



26th October 2021

Deputy Bernard J. Durkan,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 49451/21 - To ask the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable for children to wait in excess of 52 weeks for access to psychology services with particular reference to the importance of early intervention; the efforts currently being made to reduce this waiting time; the success to date in reducing this waiting time; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Bernard J. Durkan

Dear Deputy Durkan,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question (PQ 49451/21) which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

Psychology services in the HSE are delivered by primary care, mental health and disability services. However as there was just over 5,000 children waiting more than 52 weeks for psychology treatment in Primary Care in early 2021, our assumption is that your question is with reference to psychology in Primary Care and this reply is only in respect of this service.

Primary Care psychology is a large provider of psychological services at primary/community level in Ireland. The service grew out of hospital and community care models that are largely one-to-one assessment and intervention models. Today, it provides a range of services of varying intensity, encompassing education, prevention, early intervention and a range of treatments. It also plays a key role in signposting and escalation to secondary and tertiary services, both in psychology and across other disciplines.

Primary Care psychology has long established roles in caring for children with mild-to moderate mental health needs or signposting those who need specialist services. In line with the National Access Policy, it provides an increasing level of service to those with non-complex disabilities or as yet undiagnosed/unrecognised disabilities.

In consideration of the children and young people waiting over 12 months to access Primary Care psychology services, Primary Care Operations and the Department of Health has provided additional funding to year end to decrease the numbers of children and young people waiting over 12 months to access psychology services.

Measures that are being implemented include: overtime/increased hours; the use of private capacity; arrangement of initial screening and/or once-off brief therapeutic appointments to supply clients with support/information; reprioritisation of clients etc.

Since the commencement of these additional measures, significant progress has been made in the areas with an approximate reduction of 850 children or young people from the waiting lists to date.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Seán McArt'.

Seán McArt

General Manager Primary Care
National Community Operations