



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
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12th April 2021

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: cian.ocallaghan@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy O'Callaghan,

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 16733/21

To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to remedy the lack of service provision for adults with autism; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

An extremely wide range of individual differences is represented within the Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) categorisation, from individuals who also have a severe learning disability to those with average and above average intelligence. All share the triad of difficulties in reciprocal social interaction, communication, and a lack of flexible thinking.

ASDs impact on all areas of functioning and have enormous implications throughout the lives of those affected across the entire ability range. Services provided and the model of care provided is tailored to the individual needs and requirements of the person with ASD. Hence, the academic literature does not support one particular model or pathway of care for people with ASD, be it assessment and/or intervention.

Disability services are provided based on the presenting needs of an individual rather than by the diagnosis of the individual or the actual type of disability or service required. Services are provided following individual assessment according to the person's individual requirements and care needs. Care and/or services provided are tailored to the individual needs and requirements of the child/adult with ASD.

With regard to children who may be presenting with a possible ASD, they can present either through; the Assessment of Need process under the Disability Act, 2005, through Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), or through Community Services.

Regarding Therapy Services, for those children and young people with non-complex presentations, these are provided through Primary Care Teams in Community Healthcare Organisations. For those with complex presentations (i.e. two or more disabilities), Therapy Services are provided by either Children's Disability Network Teams and/or CAMHS (e.g., where a person with ASD also has a co-morbid mental health disorder).

Review of the Irish Health Services for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

The implementation of the recommendations arising from the *Review of the Irish Health Services for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (2018)* were temporarily put on hold due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This programme of capacity building and public awareness has a budget of €2m of new investment specific to the needs of this vulnerable group.

In accordance with the National Service Plan, the additional funding secured will be used in a number of priority areas:

- To implement a programme of awareness raising that can provide a better information resource for children and parents about what supports are available;
- To deliver a campaign to assist in creating awareness of the challenges, needs and experiences of people with autism; and
- To build capacity and competence amongst key professionals working with autism – including a national training programme for clinicians and the implementation of a tiered model of assessment in order to improve access to and responses by services for those with ASD.

The HSE's ASD Programme Board has re-engaged and has, for example, tasked, a multi-stakeholder working group (including individuals with ASD) to agree an Autism Assessment and Pathways Protocol that will realise a more streamlined clinical pathway for service users with ASD; improved collaborative working with parents; tiered or staged assessment; and more structured transition planning.

Services for Adults with Autism

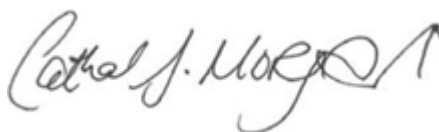
HSE Disability Services has been allocated c. €2.2 billion in 2021. This funding is providing Disability Services throughout the country to children and adults with physical, sensory, intellectual disability and autism, including Residential, Day and Respite Services; Home Support & Personal Assistant Services; Early Intervention Services and Multidisciplinary supports for children and adults, including persons with ASD.

Some individuals with autism live independent lives within our community and others may require services such as a Personal Assistant or Home Support. Many individuals with autism due to the complexity of their presentation may have a primary diagnosis of intellectual disability or a co-morbid mental health component. In this context, it is important to note that the provision of supports and services across the range of Residential and Day Services work with people presenting with ASD.

Working Group on Autism Innovation Strategy

On Friday 2nd April 2021, World Autism Awareness Day, Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, Anne Rabbitte T.D., announced her intention to establish a Working Group to develop a cross departmental Autism Innovation Strategy. Building on the work of the HSE's ASD Programme Board, the focus of the strategy will be to deliver a clear pathway of supports needed.

Yours sincerely,



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