



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
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26th October 2021

Deputy Holly Cairns,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
e-mail: holly.cairns@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Cairns,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ 49868/21

To ask the Minister for Health the number of children and young persons on waiting lists for an assessment of need in each HSE region.

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 3 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 September, 2021 broken down by CHO Area. The information is based on data extracted from the Assessment Officers' System Database (AOS).

Activity for the year (up to end Quarter 3) indicates that there has been significant progress in the number of Assessment of Need reports completed during the year, 6,204 by end of September. This has led to a significant reduction in the total number of applications 'overdue for completion', which now stands at 2,720 (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 to date in 2021 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

| CHO | Total Overdue ¹ | Overdue/ Exceptional Circumstances ² | Overdue/ No Exceptional Circumstances |
|--------------|----------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| AREA 1 | 25 | 16 | 9 |
| AREA 2 | 10 | 1 | 9 |
| AREA 3 | 41 | 8 | 33 |
| AREA 4 | 758 | 22 | 736 |
| AREA 5 | 107 | 12 | 95 |
| AREA 6 | 65 | 0 | 65 |
| AREA 7 | 899 | 1 | 898 |
| AREA 8 | 157 | 12 | 145 |
| AREA 9 | 845 | 115 | 730 |
| Total | 2907 | 187 | 2720 |

¹All assessment reports that were not completed within 6 months of application or within 3 months of Start Stage 2 and before the end of the quarter are included in this report.

²The number of Assessment Reports 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. Consent to extension is only valid if agreed extension date has not already passed.

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.

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.

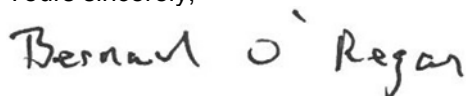
The HSE is establishing a total of 91 Children's Disability Networks across each of the nine CHOs comprised of specialist inter-disciplinary Children's Disability Network Teams to work with children with complex disability needs. This reconfiguration of services under the Progressing Disability Services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

Since 2019, 285 development posts have been allocated to children's disability services across the country. This includes 100 posts allocated under the HSE National Service Plan 2021. 185 development posts were allocated to children's disability services across the country in 2021. These posts have been assigned based on a number of factors, including the existing ratio of staff to the number of children with disabilities in each area.

In June 2021, the Minister of State for Disabilities confirmed that the HSE should progress the recruitment of 85 whole time equivalent (wte) posts to facilitate the provision of in-reach services to those special schools that have heretofore provided a school based service. These staff members will be employed as part of the new CDNTs and will report to the Children's Disability Network Manager. CHOs must ensure that the allocation of any posts to CDNTs are targeted towards providing appropriate interventions.

Services in most parts of the country have now reconfigured to CDNTs. The remaining teams 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