



**Oifig an Stiúirthóra Náisiúnta  
Géaroibríochtaí**

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**Deputy David Cullinane**  
**Dáil Éireann**  
**Leinster House**  
**Dublin 2**

**PQ 16797/22** *To ask the Minister for Health his plans to tackle emergency department overcrowding; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -David Cullinane*

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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.

The HSE is currently experiencing a record level of unscheduled care demand. Levels of Emergency Department (ED) attendances and subsequent admissions are consistently exceeding even our highest pre-pandemic levels. Management of this activity is challenging in the environment of COVID-19 which necessitates infection prevention and control pathways for pre-admission, post-admission and egress from the hospital.

Acute hospitals are running in excess of 99% occupancy levels with egress options for patients to either residential or home care inhibited by outbreaks in nursing homes and staff absence amongst home care staff.

The HSE received significant investment through the Pandemic Plan in March 2020 and both winter and National Service Plans in 2021 and 2022. These investments focused on developing and maintaining new COVID-19 services, providing continuity of non COVID-19 services and the enhancement of services in line with Sláintecare. Many service enhancements will ultimately provide the fundamental shift required from acute services, including emergency departments, to the community and enable the provision of “right care, in the right place, at the right time”. The delivery of these services will require time to embed.

The investments and plans made in the past two years have focused on the core priorities including building capacity, developing alternative and new pathways of care; testing and contact tracing; population health and vaccination.

We continue to implement actions related to these priorities, particularly in enhancing capacity and pathways of care aim to ultimately enhance flow in our acute hospital system and ultimately improve patient and service user experience.

Significant progress has been made in enhancing capacity in both our acute and community services to facilitate patient flow within our acute hospital system and egress and includes increased staffing levels in both Hospital Groups and Community Health Organisations and delivery of an additional 829 acute beds to date as part of the National Service Plan 2021.

There is ongoing work underway in developing alternative pathways of care to EDs and to ensure care is delivered in the right place at the right time, in conjunction with the Community Health Organisations. This includes the:



- Enhanced Community Care Programme to enhance integrated working facilitating ED avoidance and enhancing flow between services.
- GP access to Diagnostics scheme.
- Enhancement of Community intervention teams, and
- Expansion of Pathfinder which involves the National Ambulance Service and multidisciplinary teams providing alternative pathways to EDs.

I trust the above information indicates the measures in place, and future plans for the service, which will all contribute to improving emergency department overcrowding.

Yours sincerely,

*Jacqueline McNulty*

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Jacqueline McNulty  
General Manager Unscheduled Care  
Acute Operations