



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

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Deputy Eoin Ó Broin.
Dail Eireann,
Dublin 2.

30th March 2022

PQ Number: 9252/22

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the number of psychiatric services for adults with ASD in the HSE broken down by region; and his plans to expand these services - Eoin Ó Broin

Dear Deputy Eoin Ó Broin,

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Services for adults with ASD reflect the continuum of severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe. A number of factors are taken into account when defining whether someone has a moderate to severe mental disorder and these include the diagnosis, formulation, the duration of the symptoms and level of functioning in daily living. In practice, the term “moderate to severe” means that the mental disorder is severe enough to cause substantial distress.

Adults with ASD can access primary care and disability services. If adults who have a diagnosis of ASD present with moderate to severe mental health difficulties then they are seen by adult mental health services.

Further information on where to access mental health services by CHO area/region can be found in the HSE Directory of Mental Health Services <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/>

In terms of future plans, a Service Improvement Programme for the Autistic Community has commenced following the publication of the ASD Service Review in 2017. This has two work streams:

1. Assessment and Pathway Working Group:

The Assessment and Pathways working group aims to develop a Standardised Assessment approach for use in all services dealing with the assessment of those with autism to ensure that every assessment is of an acceptable and agreed standard, regardless of which service is being accessed. In addition, it seeks to agree a standardised service user journey and the implementation of a consistent core service offering across those providing services to people with autism, including adults.



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The Working Group, including people with lived experience of autism, has consulted widely with key stakeholders in the design and formulation stage of the project; this is particularly important in the context of the implementation of a tiered approach to assessment.

Its main work focus has been to:

- Agree an operational model for a tiered approach to autism assessment through developing clear and functioning pathways to services.
- This will contribute to the National Clinical Programme for People with Disabilities (NCPD) producing a Model of Service (including initial and ongoing assessment) for people with autism, with appropriate sign off through the governance procedures of the NCPD.
- An implementation plan to include training which takes cognisance of existing policies of the HSE
- Social Care/Primary Care/Mental Health Policy Training material to support the agreed approach to autism assessment
- The development, where required, of processes or supporting protocols to underpin service delivery.

A draft document which sets out the assessment protocol for both children and adults is being piloted in three CHOs (2, 7 & 9). It will then be evaluated to inform the further iteration and development of the protocol.

2. Awareness Working Group:

The 'Report of the Review of the Irish Health Services for Individuals with Autism' showed that the information available to the autistic community, family members, carers and service providers was limited, and inconsistent from region to region and did not always reflect current understanding and approaches. The HSE, through the work of the Awareness Working Group have taken a comprehensive approach to addressing this, and is reviewing existing content, seeking the views of the autistic community, family members, carers and service providers on this content, and working to ensure it can be produced and made accessible to people all over the country, online and in print. This quality process has been progressing and will continue into next year.

The Awareness Stream of the programme is designed to respond to the call for greater clarity amongst clinicians and service providers regarding both autism and the supports available to people with autism.

- There are a number of individuals with the lived experience participating in this group.
- The availability of comprehensive accessible information relating to people with autism, their families, and healthcare workers working in the field.



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- The development of an online knowledge hub combined with a helpline aimed at providing contemporary information in relation to :a) location and types of services, b) tools and resources for service users, their families and clinicians and c) signposting to other essential community, voluntary and statutory based supports and services.

The work outlined above with respect to the Service Improvement Programme will be complemented by the implementation of relevant recommendations in 'Sharing the Vision, A Mental Health Policy for Everyone'. Progress with respect to implementation of this policy is being published online on a quarterly basis.

I trust this information is of assistance to you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely,

Jim Ryan
Assistant National Director - Head of Operations
National Mental Health Services