with significant visual impairments accessed the specialised School for the Blind in Dublin. Currently most children with visual impairments access education and health services locally.

The HSE does not collate nationally the number of children and young persons that have a blind or vision impairment diagnosis in Ireland, however each CHO area would be aware of the needs and requirements of children with disabilities including blindness or vision impairment in each area.

Overall Reform of Children's Disability Services - Progressing Disability Services Programme

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.

National HSE Disability and Primary Care are working together collaboratively with Community Health Organisations via their Chief Officers to support implementation of the HSE's National Policy on Access to Services for Children with a Disability or Developmental Delay.

The HSE also works collaboratively with organisations such as NCBI who aim to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by those with vision impairment.

National Council for the Blind of Ireland (NCBI)

NCBI is a not for profit charitable organisation which provides support and services nationwide to people experiencing sight loss. The overall aim of NCBI services is to enable people to live an independent life of their choice.

NCBI provide services to over 7,000 people every year. Almost 95% of these people have some degree of useful vision while less than 5% are blind.

NCBI offers community based services to help people to adapt to sight loss and maintain their independence. These services include emotional support to the individual experiencing loss of vision and to their families, advice and information on all aspects of vision loss as well as practical support and solutions to the challenges encountered by people with vision loss. Services are offered to people of all ages, from birth through to older age.

NCBI operates a Library and Media Centre that provides Braille production of books for visually impaired service users. Talking books and newspapers are also distributed to the national service users base and the library currently comprises 16,000 titles in a number of different formats.

NCBI also provide a range of services to public and private organisations to make sure that their services are accessible to people who are blind and vision impaired.

NCBI advises government departments, companies and individuals on how to make the built environment and services accessible to people with sight loss.

HSE Disability Services fund NCBI, under Section 39 of the Health Act to provide a range of centre, domiciliary and community based services to people who are blind or vision impaired. This funding is governed by a number of Service Arrangements in all 9 CHO Areas, which identify service delivery provided by the agency in return for the money being provided to them. The Service Arrangements are reviewed on an annual basis. NCBI received funding of €6,698,031 in 2020 from the HSE.

Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT)

The implementation of the Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People (PDS) programme is agreed Government and HSE policy. This policy supports the reconfiguration of children's disability services to provide equitable, child and family centred services based on need rather than diagnosis. The PDS programme will ensure that services are provided for children with complex needs regardless of where they live or where they go to school. A total of 91 Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT) are being established to provide services and supports for all children with complex needs within a defined geographic area. It is envisaged that all 91 CDNTs will be established by end Q2 2021.

CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including occupational therapy, psychology, nursing, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work and others. The team will work closely together in a family centred model, focussing on the child's and family's own priorities. Once all teams are in place, every child with complex needs will have access to a team, regardless of the nature of their disability, where they live, or the school they attend.

Children and their families will have access to the full range of services and supports of the CDNT according to their individual needs. This includes universal, targeted and specialist supports, such as individual therapeutic intervention and access to specialist consultation and assessment when needed. Supports will be provided as is feasible in the child's natural environments - their home, school and community.

Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme (PDS) is a significant change programme for the provision of services and supports for children from birth to 18 years of age, in line with Slaintecare and the Programme for Government, in order to:

- Provide a clear pathway and fairer access to services for all children with a disability.
- Make the best use of available resources for the benefit of all children and their families.
- Ensure effective teams are working in partnership with families and with education staff to support children with a disability to reach their full potential.

PDS aligns with two clear objectives of The Sláintecare Report to:

- Provide the majority of care at or as close to home as possible.
- Create an integrated system of care with healthcare professionals working closely together.

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Under PDS, transition plans will be developed with families and special schools to ensure a smooth and safe transition from what is often a unidisciplinary service into the multidisciplinary team over a defined period of time.

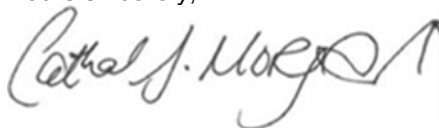
On full implementation in mid-2021, there will be 91 CDNTs covering the country and every child with complex needs will have access to a CDNT as close to their home as possible.

Developments in 2021

The HSE welcomes the recent announcements from the Government of additional funding for Disability Services:

- An additional €100 million secured for Disability Services in the recent budget. In the National Service Plan for 2021, the HSE commits to:
 - Providing 100 additional multi-disciplinary posts within children's network teams to improve assessment of need and treatment with a particular focus on behavioural, dietetics and paediatric services within the children's disability network teams and move towards the completion of reconfiguration under progressing disability services.
 - The NSP also commits to the development of additional Respite Services and in-home intensive transitional support packages.
- €20 million in one-off grants will be provided to reform disability services, build the capacity of disability organisations and to improve the quality of life of those who rely on these services.
- €7.8 million has been allocated by Sláintecare to facilitate the HSE and its funded service providers to address the overdue Assessments of Need for children and young adults with disabilities

Yours sincerely,



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