

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.

4th March 2021

PQ 44750 - To ask the Minister for Health his plans to increase the number of public health nurses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Pádraig O'Sullivan

Dear Deputy O'Sullivan

I refer to your recent parliamentary question which was passed to the HSE for response and apologise for the delay in responding.

Public health nurses (PHNs) are registered nurses with a specialist nursing qualification. They provide the core nursing and midwifery care in the community and are a key member of the Primary Care Team. Based in the community, they work with clients of all age groups delivering care in the home and in clinical settings. PHNs offer guidance and information to clients about how best to meet their health needs.

The Health Service Capacity Review 2018 emphasised a requirement for greatly increased levels of investment in primary and community-based care and added impetus to health and wellbeing initiatives. The "future state" analysis still shows an estimated requirement for a 47% increase in primary care workforce (including GPs). Workforce was considered to be a critical limiting factor, especially given existing challenges in recruiting and retaining primary care staff.

There are approximately 1471 PHNs employed in the Primary Care/ Community Care setting.

Within the Covid-19 pandemic environment, there is now more than ever a requirement to protect and care for the most vulnerable people in our society. A Community First approach to the delivery of care will be central to delivering safe, efficient and effective services through the winter and beyond.

The implementation of the proposals in the Winter Plan 2020 and the HSE Corporate Plan designed to enhance community care services through the Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Programme, Community Health Networks and Specialist Teams will also advance the goals of Sláintecare, whilst mitigating the impact of Covid-19. There will be a requirement for greatly increased levels of investment in primary and community-based care and expansion of the workforce and infrastructure capacity in the community to deliver the plan for community based services. This investment in expansion of the workforce will result in increased numbers of PHNs.

In the Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Programme, nursing plays an integral part of the ECC Network teams, ICPOP (Integrated Care Programme for Older Persons) teams, ICPCD (Integrated Care Programme for the Prevention and Management of Chronic Disease) teams and CIT (Community Intervention Teams) helping to bring care closer to home for patients. The ECC programme will enable multidisciplinary teams to work in a more coordinated and consistent way, based on the assessed needs of the local population enabling integrated care across hospital and community services.

In the overall ECC network rollout involving 96 networks across the country, there will be a total of 92.5 WTEs for PHNs as well as 8.5 WTEs across the 5 new and 3 enhanced CIT teams. This is a total of 101 WTEs for PHNs under the ECC programme in 2021. This amounts to an increase of over 14% in the number of PHNs.

In the networks, there will also be increased numbers of Assistant Directors of Public Health Nursing (ADPHNs) and Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS's) along with new WTEs for Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANPs) and CNS's in ICPOP and ICPCD.

The investment in an Enhanced Community Care Model will be delivered on a phased basis with a view to national coverage being achieved within a 2-3 year period.

Yours sincerely,

Susan Kenny
General Manager
Community Strategy & Planning

