

28th February 2022

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

PQ ref 7930/22:

“To ask the Minister for Health his plans to address the shortage of community step-down beds in County Cork.”

Dear Deputy Ó Laoghaire,

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.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare provides a broad range of services for older people in our community, including in-patient services, step down and convalescent care, day services, rehabilitation, community services, home care and home support. Our community hospitals and community nursing units provide services primarily focused on the needs of the elderly.

As well as long-stay residential care, many of our community hospitals also provide what we call short-stay beds. Part of the strategy associated with managing care in the community includes the use of such beds in the context of significant system reforms in recent years that aimed to, among other things, achieve greater integration in the Irish healthcare system via transferring care, where appropriate, from acute to non-acute settings and building capacity in primary, community and longterm care. Short stay beds are used for respite, rehabilitation, palliative care, transitional care or other supports and the people using these beds generally stay for a number of days or weeks.

Community hospitals are an essential part of our national health infrastructure, but many public units are located and housed in buildings that are less than ideal in the modern context. Consequently, refurbishment and extension works are currently underway in a number of our Cork community hospitals in order to facilitate a move away from the 'open ward' model to more private rooms. These works aim to support residents' privacy and dignity as well as facilitating physical distancing of residents in order to minimise the risk of transmission of infection. These upgrades will also ensure compliance with HIQA requirements.

Building works are temporarily impacting long term and short stay bed availability in some units but, when completed, the works will provide high quality accommodation to all residents and bed capacity will be increased in some units. Refurbishment and building works are currently underway in Clonakilty, Kinsale and Macroom Community Hospitals (scheduled for completion in 2022) and Kanturk, Millstreet and Fermoy Community Hospitals (scheduled for completion in 2023).

Capital projects are also underway throughout the county which will increase bed provision and services for older persons in the region. Extension works at Heather House to provide 60 additional long stay beds are due to complete in mid-2022. Development of a 105 bed Community Nursing Unit at St Finbarr's Hospital is scheduled to commence in late 2022. A 50 bedded Community Nursing Unit is also planned for Midleton Community Hospital and scheduled to commence in late 2022. Development of a 60 bed Community Nursing Unit in Youghal is currently at design stage with a design team appointed and design advancing towards planning. In addition, the HSE has received

funding this year to complete a 50 bedded Community Nursing Unit in Blarney – anticipated completion date is Q3 2022.

Additional short stay beds have come on stream at St Francis's Home in Fermoy, which had provided transitional care during the Covid 19 pandemic for clients in the acute sector who were transitioning to a home setting. St Francis's Home closed temporarily in July 2021 due to the unavailability of Medical Officer cover but this post has now been filled and St Francis's Home reopened on Monday 8th February 2022 providing a service comprised of 9 Respite beds, 1 Palliative Care bed and 4 Transitional Care beds.

In addition, in line with HSE priority areas for action founded on the need to accelerate the implementation of an integrated service delivery model, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare reviewed the referral process for people over 65 years of age from acute hospitals in Cork and Kerry. As a result, Liaison Community Support Teams are being rolled out in both counties which will act as a central process to receive all such referrals that require community support such as residential long stay/short stay, Integrated Care Programme for Older Persons (ICPOP), Home Support etc. The overall objective of this initiative is to facilitate timely discharges from acute hospital settings. In tandem with the refurbishments and capital works underway which will increase bed capacity, as well as recruitment of additional Health Care Support Assistants for provision of Home Support, this initiative should facilitate a more efficient journey for our service users.

I trust the above clarifies the current position in the Cork region in relation to the provision of beds (both long-stay and short-stay), the steps being taken to enhance our facilities post-Covid and initiatives underway to facilitate greater integration across our services.

If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Eileen O'Leary
Acting Head of Service for Older Persons