



Oifig Ceannasaí Oibríochtaí,
Oibríochtaí Pobail, Cúram Príomhúil

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29th August 2022

Deputy Róisín Shortall,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

PQ 41251/22 – To ask the Minister for Health the number of areas that can no longer guarantee development assessments for babies and children aged three months, 9 to 11 months, 21-24 months and 46-48 months, by CHO and LHO; the timeline that he is working towards for reinstating these services in the affected areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

- Róisín Shortall

Dear Deputy Shortall,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question (PQ 41251/22) which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

To give some context Public Health Nurses are healthcare professionals who provide a range of community healthcare services including child development checks. The Public Health Nursing service is one of a number of multidisciplinary health services provided through Primary Care within the community setting.

During the pandemic, many Public Health Nursing staff were redeployed to support Covid-19 related clinical activities, which in turn impacted the services available in certain areas. However, a framework was put in place to ensure that available staff were enabled to identify and support patients who have the greatest need in the community. Our public health nursing staff have returned to their core duties, which enables the resumption of a full service.

In some parts of the country, this post-pandemic resumption is challenged by shortages in the Public Health Nursing Service – mainly due to loss of staff due to retirement, internal movement and challenges in replacing staff - which is having an impact on the capacity to deliver routine Public Health services.

A small number of areas within Community Health Organisations, have introduced a temporary prioritisation system while waiting to fill vacant posts but development checks have not ceased in these specific areas. The areas impacted include parts of Dublin (including some areas of CHO6 and & CHO7) and parts of Galway. In 2022, there have been significant increase in monthly activity around development checks across the country with the HSE reaching 87.7% in May of an expected activity target of 95% as per service plan agreed targets 2022.

Where these shortfalls are arising, we continue to prioritise and support patients who have the greatest need in the community. The prioritisation system is limited to and only in place as a contingency in areas with acute PHN staffing issues.

The shortfalls which have been experienced in some areas recently, will be reduced in the coming months with the appointment of student Public Health Nurses allocated to these areas. The HSE remain committed to child development checks provision across all Community Healthcare Organisations.



I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Seán McArt'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S' and 'M'.

Seán McArt
General Manager Primary Care
National Community Operations