

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2021.

Deputy Holly Cairns T.D.,  
Dáil Éireann  
Dublin 2.

**PQ ref 53358/21**

**“To ask the Minister for Health the steps he is taking to provide public dental services in Bantry, County Cork.”**

Dear Deputy Cairns,

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.

The Primary Care Dental services team provides Dental treatment services to eligible children, medical card holders, special needs clients and others in the care of the HSE at various locations throughout County Cork. Children under 16 years of age are treated in HSE dental clinics and adults are treated by private dental practitioners contracted to the Health Services under the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS). People who are categorised as high risk, for example: people with specified medical conditions, or special care needs adults, can avail of more extensive dental care.

The emergence of Covid-19 in March 2020 has had a significant impact on the provision of all health services including dental services throughout the Cork and Kerry region. As per our pandemic plan the HSE Dental Service had to curtail service provision to emergency services only and staff were largely redeployed into COVID testing, contact tracing and the vaccination program. The school dental screening program was suspended from March to September 2020 and again from January to March 2021. This has led to significant delays in the service.

While most oral health staff have now returned to core duties enabling the safe resumption of services, strict adherence to physical distancing and enhanced infection prevention and control measures has reduced the capacity of the available staffing from what it would have been pre-Covid and it is necessary to target the resources available. There is a vacant post in Bantry and once the recruitment process is completed we expect a vacant dental surgeon post in Bantry to be filled in the near future.

The dental service continues to prioritise special care needs patients and medically compromised patients. The service also continues to provide emergency care for all eligible patients.

The service is currently prioritising 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils for school screening. In the case of the school dental screening in Cork, taking into consideration all available resources at this time, the backlog of 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils from 2019/2020 is currently being prioritised. When this patient cohort is completed, screening of the 2020/2021 6<sup>th</sup> class children will commence followed by the recommencement of screening of 2<sup>nd</sup> class children. I refer specifically to your representation in relation to the provision of public dental services in Bantry, County Cork. The HSE children's dental service in Bantry is providing emergency dental care to all eligible patients and has recommenced the school dental screening programme.

There are particular issues with the provision of HSE dental service for adults through the Dental Treatment Services Scheme (DTSS). This issue is a nationwide problem and is not unique to Bantry. A significant number of private general dental practitioners (GDP`s) have resigned from the Scheme. Many of the private GDP`s still operating the scheme have restricted access providing services to existing patients only. Therefore, currently medical card patients must travel to towns outside of Bantry to access dental treatment. We are continuing to provide patients with the names of nearby GDP`s still operating the scheme.

A more long term solution will require engagement at a national level between the various stakeholders.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Priscilla Lynch', written in a cursive style.

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**Priscilla Lynch**  
**Head of Service - Primary Care,**  
**Cork Kerry Community Healthcare**