



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
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6th May 2021

Deputy Mark Ward
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Dear Deputy Ward

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 19100/21

To ask the Minister for Health the number of clinicians in each CHO that have been redeployed from early intervention and school age disability teams into assessment of needs posts; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response.

Since the Disability Act commenced in June 2007, the HSE has endeavoured to meet its legislative obligations under the Act. However, as a consequence of a High Court ruling of December 2009, the effect of which was to open eligibility to all children born after 1st June 2002, the number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while throughout 2020, this figure averaged 54%. This is a reflection that the AON process is an accumulative process in terms of numbers of children seeking access. 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.

In August 2020 the HSE secured €7.8m to address overdue Assessments of Need (AON). This funding was provided on a once off and strictly time bound basis to eliminate all AONs overdue at 30th June 2020. This funding provided a very welcome and timely opportunity to address AON backlogs as implementation of the Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need and the reconfiguration of all children's disability services to Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) will ensure that further backlogs do not occur. Furthermore, the elimination of these waiting lists will support the new CDNTs to deliver child and family centred services in line with the Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People (PDS) model.

Each Community Healthcare Organisation developed a plan to address their backlog of overdue Assessments of Need through:

- Overtime initiative for existing therapists at weekends / evenings
- Procurement of private assessments
- Short term recruitment of additional staff

The impact of COVID 19 restrictions also required clinicians to deliver some of these assessments remotely.

Significant numbers of assessments have been completed in the period since September 2020 and it is anticipated that most of the CHO areas will have eliminated their backlogs by the end of Quarter 2 2021.

Activity for Quarter 1 indicates that there has been significant progress in the number of Assessment of Need reports completed during the Quarter. This has led to a significant reduction in the total number of applications 'overdue for completion', which now stands at 3,103 (excluding those applications 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). The increase in activity in Q1 can be attributed to the additional funding allocated to the AON process via Slaintecare. This has been utilised to provide additional assessments through a range of options including overtime for existing staff and private procurement.

As outlined in the Quarter 1 Assessment of Need report, 2,693 AONs were completed in the period between January and March 2021. The majority of these assessments were completed as part of the AON waiting list initiative scheme. However, data submitted by the nine Community Healthcare Organisations indicates that 86% of children who received a Preliminary Team Assessment during this period were referred to an intervention pathway while 53% required further assessment. This represents a significant improvement in the pathway to intervention for children and their families.

It is important to note that completing Assessments of Need is part of the core work of any early intervention / school age disability service.

100 therapy posts were allocated to children's disability services under the HSE National Service Plan 2019. These posts were funded at basic grade therapist level. Posts were allocated to CHO areas based on the numbers of overdue Assessments of Need in each area as well as taking cognisance of the existing ratio of staff to the number of children with disabilities in each area.

As part of the current project to eliminate the backlog of overdue AONs, some CHO areas established dedicated short term AON assessment teams. New dedicated teams have been staffed through limited reassignment of existing staff and short term recruitment or agency use.. Only CHOs 7 and 9 have redeployed staff to dedicated AON teams. These redeployments have been facilitated to ensure that teams have the necessary skill mix and expertise to undertake AONs. CHO7 initially established nine teams but this number has now been reduced to four. Four teams established in in CHO9 continue to address overdue assessments in that area.

A further 100 posts have been allocated under the HSE National Service Plan 2021. Funding for these posts will facilitate each area to determine the discipline and grade required to address the gaps in their Children's Disability Network Teams. The 2021 allocation of posts is being assigned to the CHO areas in two tranches of 50 posts. The first tranche has been assigned based on the existing ratio of staff to the number of children with disabilities in each area. The second tranche will be allocated based on performance in the following categories:

Category 1 – Assessment of Need (max 36 posts)

The AON Special Scheme aims to eliminate overdue Assessments of Need from early 2021. 1 post will be allocated to each CHO area that achieves zero overdue AONs as per the published quarterly reports, for Quarter 1, Quarter 2, Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 2021. Any posts not assigned via this mechanism will be included for allocation in category 2.

Category 2 - Establishment of CDNTs

It is expected that all CHO areas will achieve full reconfiguration of their children's disability services to CDNTs by Quarter 2 2021. Posts in this category will be allocated on a pro-rata basis to CHOs based on the proportion of their total number CDNTs established at 31st March 2021. For the purposes of this exercise the following criteria must be met for each network:

- All appropriate staff assigned to CDNT
- All pre-existing caseloads transferred to CDNT as appropriate
- CDNT providing services for children with complex needs aged 0 – 18 years

CHOs must ensure that the allocation of any posts to CDNTs are targeted towards providing appropriate interventions.

The range of posts to be recruited in phase one 2021 include; dietitians, occupational therapists, physiotherapists, psychologists, speech & language therapists and some administrative support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathal J. Morgan', enclosed within a thin black rectangular border.

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



Seirbhís Sláinte
Níos Fearr
á Forbairt

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