



**Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,**  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
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12<sup>th</sup> December 2022

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Dear Deputy Murphy,

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: 61249/22**

*To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the chronic lack of services within the children's disability network teams; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

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.

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.

The National Service Plan 2022 provided €8.2 million for PDS in 2022. This was for the targeted provision of 190 multi-disciplinary, administration and specialised posts for the Children's Disability Network Teams. A further €11.48 million was provided for 136.3 posts to restore on-site supports in special schools.

**Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs)**

In line with the PDS model, resources assigned to children's disability services are allocated to the Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs); 91 CDNTs are aligned to 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) across the country and are providing services and supports for children aged from birth to 18 years of age.

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.

Since 2019, more than 610 development posts have been allocated to children's disability services across the country. These posts have been assigned to teams based on a number of factors, including the existing ratio of staff to the number of children with disabilities in each area. This figure includes the 190 posts provided in 2022 as well as the recently agreed funding for an additional 136.3 WTEs at a cost of €11.48m to restore pre-existing services in 104 special schools.

These additional posts are intended to support the newly established CDNTs to prioritise intervention for children with complex needs in special schools.

### **Recruitment and Retention**

Most of the disciplines working in CDNTs are similar to those working in other areas of the health services including Primary Care Services, Mental Health Services, Older Person Services and Acute Hospitals. The HSE and the various Lead Agencies experience ongoing challenges recruiting staff across a range of disciplines and grades.

The HSE is operating in a very competitive global market for healthcare talent as there are significant shortages of qualified healthcare professionals across the globe.

The HSE continues to explore a range of options to enhance the recruitment and retention of essential staff across all aspects of the health services. In addition, the HSE Community Operations Disability Services is working collaboratively with the CDNT lead agencies at CHO level to promote CDNTs as a workplace of choice in a competitive employment market.

The lead agencies and the number of teams they lead are: HSE (41 teams), Enable Ireland (20 teams), Avista (formerly Daughters of Charity - 4 teams) Brothers of Charity (6 teams), Central Remedial Clinic (5 teams), St. Michael's House (4 teams), Cope Foundation (3 teams), St. Gabriel's (2 teams), St. Josephs Foundation (2 teams), Stewarts Care (2 teams), with CoAction West Cork and KARE leading 1 team each. Each lead agency is responsible for recruitment of staff on their CDNTs and is using a variety of approaches to fill funded vacancies. Each agency has on-going rolling recruitment to address a range of vacancies including short term temporary posts, full time permanent posts, development posts, part time posts etc. CDNTs and Lead Agencies report on the number of vacancies rather than the number of staff appointed.

Options to support the recruitment of staff for the CDNTs currently being explored include:

- Targeted National Recruitment for CDNTs
- Targeted International Recruitment for CDNTs with an agreed relocation allowance
- Sponsorship Programme for therapy grades
- Apprentice Programme for therapy grades
- Employment of graduates as therapy assistants as they await CORU registration
- Expansion of therapy assistants in the system with HSE supporting individuals to return to education to qualify as therapists.

International Recruitment campaigns have been launched for qualified healthcare professionals. To support these international campaigns, the HSE is working in partnership with CORU, the regulator, and government departments to maximise this pool.

Some CHO Areas report that staff from outside the European Union have been successful at interview recently. However, the pre-clearance stage to appointment time frame can take a number of weeks and is heavily dependent on a number of factors including the candidate returning documentation in a timely manner, the requirement in some cases for overseas clearances or visas, return of references and notice period to be worked. Pre-clearances can take a minimum of 2 weeks (if all documentation is submitted as requested), however it can take significantly longer if provision of the aforementioned documentation is delayed. It should also be noted that some candidates may be



available for an immediate start with other candidates having to provide notice to a current employer. This will impact the time to hire.

Some further points to note in relation to recruitment and retention of CDNT staff include the following:

- There are panels in place for occupational therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, and speech and language therapists.
- National Disability Operations is currently reviewing the area of Assistant Grades.
- A comprehensive Team Development Programme 2020/2021 has been provided for CDNMs and cascaded to all team members. This programme, which was designed to support the establishment of the new CDNTs and the implementation of the new model of service, will also support staff retention. All resources from this Programme are available online for CDNMs
- An extensive CDNT Training and Development Programme 2022/2023 has been launched. This is supported with dedicated funding and based on the current competency gaps identified and prioritised by the National CDN Forum. The HSE and Lead Agencies are committed to providing ongoing training and development supports for CDNT staff supporting their professional development and retention.
- A secure site for CDNMs and their staff has been set up on Basecamp to facilitate sharing of training and development resources as well as clinical and service resources.

Yours Sincerely,



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

