



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

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Deputy Holly Cairns  
TD  
Dail Eireann  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

**PQ Question 4956/21: To ask the Minister for Health the progress made in meeting each of the objectives of Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland Health Service Breastfeeding Action Plan 2016-2021 as of 25 January 2021; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Deputy Cairns,

The above PQ has been sent to my office for direct response to you on same.

The HSE Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland Action Plan 2016-2021 is the framework for progressing supports for breastfeeding in Ireland. Since its publication the HSE has established the National Breastfeeding Implementation Group to progress a range of actions to:

- improve governance and health service structures,
- develop new breastfeeding training programmes,
- develop evidenced based policies and practices
- communicate the importance of breastfeeding through social marketing, support and advocacy and
- monitor and evaluate breastfeeding services.

The National Breastfeeding Implementation Group is partnering with key divisions to provide the supports that mothers require at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum. It should be noted that up until now the HSE has not received any additional funding to implement the National Breastfeeding Action plan 2016-2021 except for the recruitment of 3 additional lactation consultant posts in maternity hospitals in 2020. However, considerable progress has been made using existing resources and support received from the Nurture-Infant Health and Wellbeing Programme.

A range of supports for breastfeeding are provided from antenatal care services, care immediately after birth and throughout the post natal period in maternity hospitals/units and community services.

- Midwives provide breastfeeding support during the mother and babies stay in hospital. Public health nurses provide breastfeeding support to mothers and babies after discharge from hospital in the community.
- Breastfeeding clinics and breastfeeding support groups are provided by the HSE and HSE funded voluntary breastfeeding organisations around the country. The HSE breastfeeding clinics and groups are run by midwives and public health nurses who have the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant qualification.
- Maternity and community services have dedicated lactation support posts available, but comparisons with international staffing benchmarks suggest that there is a requirement for additional posts dedicated to lactation support to ensure timely skilled assistance for mothers and support the development of skills and knowledge of front line staff. The National Women and Infants Health Programme (National Maternity Strategy) are funding three additional lactation consultant posts in maternity services in 2020.
- The HSE's online breastfeeding support service (Ask our Expert) is available seven days a week with the live chat service available Monday to Friday from 10am to 3pm. It was established in 2014. We have seen a significant rise in online queries as COVID-19 restrictions impact face-to-face breastfeeding support.
- Other supports have been developed during the pandemic, with a number of hospital antenatal breastfeeding classes and some breastfeeding groups run by the HSE and voluntary organisations moving online. There are approximately 60 virtual breastfeeding support group meetings taking place each month. Phone and virtual breastfeeding support is also being made available to replace face-to-face appointments as services try to re-establish safely, in line with national COVID-19 guidance.

I trust this information will be of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



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