



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

National Office for Public
Health/ChildHealth
Office of the Chief Clinical Officer,
Health Service Executive,
Public Health Department,
Second Floor,
Mount Kennett House,
Henry Street,
Limerick

Post Code V94KN3N

Tel: (061) 483347

Fax: (061) 464205

Website: <http://www.hse.ie>

26th April 2021

Deputy Steven Matthews
TD
Dail Eireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ15789/21: To ask the Minister for Health the spend on the HSE breastfeeding action plan for 2019 and 2020; and the way in which this compares to that which had been budgeted for this area.

Dear Deputy Matthews,

The above PQ has been forwarded to my Department for direct response to you on same.

The National Breastfeeding Implementation Group was established in 2016 to oversee the implementation of Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland – HSE Action Plan 2016-2021.

The group is working to achieve the aims and objectives of the Breastfeeding Action Plan through the implementation of initiatives in the following areas:

1. Improved governance and health service structures
2. Breastfeeding training and skills development
3. Health service policies and practices
4. Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum through social marketing, support and advocacy.

The group is partnering with key divisions to develop to provide the supports that mothers require at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the delivery of some actions, the HSE will extend the implementation of the Breastfeeding Action Plan into 2022 and continue to work on priority outstanding actions.

The allocation of additional funding each year is through the annual Estimates process. Submissions were made each year since 2017 for funding to provide additional lactation consultant posts and breast pumps for preterm babies. Up until 2020, the HSE has not received any additional funding to implement the plan. 3 lactation consultant positions were funded through the National Maternity Strategy in 2020. However considerable progress has been made using existing resources and support received from the Nurture-Infant Health and Wellbeing Programme.

The National Women and Infants Health Programme (National Maternity Strategy) is funding 6.5 additional lactation consultant posts, this year, to ensure every maternity unit/hospital will have dedicated posts in place. The Baby Friendly Initiative will receive dedicated implementation support this year also.

1. Improved governance and health service structures

There are dedicated lactation supports in some hospitals and community service, 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. Community Health Organisations and Maternity services have prioritised these posts within their existing budgets and there are currently 30.69 whole time equivalent positions (WTE's) with maternity and community services, which is an increase of almost 13 WTE since 2017. The National Women and Infants Health Programme (National Maternity Strategy) allocated funding to 3 additional lactation consultant posts in 2020.

2. Breastfeeding Training & Skills Development

The HSE Nurture Infant Health & Wellbeing Programme is funding initiatives to contribute to increasing the rates and duration of breastfeeding. This includes the development of new standards for antenatal education, nutrition e learning modules and a suite of breastfeeding training programmes.

This will make training more widely available to a broader range of front line staff who are supporting mothers and babies to breastfeed, including midwives, public health nurses, community medical doctors, practice nurses and other support staff. Two new eLearning breastfeeding modules have been completed on HSELand over 2,000 times since October 2018 and nutrition modules including formula feeding came online in 2019. An accompanying skills-based programme for breastfeeding is currently in development.

3. Health Service Policies and Practices

Breastfeeding clinics and breastfeeding support groups are provided by the HSE and HSE-funded voluntary breastfeeding organisations around the country. Breastfeeding clinics and groups are run by midwives and PHNs who have the International Board Certified Lactation Consultant qualifications or are experienced trained peer counsellors. 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 70 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, in line with national COVID-19 guidance.

A new Breastfeeding Policy for Staff working in the Public Health Service came into effect in February 2021. This will support staff to continue to breastfeeding on return to work following maternity leave. This policy is being implemented on a cost neutral basis and will allow employees to take 1-hour paid breastfeeding breaks up until their child's second birthday, in line with WHO/DOH Infant Feeding recommendations.

A new Code of Marketing of Breast Milk Substitutes in public health services is in final draft and is due for implementation, across all health services in early 2021. The clinical Infant Feeding Policies for Maternity and Neonatal services and community services and Primary care Team were updated in 2019 and 2018 respectively. A new National Breastfeeding Observation and Assessment Guideline and Tool was rolled out at the end of 2018 for use in primary care services by Public Health Nurses.

4. Support at all stages of the breastfeeding continuum through social marketing, support and advocacy.

Breastfeeding is promoted to all expectant mothers in the antenatal period at maternity hospitals and in primary care. Mothers are offered support to breastfeed following birth by midwifery staff and care is provided by public health nurses in the community following discharge from maternity hospital. Since the

beginning of 2019, expectant mothers receive a copy of the new HSE My Pregnancy Book. This contains a wealth of useful information and tips for breastfeeding mothers
Additional breastfeeding information is available from the mychild.ie website. The HSE 'Breastfeeding – a good start in life' publication is also made widely available and was last updated in 2019. The HSE's breastfeeding publication for sick and pre term babies was updated in 2020 and was made available in Q 1 2021.

Breastfeeding support groups are provided by the HSE and HSE funded voluntary breastfeeding organisations around the country. The HSE has service level agreements with voluntary breastfeeding organisations, La Leche League, Cuidiu, Friends of Breastfeeding as well as the Association of Lactation Consultants in Ireland. €247,445 in grant funding was provided from 2019, 2020 and 2021 in relation to Breastfeeding.

The HSE delivers an annual National Breastfeeding Week as part of its overall breastfeeding promotion campaign. The HSE website mychild.ie is the primary on-line route for providing information, advice and support to women thinking about breastfeeding and those who are breastfeeding. An on-line Ask the Expert service and webchat facility is available on mychild.ie and support is provided by International Board Certified Lactation Consultant Lactation Consultants who respond to mother's queries about breastfeeding. There was a 38% increase in demand for the service in 2020 with over 4,000 queries answered. €984,000 was invested in the promotion of mychild.ie for 2019 & 2020.

I trust this clarification will be of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,



DR. KEVIN KELLEHER, FFPHM, FFPHMI
ASSISTANT NATIONAL DIRECTOR –PUBLIC HEALTH/CHILD HEALTH
OFFICE OF CHIEF CLINICAL OFFICER
Medical registration number 19719