



**Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,**  
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,  
31-33 Sráid Chaitríona, Luimneach.

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6<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Deputy Mattie McGrath,  
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Dear Deputy McGrath,

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 16051/22**

*To ask the Minister for Health the number of children waiting an assessment of needs in County Tipperary; the average length of time waiting; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

#### **HSE Response**

Since the Disability Act commenced in June 2007, the HSE has endeavoured to meet its legislative obligations under the Act. However, 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, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while throughout 2021, this figure averaged 53%. This is a reflection that the AON process is an accumulative process in terms of numbers of children seeking access. However, it is acknowledged that the numbers of assessments overdue for completion remain high.

Activity for 2021 indicates that there has been significant progress in the number of Assessment of Need reports completed during the year, 8,353 by year end. This has led to a significant reduction in the total number of applications 'overdue for completion', which now stands at 1,793 (excluding those applications for which an extended time-frame was negotiated with the parent on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations). See Table 1.

(As Co. Tipperary is included in CHO 3 and CHO 5, these CHOs are highlighted )

**(Table 1) Applications overdue for completion**

| CHO    | Total Overdue <sup>1</sup> | Overdue/ Exceptional Circumstances <sup>2</sup> | Overdue/ No Exceptional Circumstances |
|--------|----------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|
| AREA 1 | 36                         | 9   | 27                                    |
| AREA 2 | 21                         | 1   | 20                                    |
| AREA 3 | 37                         | 21  | 16                                    |
| AREA 4 | 711                        | 56  | 655                                   |



|               |             |            |             |
|---------------|-------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>AREA 5</b> | <b>90</b>   | <b>10</b>  | <b>80</b>   |
| <b>AREA 6</b> | <b>65</b>   | <b>5</b>   | <b>60</b>   |
| <b>AREA 7</b> | <b>176</b>  | <b>0</b>   | <b>176</b>  |
| <b>AREA 8</b> | <b>203</b>  | <b>9</b>   | <b>194</b>  |
| <b>AREA 9</b> | <b>647</b>  | <b>82</b>  | <b>565</b>  |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>1986</b> | <b>193</b> | <b>1793</b> |

<sup>1</sup>All assessment reports that were not completed within 6 months of application or within 3 months of Start Stage 2 and before the end of the quarter are included in this report.

<sup>2</sup>The number of Assessment Reports for which an extended time-frame was negotiated with the parent on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations. Consent to extension is only valid if agreed extension date has not already passed

The increase in activity in 2021 can be attributed to the additional funding allocated to the AON process via Slaintecare. This has been utilised to provide additional assessments through a range of options including overtime for existing staff and private procurement. The total number of overdue AONs has reduced by 63% since this additional funding was allocated.

The most recent information regarding the number of children and young persons on waiting lists for an assessment of need in County Tipperary is given in Table 2 below. The table breaks down the information by LHO area and length of time overdue. Co. Tipperary LHO areas are highlighted.

### Applications overdue for Completion on 31st December 2021

(Table 2)

