

29<sup>th</sup> January 2019

Mr. Michael Healy-Rae, T.D.,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Dublin 2

**PQ ref 1002/19**

**“To ask the Minister for Health the steps which can be taken to reduce the long delays in disability assessments in counties Kerry and Cork (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

**Details supplied: Minister unacceptable long delays for disability assessments are in particularly angering figures at the moment in both Kerry and Cork. What can be done to reduce these unacceptably long delays**

Dear Deputy Healy-Rae,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you have submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

Children and young people born on or after 1st June 2002 who are suspected of having a disability can apply for an Assessment of Need (AON) under the Disability Act (2005). The Act allows for an assessment of the child's health needs. The assessment of need process consists of two stages, the first stage involves a review of the referral to the assessment of need process by an assessment officer which is an administrative exercise. The child is then referred to stage 2 if appropriate, which is for clinical assessment.

At the end of 2017, we had cleared the wait list at stage one. All Assessment Of Need applications are now commenced within a month. In Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, we receive on average over 1,100 applications per annum of which over 65% are referred for an Autism Assessment (ASD).

Current wait times for an ASD assessment (Stage 2) in the Cork Area range from 24 – 36 months

There has been both a national and local focus in 2018 in relation to addressing the wait lists at stage 2 of the assessment of need process. This focus took the format of:

- Working collaboratively with the current service providers in an effort to standardise their approach to the ASD assessment process. Currently there are variations taken in the time to assess each child. Standardising the process should increase the numbers seen.
- A national procurement process in response to a wait list initiative in this area.

These efforts, while not all are complete, have been successful and will yield a substantial increase in the number of assessments per month as we progress into 2019.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare area will re-configure Childrens Services in 2019 in the Cork area with the roll out Progressing Disabilities (PDS) for Children. Services in Kerry and in West Cork have already re-configured and are now structured according to the PDS model. Cork County North and Cork City will re-configure in the months ahead. The aforementioned area will have 10 Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT's) once the reconfiguration is complete. The recruitment process for the CDNT Managers is currently underway.

Reconfiguration of Children's services in Kerry has already taken place.

ASD assessments in Kerry are carried out by a multidisciplinary team, in line with best practice guidelines, which includes a Psychologist and Speech & Language Therapist/ Occupational Therapist. Waiting lists for children attending Kerry Disability Network teams that require an ASD assessment are currently between 18 to 24 months and while this number continues to grow due to the increase in numbers of children presenting with characteristics associated with ASD, the children on the waitlists are continually being monitored and reviewed by the team as needs change thus ensuring that urgent clinical cases are prioritised. The teams work closely with families to ensure that time sensitive and priority assessments are undertaken e.g. for children requiring specialist school placements, for young adults who are reaching 18 years and are leaving the children's services.

It is important to note that children who are on the ASD diagnostic waitlist for the Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT) will have been seen for an assessment of their needs by the team. This assessment will have identified the need for an ASD diagnostic assessment, the team will have provided a full written report to the family as well as arranging a feedback meeting with parents. The report and feedback meeting provides detailed recommendations for the child as well as setting out the intervention pathway within the CDNT, therefore children who are waiting for ASD diagnostic assessment will receive an appropriate intervention service from the CDNT. This process ensures that children are not on extended waitlists without receiving any services and also children are appropriately screened for ASD assessment reducing the number of inappropriate referrals to the waitlist. This is in line with the National Progressing Disabilities Services Model (PDS).

The length of waiting time for ASD assessments is impacted by resource issues including maternity leave cover and the recruitment of suitably qualified Psychologists in the area. However, it is important to note that a number of waitlist initiatives continue to be undertaken by the managers to reduce the waiting time including outsourcing of assessments to an external Psychologist and streamlining the assessment process.'

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



**General Manager  
Disability Services  
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare**

