



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

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Deputy Mark Ward,  
Dail Eireann,  
Dublin 2.

17th November 2021

**PQ Number: 52052/21**

**PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health his views on the fact that young persons are waiting up to 20 weeks for an appointment with Jigsaw; and the plans that are in place to reduce the waiting times - Mark Ward**

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Dear Deputy Ward,

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The HSE funds Jigsaw to provide youth mental health services for those with mild to moderate mental health difficulties. Jigsaw provide face-to-face, online and phone based services to young people aged between 12 to 25 years old while working with communities to resource and support parents and other adults who work with young people. Face-to-face services are delivered from 12 nationwide locations in the form of brief intervention sessions with healthcare professionals, usually taking place across 6 to 8 appointments. Other services include live 1 to 1 online chat, phone based support provided by a counsellor and text support. All Jigsaw services are highlighted on [www.jigsaw.ie](http://www.jigsaw.ie)

The following details have been provided from Jigsaw directly.

### **Capacity and demand in Jigsaw services**

Currently, Mental Health Services in Ireland are overwhelmed as a result of COVID 19 and Jigsaw is no exception to this. The wait time between first contact and first appointment in Jigsaw services in some areas remain longer than Jigsaw would wish for. While this is an area of concern, Jigsaw are encouraged by the fact that the young people are reaching out for support and that Jigsaw continues to be recognised as a high quality, youth friendly and impactful service.

Despite such challenges, Jigsaw are fully on track to meet its commitments in line with the Service Level Agreement with the HSE (with over 30,000 appointments offered to young people to date this year (against a full year target of 36,000)).

## Contributing factors to wait times include:

- Ongoing major **public mental health literacy and stigma reduction campaigns** have resulted in a significant shift in awareness and acceptance of mental health in the community. This, alongside a growth in Jigsaw's awareness as a free, youth friendly and impactful service, is resulting in a greater willingness amongst young people to seek help. Jigsaw has seen a year on year increase in referrals to its services. At this point in 2021, Jigsaw estimate that by year end they will have received 19% more referrals than in 2020.
- It is important to acknowledge that **levels of distress among our youth population are on the rise**. The total number of referrals for Jigsaw in 2019 was 8,120 which represents an increase of 21% on 2018 (6,667) and 63% on 2017 (4,995)<sup>[1]</sup>. Alongside this, My World Survey 2 (Jigsaw and UCD, 2019) pointed to significant increases in the rates of anxiety, isolation and low mood (since the first My World Survey 1 published in 2012). Added again to this, the past 18 months have been particularly challenging for many young people who are disproportionately affected by the impact of COVID-19.
- Jigsaw, as is the case with other mental health service providers, have experienced significant challenges in the **recruitment and retention of key people**, especially in relation to clinical staff. Often Jigsaw is competing with the public sector and other mental health service providers to attract and retain staff. Any delay in recruiting a new staff member can lead to a delay in offering support to a young person a timely manner.

In terms of future plans to reduce waiting times, Jigsaw intend to work on two fronts:

### 1. Evolving the Service Model

Central to their 2022-2025 strategy, Jigsaw Connect is a new, integrated and holistic suite of services and supports with multiple entry points for young people experiencing a range of mental health difficulties.

Jigsaw Connect will transform their current service model to provide greater choice and flexibility to enhance the way in which young people can avail of supports that best meet their needs. This is aligned with the Mental Health Policy *Sharing the Vision*, the *Sláintecare* programme of reform and the key recommendations in the *Youth Mental Health Taskforce Report (2017)*.

The expansion of their suite of services and supports, both online and offline, will enable Jigsaw to move past the existing catchment based boundaries of community services. Over time, Jigsaw Connect, will enable meaningful national digital reach allied with a wider network of face to face services, aiming to deliver over 56,000 appointments in 2024 (a 56% increase on 2021).

### 2. Adding clinical capacity to existing services

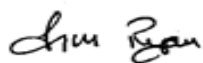
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<sup>[1]</sup> The decrease in total referrals received in 2020 (7,215) was impacted by COVID and therefore does not necessarily represent a true reduction in demand for services. The number of referrals received by end of Q3 2021 is 6,458 and is projected to reach approximately 8,500 by year end, which would be a small increase on 2019 figures. Referrals were most likely impacted during the early months of 2021 however, two new services were also opened this year (in Q1 and Q3 respectively) so it's difficult to predict what the demand would have been otherwise.

The HSE are in continued engagement with Jigsaw and are fully committed to working with them in relation to the provision of mental health services for young people.

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



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**Jim Ryan**  
**Assistant National Director - Head of Operations**  
**National Mental Health Service**

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