

24<sup>th</sup> March, 2022

Mr, Pádraig O’Sullivan, TD.  
Dáil Éireann,  
Dublin 2.

**PQ ref: 12405/22**

**“To ask the Minister for Health the number of children awaiting an assessment of need in each of the CHO areas of Cork city and county in each of the years 2015 to 2021; the average waiting times; and if he will make a statement on the matter.”**

Dear Deputy O’Sullivan,

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

Disability Services, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare recognises the long waiting times for clinical assessments within the AON process. There has been both a national and local focus in relation to addressing the numbers of children waiting for an assessment of need.

Average wait times for AON during the years 2015-2021 are currently not available but the figures below do indicate the current numbers awaiting assessment.

**Area 4: 342 applications Overdue to start Stage 2 as at February 2022**

Cork North	46
Cork North Lee	184
Cork South Lee	93
Cork West	0

**Area 4 – Applications overdue for completion on last day of month for last three months**

Area	December 2021	January 2022	February 2022
Cork North	79	72	48
Cork North Lee	277	224	178
Cork South Lee	197	154	112
Cork West	13	10	6
Total	566	460	344

One of the issues for the HSE which has caused issues in the preparation of reports lies in the outdated database we are currently using to facilitate the case management, planning and reporting of assessments and services to children with a disability eligible to apply for an assessment under the Disability Act 2005 – The Assessment Officers System Database (AOS). The AOS was developed by a small software development company, which no longer provides maintenance or technical support for the system. The database is 20 years old and has not had necessary upgrades or technical changes in recent years that are generally required by IT systems, to reflect changes in policy, operational practice and user requirements. This has created many challenges for both Disability Services nationally and for system users locally.

The HSE is committed to the development of a new integrated management information system for Children's Disability Services, which will include a module on the Assessment of need process under the Disability Act. This will facilitate the HSE to provide a wider range of reports on AON activity.

We have been significantly challenged in terms of the volume of applications for assessment of need for a number of years now. Initiatives in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and into 2022 have sought to address a non-compliance in respect of the requirement under the Disability Act to assess and determine a disability (or otherwise) within a pre-determined timeline. Due to the most recent local AON waiting list initiative, using time related saving which commenced in December 2021, the number of applications overdue is starting to reduce as demonstrated by the data above. However, all of the agencies in this area, who are providing assessments and interventions, are experiencing very high volumes of referrals and as a consequence of same, they are holding wait lists both for assessments and for interventions. The level of need for assessments and interventions exceeds the resources available.

Delays experienced due to the Cyber-Attack and the healthcare crisis due to Covid-19 must also be recognised. Regrettably, due to the crisis, many services such as the Assessment of Need appointments process in Cork and Kerry were severely impacted and resulted in either services ceasing operations on a temporary basis or progressed at a reduced capacity. In regard to assessments, elements of the assessment process such as desktop reviews and requests for further information (reports) continued whilst the face to face clinical element of the assessment were put on hold pending national guidelines on the resumption of services.

The numbers referred for assessment in Cork Kerry Community Healthcare are among the highest in the country.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare acknowledges the lengthy waiting times that parents are experiencing under the Assessment of Need process. We sincerely regret that any child has to wait for an assessment and both management and staff fully appreciate the level of stress that families are experiencing due to the current waiting times. Disability Services continues to engage with the Service Providers to ensure that where possible, some level of service is maintained, based on prioritising those with the greatest need.

I trust this clarifies the situation for you.

Yours sincerely,



**Ms. Majella Daly,**  
**Head of Disability Services,**  
**Cork Kerry Community Healthcare**

