



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

30<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Deputy Peadar Tóibín  
Dáil Éireann  
Leinster House  
Dublin 2.

Rannan na nOspideil Ghearmhíochaine  
Aonad 4A – Áras Dargan  
An Ceantar Theas  
An Bothar Mileata  
Cill Mhaighneann  
BÁC 8

Acute Operations  
Health Service Executive  
Unit 4A - The Dargan Building  
Heuston South Quarter  
Military Road  
Kilmainham  
Dublin 8.

**PQ 23633/21\*** *To ask the Minister for Health the number of hospital appointments which were cancelled in 2020 and to date in 2021. - Peadar Tóibín*

Dear Deputy Tóibín

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

## Response

Since the onset of COVID-19 there has been significant reduction in all scheduled care activity across Acute Services including outpatient clinics, this is in line with the National Action Plan on COVID-19 (page 20). <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/47b727-government-publishes-national-action-plan-on-covid-19/>

Arising from the NPHE decision in early May regarding resumption of services and aligned with the roadmap for reopening society and business, Phase 1 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ad5dd0-easing-the-covid-19-restrictions-on-may-18-phase-1/#health-and-social-care>, interim guidance was developed in the context of all scheduled services for the resumption of activity including outpatients. This guidance has been approved by the Expert Advisory Group (EAG) and has been issued to all hospital groups/hospitals to support the resumption of scheduled care.

This guidance outlines the measures that need to be undertaken to ensure safety for both patients and staff and vary depending on the type of appointment or treatment the patient is receiving. Key advice for both patients and staff has been provided depending on the above relating to measures required during the various steps in the

patient journey. In addition to the above, guidance has been provided specifically for individual specialties to support prioritisation of patients during this time of constrained activity.

These measures were implemented as services resumed in 2020 however they are restrictive and have resulted in a considerable reduction in capacity. The restrictions are multifactorial in the context of such elements as workflow, patient pathways, patient engagement and communication, infrastructure, physical distancing, capacity and resources. The capacity that will be available under these measures will vary from one site to the next and indeed from one service to the next.

Of note for consideration are that attendances in previous years have been impacted by adverse weather events, industrial action and the global pandemic COVID - 19 in 2020.

In the latter part of 2020, as services adapted to new workflows and processes associated with providing care within a COVID environment, the number of patients treated began to increase. The number of patients being treated in the scheduled care pathway in the early part of 2021 has been affected by the latest surge in COVID-19 and the requirement to prioritise access for time – urgent care.

In this instance the National Treatment Purchase Fund (NTPF) are not in a position to provide the requested cancellation data, as within their remit they do not collect and collate cancellation activity, namely; numbers treated /cancellations, etc.

There are challenges arising with the data collected by the NTPF, not all hospitals return cancellation information thus impacting a true reflection of overall numbers. In addition, there are a number of caveats related to data validity and furnishing this data would not provide an accurate reflection of the cancellation status nationally. The NTPF have advised that releasing data that is heavily caveated is not ideal as these caveats are often missed or misunderstood, therefore in this instance the data will not be available.

Significant funding has been identified through the 2021 estimates process to support access to care. The HSE is working with Hospital Groups to ensure that available additional funding in 2021 is targeted at access to care for patients where care delivery has been affected by the Pandemic.

I trust that this response is satisfactory.

Yours sincerely,

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**Robert Kidd**  
**Assistant National Director**  
**Acute Operations**