



9 February 2021

Deputy Gino Kenny TD  
Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2

**Ref: PQ 21/3797**

*“To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that during the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic there were at one point over 2,000 vacant beds in the hospital system due to the cancellation of elective procedures and the reduction in non-Covid hospital admissions; the reason for missed targets despite this spare capacity given patient experience times failed to meet targets in many instances and times for persons over 75 years of age grew in this period; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”*

Dear Deputy Kenny,

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. The following outlines the HSE’s response to your questions:

### **Scheduled Care Waiting Lists**

2020 saw a significant reduction in planned scheduled care activity volumes across acute hospital services including outpatients, inpatient and day case procedures due to the impact of COVID 19. This reduction in activity was aligned to the National Action Plan on COVID 19 and the Clinical Guidance that was developed as part of the response to the pandemic. During 2020 scheduled care activities mainly focused on urgent and time critical access.

In the latter part of 2020, as services adapted to new workflows and processes associated with providing care within a COVID environment, the number of patients treated began to increase. The number of patients being treated in the scheduled care pathway in the early part of 2021 has been affected by the latest surge in COVID-19 and the requirement to prioritise access for time – urgent care.

The National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) have statutory responsibility for collection and reporting of waiting list data. This information is published on a monthly basis at [www.ntpf.ie](http://www.ntpf.ie)

The published waiting list data sets out volumes of patients waiting by time band, hospital and speciality however, it does not provide a breakdown by age category. The latest waiting list data shows performance against the HSE target as follows:

### **Waiting Times**

The National Service Plan (NSP) 2020 target is that 85% of adults on the inpatient waiting list will wait less than 15 months for an inpatient procedure and 95% will wait less than 15 months for a day case procedure.

By the end of December 2020, compliance with wait time targets is as set out in the table below, also included are the compliance to targets for years 2019 and 2018.



**Table 1: Compliance to Waiting Time Targets Years; 2020, 2019, 2018**

<b>NSP Waiting Time Categories</b>	<b>% of adults waiting &lt;15 months for an elective procedure (inpatient)</b>	<b>% of adults waiting &lt;15 months for an elective procedure (day case)</b>	<b>% of children waiting &lt;15 months for an elective procedure (inpatient)</b>	<b>% of children waiting &lt;15 months for an elective procedure (day case)</b>	<b>% of people waiting &lt;52 weeks for first access to OPD services</b>
<b>2020</b>	76.9%, below target of 85%	85.4%, below target of 95%	79.6%, below target of 95%	81.4%, below target of 90%.	57.8% target of 80%
<b>2019</b>	86.0% ahead of target of 85%	93.3% which was marginally below target of 95%	91.9% ahead of target of 85%	85.4% below target of 90%.	68.9% below target of 80%
<b>2018</b>	83.3% below target of 90%	92.9% below target of 95%	89.8% marginally below of 90%	83.9% below target of 90%	70.4% below target of 80%

**Data Source: HSE Business Intelligence Unit (BIU)**

Within the context of COVID the focus has been on ensuring access for patients to time urgent care which has had an impact on access targets. The HSE has been supported with significant additional resources in 2021 for access to care which will support Hospitals in recovering activity back to pre-COVID levels. The HSE will also be utilising these additional resources to provide access to treatment in Private Hospitals where appropriate.

### **Unscheduled Care Patient Experience Times**

The system response to the COVID-19 Pandemic has been the prevailing operating context for Unscheduled Care (USC) in 2020. This has resulted in changes in Emergency Department (ED) attendances, admissions and Patient Experience Times (PET) compared to 2019 performance and to performance in the early part of 2020. PET times performance for all age groups has exceeded the performance seen in 2019, exceeding targets set nationally.

Despite this overall improvement, the HSE is acutely aware that PET times for the cohort of patients who are over 75 years of age have deteriorated. The assessment and diagnosis of patients in this cohort is often more protracted for a number of reasons:

- Increased numbers of attendances of over 75's as a percentage of all attendances
- Reductions in available community services due to COVID 19 restrictions and guidance, including day services
- Reductions in nursing home bed availability
- complexity and underlying disease processes
- Increased numbers within this cohort presenting with COVID 19 symptoms

There is a particular focus on improving this performance and reducing waiting times in ED for this group of patients.



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Further information on the impact of cocooning measures on older people in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, including Impact on Services Utilisation is available at: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/olderpeople/interim-report-on-the-impact-of-cocooning-measures-on-older-people.pdf>

I hope this information is helpful

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Morton'.

Robert Morton  
Assistant National Director  
Acute Operations