



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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2nd December 2021

Deputy Mark Ward,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: mark.ward@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Ward,

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 56630/21

To ask the Minister for Health the number of children waiting on an ASD service; the average waiting time after completion of an assessment of needs per CHO area; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ 56631/21

To ask the Minister for Health the number of interventions received on average since their initial intervention after a child is identified as needing an ASD service after completion of an assessment of needs in the first 12 months per CHO area in the past five years in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

Children who require a diagnostic assessment for ASD usually access these assessments through children's disability services (Children's Disability Network Teams – CDNTs or equivalent). However, some children will access these assessments through Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or through Primary Care. Children do not need to apply for an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act (2005) to access an ASD assessment.

In respect of those children applying for an assessment under the Disability Act 2005, the Act gives an individual with a disability the right to an assessment of their health needs. The intention of the Assessment of Need process is to identify the health needs resulting from the child's disability. It is a matter for clinicians, based on their experience and qualifications, to decide how best to evaluate the needs at the time of the child being assessed. The Act does not give the right to a specific assessment at a particular point in time. Nor does it give a right to access to a diagnosis unless it is required at that time to identify the health needs occasioned by the disability.

The HSE records data, pertaining to the assessment of need process, under the Disability Act, 2005. The Act concentrates on identifying need and does not require diagnosis and the category of disability is only recorded where known. It should also be stressed that the Act currently only applies to those



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children born after 1st June 2002 and that not all eligible children apply for an assessment under the Act.

Diagnostic ASD assessments are in the main lengthy multidisciplinary assessments that include a number of components such as parent interviews, school observations and standardised assessments. The numbers of children requiring ASD assessment is very high and the impact of COVID-19 has also had an effect on waiting lists.

We do not have information regarding the average waiting time for autism assessment nor the number of interventions received on average since their initial intervention after a child is identified as needing an ASD service after completion of an assessment of need.

The information regarding the number of Assessment of Need reports completed since 2017 is provided below. The detail regarding the number of these reports that identified a requirement for an ASD service is also provided. This data is not available by CHO area. HSE Disability Services does not gather data on the service provided through Primary Care or Mental Health services.

Of note, children do not require an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act to access any health services.

| Year | AON Reports Completed | No. with identified need for ASD Service |
|------|-----------------------|--|
| 2017 | 3660 | 229 |
| 2018 | 4237 | 706 |
| 2019 | 3312 | 816 |
| 2020 | 3911 | 1126 |
| 2021 | 6204 | 1266 |

The HSE and disability service providers recognise the critical need and importance of disability supports for children with complex needs including autism and are very much aware of the importance of service provision for the families of children with disabilities. The impact of COVID-19 on people's lives has and continues to be very significant. Our collective aim is to continue the provision of services and supports based on prioritised needs of service users and their families in a safe way and in line with the very significant investment made by the State and funded agencies.

Progressing Disability Services

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 implementation of the Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People (PDS) programme is agreed Government and HSE policy. This policy supports the reconfiguration of children's disability services to provide equitable, child and family centred services based on need rather than diagnosis. The PDS programme will ensure that services are provided for children with complex needs regardless of where they live or where they go to school.

The Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (PDS) model addresses the previous inequity in service provision whereby there may have been an excellent service for some children and little or no service for others. This variance may have been linked to diagnosis, age group or geography. Under the PDS programme children's disability services are changing from diagnosis based to needs based, so that all children with a disability or developmental delay have access to the right service based on their needs no matter where they live.

The National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay ensures that children are directed to the appropriate service based on the complexity of their presenting needs rather than based on diagnosis. Many children and adults with a disability who have support needs can be effectively supported within mainstream child and adult

health services. This policy will provide a single point of entry, signposting parents and referrers to the most appropriate service (Primary Care for non-complex functional difficulties and Children's Disability Network Teams for complex functional difficulties).

The HSE is committed to the full implementation of the Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People Programme (PDS). PDS is a significant change programme for the provision of services and supports for children from birth to 18 years of age, in line with Sláintecare and the Programme for Government, in order to:

- Provide a clear pathway and fairer access to services for all children with a disability
- Make the best use of available resources for the benefit of all children and their families
- Ensure effective teams are working in partnership with families and with education staff to support children with a disability to reach their full potential.

PDS aligns with two clear objectives of The Sláintecare Report to:

- Provide the majority of care at or as close to home as possible
- Create an integrated system of care with healthcare professionals working closely together.

Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs)

In line with the PDS model, resources assigned to children's disability services are allocated to the 0 – 18 Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) rather than to a dedicated early intervention team or dedicated school age team.

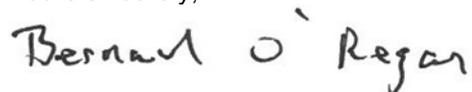
91 Children's Disability Networks (CDN) are aligning to 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) across the country and each Children's Disability Network will have one CDNT providing services and supports for children aged from birth to 18 years of age. Early Intervention Teams and School Age Teams already in place are reconfiguring into 0-18 CDNTs. On full reconfiguration of children's disability services into CDNTs, every child across the country with complex needs arising from their disability will have access to a Children's Disability Network Team.

CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work and others. The team works closely together in a family centred model, focusing on the child's and family's own priorities. Once all teams are in place, every child with complex needs will have access to a team, regardless of the nature of their disability, where they live, or the school they attend.

Children and their families will have access to the full range of services and supports of the CDNT according to their individual needs. This includes universal, targeted and specialist supports, such as individual therapeutic intervention and access to specialist consultation and assessment when needed. Supports will be provided as is feasible in the child's natural environments - their home, school and community.

Services in most parts of the country have now reconfigured to CDNTs. The remaining teams in will be established before the end of 2021, thereby all 91 CDNTs will be in place and delivering services at that time.

Yours sincerely,



Bernard O'Regan
Head of Operations - Disability Services,
Community Operations