



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

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Deputy Mark Ward  
Dail Eireann,  
Dublin 2.

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2022

**PQ Number: 16682/22**

**PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health his plans to address the lack of public in-patient adult eating disorder services in the State; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Mark Ward**

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Dear Deputy Ward,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Eating disorders have the highest mortality and morbidity within mental health and they pose significant health, social and economic cost to people with eating disorders, to their families and to society. Early intervention, evidence based care, and consistent support make a profound difference to the clinical and personal recovery of people who are affected by eating disorders, including to those in adolescence when so many eating disorders begin.

In January 2018 the HSE published a National Model of Care for Eating Disorders (MOC) in partnership with College of Psychiatrists' of Ireland and Bodywhys. In the absence of a pre-existing dedicated eating disorder infrastructure or strategy, this Model of Care document has been developed in order to guide the provision of high quality, accessible and value for money eating disorder services in Ireland. Key recommendations include the development of a national network of dedicated eating disorder teams embedded within the mental health service, a stepped model of outpatient, day patient and inpatient care provision based on clinical need, and the development of a skilled, trained workforce. In the context of the significant physical morbidity associated with eating disorders, this Model of Care also recommends a strong integration between primary care, mental health services and medical teams, including the bridging of the acute hospital and mental health service divide through mutual clinical commitments and shared pathways.

Most people can and do recover from eating disorders if they receive effective, evidence based treatment from ED trained staff. While a small number of people benefit from more intensive treatment through day programmes or inpatient care, the most effective treatment setting is in the community. The MOC has a core focus on developing regional community based specialist eating disorder services provided by skilled multidisciplinary teams.



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The NCPED aims to establish an ED network (8 adult teams and 8 CAMHS teams) in accordance with the agreed Model of Care 2018. There are currently 3 eating disorders (ED) specialist teams in operation, 2 CAMHS teams serving Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (CHO4) and Community Healthcare Dublin South, Kildare and West Wicklow (CHO7) and an adult team in Community Healthcare East (CHO6). These multidisciplinary teams provide specialist eating disorder assessment and treatment in the community and are the foundations of delivering quality eating disorder care across the stepped model of care. CAMHS ED team staffing is recommended at WTE 14.4 per 500,000-600,000. Adult ED Team staffing is recommended at WTE 13.4 per 500,000-600,000.

The Adult Eating Disorder team in CHO 6 is currently based at St Vincent's University Hospital. The community base will be within the Mount Carmel Community Hospital campus and will deliver outpatient and day patient services. The 3 specialist inpatient beds currently operational and linked with the adult eating disorder team (for the catchment area of CHO 6) will remain within St Vincent's University Hospital acute psychiatric unit.

Adults who have an eating disorder diagnosis and require inpatient care can be referred to any of the HSE's acute inpatient mental health-approved centres around the country. Adults presenting with an eating disorder can also be treated in an acute hospital if their physical health needs require this. Under National Mental Health Policy Documents and in line with MOC the number of adult eating beds will increase, including an additional 3 beds in St. Vincents' University Hospital, 5 beds in North Dublin, 5 beds in Galway and 5 beds in Cork. Timeframes for new beds will have to be identified. These beds will be linked to eating disorder hubs and provision will be in line with Sharing the Vision recommendations.

Children and adolescents with an eating disorder diagnosis who require inpatient treatment can be referred to one of the CAMHS inpatient approved centres. Referrals are reviewed individually to determine the likely clinical benefits of admission as well as possible other treatment alternatives. There are 4 CAMHS Units across the HSE; Linn Dara Approved Centre, Dublin, St Josephs Approved Centre in Dublin, Eist Linn Approved Centre in Cork and Merlin Park Approved Centre in Galway. Specialist eating disorder beds are available in Merlin Park Galway and Linn Dara AC. There are plans for an Eating Disorder Unit in the new National Children's Hospital which will provide 8 additional beds.

Anyone who is concerned about an eating disorder should discuss it with their GP. They can offer medical assessment, support and information on treatment options including referral to community mental health team. Guidelines for the assessment and management of eating disorders in primary care have been developed in collaboration with the Irish College of General Practice (ICGP).

Adults with eating disorders can access treatment from local community mental health teams. There are currently 112 adult community mental health teams nationwide. Children and adolescents with eating



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disorders can access treatment through CAMHS community teams. Every effort is made to prioritise referrals for people with eating disorders.

An estimated 188,895 Irish people will experience an eating disorder at some point in their lives (based on epidemiological projections). Approx. 1,757 new ED cases develop each year in Ireland in the 10-49 age group. Females are at least 2-3 times more likely than males to develop an eating disorder. Since the onset of the COVID pandemic there has been a significant rise in presentations of eating disorders across health care settings in Ireland. This is a similar pattern being reported internationally. Children, adolescents and adults are presenting more medically unwell with more severe clinical presentations than prior to the pandemic. Referral rates to existing community eating disorder teams have significantly surpassed predicted demand and capacity estimates made prior to the pandemic.

The National Clinical programme for Eating Disorders promotes awareness around these significant mental health disorders from which full recovery is possible with early, effective, evidence based treatment delivered by skilled experienced multidisciplinary teams. The NCPED also looks forward to the continued expansion of eating disorder services in Ireland until every one of all ages experiencing an eating disorder has equal access to assessment and treatment.

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

Yours sincerely,

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**Dr Amir Niazi**  
**National Clinical Advisor & Group Lead for Mental Health**  
**Clinical Design and Innovation**  
**Health Service Executive**