



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
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2<sup>nd</sup> July 2021

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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 questions, which were submitted to this department for response.

**PQ: 24744/21**

*To ask the Minister for Health the waiting times for children for an assessment of needs by CHO; the number awaiting in each specific area within each CHO in tabular form; and the length of time each age group is waiting.*

**PQ: 24747/21**

*To ask the Minister for Health the waiting times for children for assessment and first time intervention by CHO; the number awaiting in each specific area within each 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 1 2021. 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 March, 2021 broken down by CHO Area. The information is based on data extracted from the Assessment Officers' System Database (AOS).

Activity for Quarter 1 indicates that there has been significant progress in the number of Assessment of Need reports completed during the Quarter. This has led to a significant reduction in the total number of applications 'overdue for completion', which now stands at 3,103 (excluding those

applications 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). The increase in activity in Q1 can be attributed to the additional funding allocated to the AON process via Slaintecare. This has been utilised to provide additional assessments through a range of options including overtime for existing staff and private procurement.

#### Applications overdue for completion 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

Of the 3,503 applications that are overdue, 2,915 (83%) are overdue for longer than 3 months. Months overdue are calculated based on the statutory timelines of 3 months from start stage 2 and no more than 6 months from the application date. This overdue figure does not include applications that have been put on hold, are closed or are ineligible for Assessment

CHO	LHO	Overdue	<1 month	1 - 3 Months	>3 Months
<b>AREA 1</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>
	Cavan/Monaghan	1	1	0	0
	Donegal	4	0	1	3
	Sligo/Leitrim	0	0	0	0
<b>AREA 2</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>
	Galway	7	2	3	2
	Mayo	11	5	2	4
	Roscommon	0	0	0	0
<b>AREA 3</b>		<b>192</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>178</b>
	Clare	33	2	5	26
	Limerick	81	0	2	79
	Tipperary N.R	78	2	3	73
<b>AREA 4</b>		<b>903</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>738</b>
	Kerry	89	1	4	84
	Cork North	150	10	18	122
	Cork North Lee	314	25	31	258
	Cork South Lee	311	33	39	239
	Cork West	39	2	2	35
<b>AREA 5</b>		<b>251</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>229</b>
	Carlow/Kilkenny	16	1	1	14
	Tipperary S.R	60	7	2	51
	Waterford	89	0	0	89
	Wexford	86	9	2	75
<b>AREA 6</b>		<b>91</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>61</b>
	Dublin South East	5	4	1	0
	Dublin South	13	1	2	10
	Wicklow	73	11	11	51
<b>AREA 7</b>		<b>735</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>588</b>
	Dublin South City	83	10	11	62
	Dublin South West	264	25	31	208
	Dublin West	119	10	9	100
	Kildare/West Wicklow	269	20	31	218
<b>AREA 8</b>		<b>292</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>212</b>
	Laois/Offaly	137	4	2	131
	Longford/Westmeath	8	2	3	3
	Louth	20	3	3	14
	Meath	127	27	36	64
<b>AREA 9</b>		<b>1016</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>900</b>
	North Dublin	582	38	43	501

	Dublin North Centre	101	6	1	94
	North West Dublin	333	21	7	305
<b>Total</b>		<b>3503</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>306</b>	<b>2915</b>

## Overall Reform of Children's Disability Services

The Disability Act requires the HSE to provide a consistent approach to Assessments of Need across the country. The HSE acknowledges that this has not been the case and that approaches to assessment and waiting times have varied.

To help address this situation, the HSE has implemented a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Assessment of Need process to ensure that;

- children with disabilities and their families access appropriate assessment and intervention as quickly as possible
- the approach to Assessment of Need is consistent across all areas.

In line with this procedure, an Assessment of Need will include a Preliminary Team Assessment that will identify initial interventions and any further assessments that may be required. This preliminary assessment will usually be undertaken by a children's disability service that are also tasked with delivering intervention. While not required by the Act, diagnostic assessments will continue to be provided, as appropriate, and these will be captured in the child's Service Statement as part of the Assessment of Need process.

These changes are intended to alleviate the current situation where children in some parts of the country may wait a number of years before they can access an assessment. During this waiting period, they often have little or no access to intervention or support. It is intended that the changes in the SOP, particularly the new preliminary assessment, will facilitate children with disabilities to access assessment in a timelier fashion.

The HSE believes that the implementation of this SOP and the planned reorganisation to Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs), will have a positive impact on the lives of the children and young people who require our services.

The recent allocation of €7.8 million through Slaintecare to address overdue Assessments of Need will further support the HSE and its funded service providers to meet the legislative timelines for Assessment of Need.

This funding has been allocated to CHO areas based on the numbers of overdue AONs at 30th June 2020. Each CHO area has developed a plan to address this backlog through a combination of:

- Restoration of relevant clinicians to children's disability services
- Waitlist initiative utilising existing clinicians working overtime at weekends or evenings
- Procurement of private assessments
- Commitment to filling maternity leaves
- Recruitment of Additional Clinical Staff for fixed term contracts of 6 months from 1/9/20

The HSE acknowledges the challenges in meeting the demand for children's disability services and is acutely conscious of how this impacts on children and their families.

A number of service improvements are being introduced that, when implemented, will help improve access to services for children with disabilities and developmental delays. The overall programme of improvement is the ongoing roll out of Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (PDS). This requires the reorganisation of all current HSE and HSE funded children's disability services into geographically-based CDNTs.

PDS is doing this by forming partnerships between all the disability organisations in an area and pooling their staff with expertise in the different types of disabilities to form the CDNTs. These teams will provide for all children with significant disability, regardless of their diagnosis, where they live or where they go to school.

The HSE is establishing a total of 91 Children's Disability Networks across each of the nine CHOs comprised of specialist inter-disciplinary Children's Disability Network Teams to work with children with complex disability needs. This reconfiguration of services under the Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People (PDS) programme is in line with Health Service Reform and the implementation of Community Healthcare Networks under Sláintecare.

Yours sincerely,



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