



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Ceannasaí Náisiúnta Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte  
Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin Baile Phámar Baile Átha Cliath 20.

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25<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan

Dail Eireann,

Dublin 2.

PQ 7743/21

**To ask the Minister for Health the degree to which child and adult mental health services can be improved in the short to medium term given the serious shortcomings that have existed for some time; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Durkan,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The availability of skilled staff is a significant issue in Mental Health services where demand outstrips supply in both the national and international contexts and our potential workforce are availing of employment opportunities outside of Ireland. This is symptomatic of the overall recruitment problem that Mental Health services have been experiencing for the past number of years. It is recognised that there is a current shortage of trained Mental Health staff nationally and this trend is not unique to Ireland. Ongoing efforts, both locally, nationally and internationally, are continuing in order to ensure that all available avenues are explored in providing a staffing supply for Mental Health services, including CAMHS services.

It is often the case that staff shortages are filled on an intermittent basis by locum, agency and overtime. Despite these recruitment challenges and difficulties, Mental Health services continue to work with our local HR colleagues and at a national level through the HSE Health Business Services National Recruitment to achieve recruitment results in as efficient a time frame as possible for posts to be filled in line with HSE recruitment guidelines.

The "HSE Psychosocial Response to Covid-19" governance group has written a report which provides a detailed overview of the effects of the pandemic on society including children and adolescents. This work was based on consultation with mental health specialists, Tusla staff and other relevant stakeholders. As part of this work a national and community mapping exercise was conducted on all psychosocial activities taking place both within the HSE and across partner organisations, to identify areas for further improvement for the general population but also specifically for children. There are plans to appoint a HSE psychosocial response board which will develop specific implementation plans to build on existing activities and services to support, introduce, expand, and partner where needed.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/psychosocial-response-group/>



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In addition to the above, in 2021, HSE Mental Health plans to progress the development of three CAMHS telehealth hubs to increase the provision of accessible care across multiple community healthcare areas, reducing waiting lists and managing projected new referrals as part of the National Service Plan 2021. Also under Programme for Government 2021, HSE Mental Health will continue to work in partnership with NGO partners to provide digital services and supports as appropriate. These digital services and supports, which include SpunOut.ie, the crisis support service text50808, online Jigsaw supports and online counselling, are designed to increase our capacity for prevention and early intervention thereby ultimately reducing the need for child and adolescent mental health services.

Since March 2020, there has been a steady increase in uptake of these digital supports, including those aimed at children and young people. The youth health website, SpunOut.ie, has been averaging 200,000 website visits per month which represents significant online traffic in the Irish context, the new crisis support service text5080 managed almost 6,000 support conversations in the month of October alone, while Jigsaw's wide range of online supports have allowed them to support young people even when face-to-face services have been curtailed. Indeed, because of the required changes in service delivery during Covid-19, young people will in the future have the choice to pick the mode of clinical support from Jigsaw which suits them best, whether that is face-to-face, over the phone or by video link.

Child and adolescent mental health services have continued to operate throughout the pandemic. Community services have remained open and have incorporated digital health methodologies into their services. In addition inpatient child and adolescent mental health services have remained operational throughout the pandemic.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me

Yours sincerely,

Dr Sinead Reynolds  
General Manager Mental Health Services