

1st February 2022

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 1169/22

“To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health services in Cork city and county have increased by 23% in recent months; the measures that are being taken to reduce the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy O'Sullivan,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are designed for children and adolescents presenting with moderate to severe mental health disorders. All referrals received to CAMHS services are triaged in a timely manner and the referral is either accepted or rejected at that point. There are two types of referral; an urgent referral and a routine referral. Every effort is made to prioritise urgent referrals so that young people with high risk presentations are seen as soon as possible and this is often within 24 to 48 hours. This may impact on wait times for cases that are considered, by a clinician, to be less severe.

As you may be aware, there are long-standing workforce challenges and although additional investment has been approved for some community services, the ability to recruit and retain the community workforce is an on-going significant issue. These workforce challenges have grown over the last 2 years as a result of competing priorities to deliver essential programmes of work including vaccination services, test and trace services, the implementation of key policies as well as on-going operational challenges of winter, the COVID response and the cyber-attack. It is acknowledged that the number of people on waiting lists for treatment or assessment exceeds Sláintecare waiting time targets.

The commitment to Sláintecare has been reconfirmed in the Programme for Government and the overall budget 2021 has invested in staffing and infrastructure so as to enhance the permanent capacity of our health services and expand the scale and range of services to be provided in the community. A budget of €250 million has been allocated nationally to address waiting lists and to deliver on waiting list initiatives across the health service. A project team has been established in Community Operations with senior national representation from all Care Groups to oversee the further development and implementation of waiting list initiatives. The project team will collaborate with CHO colleagues and partners in acute services, procurement, NTPF and the Department of

Health with a key goal to address waiting list issues. In addition to this, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare have confirmation of funding for a new initiative which will commence in 2022, a CAMHS Hub Pilot. Provision for this new referral option is outlined in *Sharing the Vision, A Mental Health Policy for Everyone, 2020*. Also, recruitment is underway for two additional posts within our sector teams, a Senior Speech and Language Therapist in North Lee North and a CAMHS Social Worker will be spread across South Lee B and C teams. It is also important to note that Cork Kerry Mental Health Services are proactively seeking to increase the number of HST posts as a way to 'grow your own' medical specialists, HST is a pathway for NCHDs (Non Commissioned Hospital Doctors) to pursue a CAMHS specialty.

Furthermore, I wish to assure you that all efforts continue to be made locally to address and reduce waiting list in CAMHS Cork Kerry Community Healthcare and we are committed to continuing these efforts to ensure that better access to a safe and effective service is delivered.

I trust this clarifies the query raised.

Kind Regards,



Mr Kevin Morrison
A/Head of Mental Health Services
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare