



11th March 2022

Mr. Paul Kehoe T.D.
Dail Eireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 13173/22

To ask the Minister for Health the current wait time for an assessment of need for children with special needs on County Wexford; and the number of children that are on the waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Kehoe,

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

I have reviewed the matter and the following is the current position.

Since the commencement of Part 2 of the Disability Act in June 2007 the HSE has endeavoured to meet its legislative requirements as set out in the Act.

The Disability Act 2005 outlines the statutory timelines under which Assessment of Need (AON) must be completed. In effect the assessment must be completed within six months of the application date with a further month to issue the report and service statement.

The numbers of applications for AON under the Act have risen steadily since its implementation in June 2007. When originally implemented, it was envisaged that AON would apply to children aged less than five years and the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs Act (2004) (EPSEN) would address the needs of older children. The relevant sections of the EPSEN Act have not commenced. Furthermore, as a consequence of a High Court ruling of December 2009, the effect of which was to open eligibility to all children born after 1st June 2002, the number of children aged five and over has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received.

As with other areas, there have been significant year on year increases in the number of children applying for assessments within disability services including AON and Autism Disorder Spectrum assessments which has led to delays in timeframes. It is acknowledged that given the increased referral rates and demand for assessments and other disability supports, there is a requirement for additional resources to meet current needs. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on capacity throughout the health system.

I have been advised that there are 58 children deemed eligible for AON in County Wexford and referred for a Preliminary Team Assessment (PTA) and these are waiting between 14-54



weeks. I have been advised that 12 completed applications have been received in the past 3 months and these applications are at Stage 1. i.e. the Assessment Officer is in the process of determining eligibility for AON.

Activity reports from the Assessment Officer indicate that Wexford receives 45% of all AON applications in CHO5, whereas Kilkenny, South Tipperary and Waterford receive 55 % of CHO 5 applications.

An initiative commenced in SECH in late 2020 where national funding was secured to focus on the AON backlog. This project was completed at the end of August 2021. This initiative resulted in a significant reduction in overdue AONs from 207 at the end of 2019 to 52 at the end of 2020. I am pleased to confirm that in 2022 an additional Senior Psychology post was developed in Wexford to support the AON process. This post has been filled and the post holder is due to commence in post on June 6th 2022.

It must also be noted that there are a number of therapy vacancies on the CDNTs, which is impacting on the service's ability to meet AON timeframes. The HSE continues to actively recruit for these posts.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Anne Ennis', written in black ink.

Ms. Anne Ennis
Head of Service, Disability Service
South East Community Healthcare