| CHO           | LHO               | Overdue    | <1 month  | 1 - 3 Months | >3 Months  |
|---------------|-------------------|------------|-----------|--------------|------------|
| <b>AREA 1</b> |                   | <b>36</b>  | <b>19</b> | <b>7</b>     | <b>10</b>  |
|               | Cavan/Monaghan    | 5          | 5         | 0            | 0          |
|               | Donegal           | 27         | 10        | 7            | 10         |
|               | Sligo/Leitrim     | 4          | 4         | 0            | 0          |
| <b>AREA 2</b> |                   | <b>21</b>  | <b>14</b> | <b>5</b>     | <b>2</b>   |
|               | Galway            | 19         | 14        | 4            | 1          |
|               | Mayo              | 1          | 0         | 0            | 1          |
|               | Roscommon         | 1          | 0         | 1            | 0          |
| <b>AREA 3</b> |                   | <b>37</b>  | <b>1</b>  | <b>8</b>     | <b>28</b>  |
|               | Clare             | 6          | 1         | 1            | 4          |
|               | Limerick          | 27         | 0         | 7            | 20         |
|               | Tipperary N.R     | 4          | 0         | 0            | 4          |
| <b>AREA 4</b> |                   | <b>711</b> | <b>78</b> | <b>133</b>   | <b>500</b> |
|               | Kerry             | 77         | 9         | 13           | 55         |
|               | Cork North        | 94         | 8         | 18           | 68         |
|               | Cork North Lee    | 322        | 35        | 54           | 233        |
|               | Cork South Lee    | 204        | 24        | 45           | 135        |
|               | Cork West         | 14         | 2         | 3            | 9          |
| <b>AREA 5</b> |                   | <b>90</b>  | <b>19</b> | <b>22</b>    | <b>48</b>  |
|               | Carlow/Kilkenny   | 16         | 2         | 2            | 12         |
|               | Tipperary S.R     | 6          | 4         | 1            | 1          |
|               | Waterford         | 16         | 1         | 2            | 12         |
|               | Wexford           | 52         | 12        | 17           | 23         |
| <b>AREA 6</b> |                   | <b>65</b>  | <b>26</b> | <b>21</b>    | <b>18</b>  |
|               | Dublin South East | 6          | 2         | 1            | 3          |
|               | Dublin South      | 7          | 2         | 3            | 2          |
|               | Wicklow           | 52         | 22        | 17           | 13         |

|               |                      |             |            |            |             |
|---------------|----------------------|-------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| <b>AREA 7</b> |                      | <b>176</b>  | <b>19</b>  | <b>23</b>  | <b>134</b>  |
|               | Dublin South City    | 20          | 1          | 2          | 17          |
|               | Dublin South West    | 42          | 7          | 2          | 33          |
|               | Dublin West          | 54          | 7          | 7          | 40          |
|               | Kildare/West Wicklow | 60          | 4          | 12         | 44          |
| <b>AREA 8</b> |                      | <b>203</b>  | <b>63</b>  | <b>74</b>  | <b>66</b>   |
|               | Laois/Offaly         | 70          | 11         | 27         | 32          |
|               | Longford/Westmeath   | 8           | 4          | 3          | 1           |
|               | Louth                | 5           | 4          | 1          | 0           |
|               | Meath                | 120         | 44         | 43         | 33          |
| <b>AREA 9</b> |                      | <b>647</b>  | <b>116</b> | <b>180</b> | <b>351</b>  |
|               | North Dublin         | 444         | 73         | 140        | 231         |
|               | Dublin North Centre  | 37          | 6          | 3          | 28          |
|               | North West Dublin    | 166         | 37         | 37         | 92          |
| <b>Total</b>  |                      | <b>1986</b> | <b>355</b> | <b>473</b> | <b>1157</b> |

The new Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need (SOP) was implemented for all new applications for AON from 15th January 2020. Since then approximately 10,000 Preliminary Team Assessments have been completed.

The recent judgement of Ms Justice Phelan in the High Court directed that the Preliminary Team Assessment approach does not fulfil the requirements of the Disability Act. The judgement states that a diagnosis is required to determine the nature and extent of a person's disability. The implications of any ruling from the Court of Appeal will be considered as soon as this becomes available.

The HSE will implement a process over the coming weeks for a revised approach to Assessment of Need. In developing this, the HSE will include a wide range of stakeholders, including families, providers, staff and representative bodies, in an intensive consultation to develop a pathway for AONs that seeks to comply with the requirements of the Act but also protects the commitment to the provision of intervention and principles as set out above.

Assessment of Need reports will no longer be issued on the basis of a Preliminary Team Assessment and the HSE will engage directly with the families of those who received a PTA to establish if they wish to receive a further assessment under the terms of the Disability Act. Where appointments have already been scheduled with children, these will form the first step in their AON process. The HSE remains committed to the delivery of appropriate services for children with disabilities and will work with families and staff to develop services that meet their needs.

