



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
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8<sup>th</sup> April 2021

Deputy Sean Sherlock,  
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Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
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Dear Deputy Sherlock,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

**PQ: 14147/21**

*To ask the Minister for Health the current waiting times for children for assessment of needs by CHO in tabular form; and the length of time each age group is waiting.*

**HSE Response**

Since the Disability Act commenced in June 2007, the HSE has endeavoured to meet its legislative obligations under the Act. However, as a consequence of a High Court ruling of December 2009, the effect of which was to open eligibility to all children born after 1st June 2002, the number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while throughout 2020, this figure averaged 54%. This is a reflection that the AON process is an accumulative process in terms of numbers of children seeking access. However, it is acknowledged that the numbers of assessments overdue for completion remain high, although there had been some improvement in these figures in 2018 and 2019 prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Assessment of Need is reported on a quarterly basis, so the latest information available is end of Quarter 4 2020. The Table below provides the number of applications for Assessment of Need under the Disability Act that were overdue for completion on the last day of December, 2020 broken down by CHO Area. The information is based on data extracted from the Assessment Officers' System Database (AOS). 5,078 applications are overdue for completion with 281 of these on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations.

Funding to address a backlog of overdue assessments was secured in August 2020 at which time each Community Healthcare Organisation developed plans to address their backlogs that included overtime initiatives, recruitment of additional staff and procurement of private assessments. CHO areas with lower numbers of overdue AONs have projected completion dates of December 2020. Other areas will continue to address the backlog in early 2021 with an overall target date of 31st May 2021 for project completion. The number of overdue AONs at 31st December 2020, reflects the fact that the AON project did not begin until Sept / Oct '20 as well as the impact of service closures due to COVID-19.

## Applications overdue for Completion

CHO	Total Overdue <sup>1</sup>	Overdue/ Exceptional Circumstances <sup>2</sup>	Overdue/ No Exceptional Circumstances	Overdue <1 month	Overdue 1 - 3 Months	Overdue >3 Months
AREA 1	27	27	0	3	4	20
AREA 2	51	1	50	7	6	38
AREA 3	434	5	429	16	21	397
AREA 4	994	78	916	38	91	865
AREA 5	461	8	453	13	14	434
AREA 6	218	1	217	8	11	199
AREA 7	1023	2	1021	33	43	947
AREA 8	574	1	573	34	28	512
AREA 9	1296	158	1138	58	54	1184
<b>Total</b>	<b>5078</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>4797</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>272</b>	<b>4596</b>

<sup>1</sup>All assessment reports that were not completed within 6 months of application or within 3 months of Start Stage 2 and before the end of the quarter are included in this report.

<sup>2</sup>The number of Assessment Reports for which an extended time-frame was negotiated with the parent on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations. Consent to extension is only valid if agreed extension date has not already passed.

## Average Waiting Time for Assessment

The length of time to complete the assessment of need under the Disability Act will vary depending on the person's complexity of need; however, the national average duration of the assessment process per report completed in Quarter 4, 2020 is 19.83 months.

We are currently unable to provide information in relation to the 'length of time each age group is waiting for an assessment of need due to the limitations of the database we are currently using to facilitate the case management, planning and reporting of assessments and services to children with a disability eligible to apply for an assessment under the Disability Act, 2005.

## The Assessment Officers' System Database (AOS)

The database is 20 years old and has not had the necessary upgrades or technical changes in recent years that are generally required by IT systems, to reflect changes in policy, operational practice and user requirements. However, we are currently working through a tender process for the development of a new integrated Management Information System for children's disability services, which will include a module on the Assessment of Need process under the Disability Act. This will facilitate the HSE to provide a wide range of reports on AON activity.

In August 2020 the HSE secured €7.8m to address overdue Assessments of Need (AON). This funding was provided on a once off and strictly time bound basis to eliminate all AONs overdue at 30th June 2020. This funding provided a very welcome and timely opportunity to address AON backlogs as implementation of the Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need and the reconfiguration of all children's disability services to Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) will ensure that further backlogs do not occur. Furthermore, the elimination of these waiting lists will support the new CDNTs to deliver child and family centred services in line with the Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People (PDS) model.

Each Community Healthcare Organisation developed plans to address backlogs in their areas and significant numbers of assessments have been completed in the period since September 2020. All overdue AONs were eliminated in CHO1 at December 31<sup>st</sup> and it is anticipated that most other CHO areas will have eliminated their backlogs by the end of Quarter 2 2021.

## Allocation of Therapy Posts

100 therapy posts were allocated to children's disability services under the HSE National Service Plan 2019. These posts were funded at basic grade therapist level. Posts were allocated to CHO areas based on the numbers of overdue Assessments of Need in each area as well as taking cognisance of the existing ratio of staff to the number of children with disabilities in each area. A further 100 posts have been allocated under the HSE National Service Plan 2021.

## Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT)

The implementation of the Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People (PDS) programme is agreed Government and HSE policy. This policy supports the reconfiguration of children's disability services to provide equitable, child and family centred services based on need rather than diagnosis. The PDS programme will ensure that services are provided for children with complex needs regardless of where they live or where they go to school. Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT) are being established to provide services and supports for all children with complex needs within a defined geographic area. To date, 31 CDNs have been established and it is envisaged that the remaining 60 CDNs will be established by end Q2 2021.

CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including occupational therapy, psychology, nursing, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work and others. The team will work closely together in a family centred model, focussing on the child's and family's own priorities. Once all teams are in place, every child with complex needs will have access to a team, regardless of the nature of their disability, where they live, or the school they attend.

Children and their families will have access to the full range of services and supports of the CDNT according to their individual needs. This includes universal, targeted and specialist supports, such as individual therapeutic intervention and access to specialist consultation and assessment when needed. Supports will be provided as is feasible in the child's natural environments - their home, school and community.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr. Cathal Morgan,**  
**Head of Operations - Disability Services,**  
**Community Operations**