



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

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan,  
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Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
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Dear Deputy O'Sullivan,

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: 28425/22**

*To ask the Minister for Health if progress has been made in recruiting staff given that a previous staff census conducted by the Department advised that child autism services are operating at 75% staffing levels; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

In 2021, the remainder of ninety-one multidisciplinary CDNTs were established to provide services and supports for all children with complex needs within a defined geographic area.

Since 2019, more than 475 development posts have been allocated to children's disability services across the country. 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.

Work is ongoing on mapping specialised services and supports, and paediatric supports available and gap analysis for children with highly complex needs including autism, in order to develop standardised approaches to integrated pathways of support for CDNTs and Primary Care staff.

A Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT) Staff Census and Workforce Review was undertaken in October 2021 and a final report has been issued to the Department of Health and relevant stakeholders. This report has provided valuable information on the number of staff working in the CDNTs by discipline and grade and staff vacancies at a point in time. Vacancies continue to be tracked monthly.

Please see copy of the attached report for your information.

The information from the Census report is supporting targeted workforce planning by the HSE in consultation with the CDNT Lead Agencies to reinforce the skill mix of their teams to accommodate local population need.

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 experiences ongoing challenges recruiting staff across a range of disciplines and grades.



Options regarding the recruitment of staff, including psychologists, for the CDNTs being explored in the first instance include:

- Targeted National Recruitment for CDNTs
- Targeted International Recruitment for CDNTs with the possibility of a relocation allowance
- Sponsorship Programme
- 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.

The Community Operations, Disability Services is actively developing business propositions for approval by HSE National Human Resource Services.

There is an acknowledgement Nationally that there are challenges with the supply of therapists and this has required the following disciplines of staff to be placed on the Critical Skills Occupations List.

- Psychologist
- Dietician
- Physiotherapist
- Occupational Therapist
- Speech and Language Therapist

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 is working collaboratively with the CDNT Lead Agencies at CHO level to market CDNTs as an employer of choice in a competitive employment market. Each lead agency is responsible for recruitment of staff on their CDNTs and is using a variety of approaches to fill funded vacancies.

A comprehensive PDS national team development programme 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 to support the implementation of the new model of service, will also support staff retention.

Yours Sincerely,



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