Figures for 2021 indicate that 4,951 Preliminary Team Assessments were provided under the terms of the SOP during the year. While this data indicates that there is substantial variation in outcomes across the 9 CHO areas, 86% of children are being referred for intervention on the basis of their PTA. This represents a significant improvement in the pathway to intervention for children and their families. Only 54% of children who received a Preliminary Team Assessment in 2021 were identified as requiring further assessment. This requirement did not delay their access to intervention. This cohort of children will be prioritised for completion of their AONs.

|      | Total PTA Activity 2021 |                               |                             |                             |                           |
|------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
|      | No. of PTAs completed   | No. referred for intervention | % referred for intervention | No. referred for further Ax | % referred for further Ax |
| CHO1 | 366                     | 356                           | 97%                         | 309                         | 84%                       |
| CHO2 | 132                     | 130                           | 98%                         | 121                         | 92%                       |



|      |             |             |            |             |            |
|------|-------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| CHO3 | 375         | 242         | 65%        | 330         | 88%        |
| CHO4 | 554         | 542         | 98%        | 252         | 45%        |
| CHO5 | 139         | 138         | 99%        | 84          | 60%        |
| CHO6 | 207         | 155         | 75%        | 111         | 54%        |
| CHO7 | 1407        | 1300        | 92%        | 551         | 39%        |
| CHO8 | 719         | 490         | 68%        | 411         | 57%        |
| CHO9 | 1052        | 884         | 84%        | 511         | 49%        |
|      | <b>4951</b> | <b>4237</b> | <b>86%</b> | <b>2680</b> | <b>54%</b> |

### Overall Reform of Children's Disability Services

The implementation of the Progressing Disability Services for Children & Young People (PDS) programme is agreed Government and HSE policy. This policy supports the reconfiguration of children's disability services to provide equitable, child and family centred services based on need rather than diagnosis. This aligns with the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

The Progressing Disability Services for Children and Young People (PDS) model addresses the previous inequity in service provision whereby there may have been an excellent service for some children and little or no service for others. This variance may have been linked to diagnosis, age group or geography. Under the PDS programme children's disability services are changing from diagnosis based to needs based, so that all children with a disability or developmental delay have access to the right service based on their needs no matter where they live.

PDS is a significant change programme for the provision of services and supports for children from birth to 18 years of age, in line with Sláintecare and the Programme for Government, in order to:

- Provide a clear pathway and fairer access to services for all children with a disability
- Make the best use of available resources for the benefit of all children and their families
- Ensure effective teams are working in partnership with families and with education staff to support children with a disability to reach their full potential.

PDS aligns with two clear objectives of The Sláintecare Report to:

- Provide the majority of care at or as close to home as possible
- Create an integrated system of care with healthcare professionals working closely together.

The National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay ensures that children are directed to the appropriate service based on the complexity of their presenting needs rather than based on diagnosis. Many children with a disability who have support needs can be effectively supported within mainstream health services. This policy provides a single point of entry, signposting parents and referrers to the most appropriate service (Primary Care for non-complex functional difficulties and Children's Disability Network Teams for complex functional difficulties).

### Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs)

In 2021, ninety one Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) were established to provide services and supports for all children with complex needs within a defined geographic area.

CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work and others. The team will work closely together in a family centred model, focusing on the child's and family's own priorities. Every child with complex needs will have access to a team, regardless of the nature of their disability, where they live, or the school they attend.



Children and their families will have access to the full range of services and supports of the CDNT according to their individual needs. This includes universal, targeted and specialist supports, such as individual therapeutic intervention and access to specialist consultation and assessment when needed. Supports will be provided as is feasible in the child's natural environments - their home, school and community.

Yours sincerely

*Bernard O'Regan*

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