



Oifig anStiúrthóir
An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta,

Foirgneamh Aibhneacha, Crosbhóthar
Thamhlachta, Tamhlacht,
Baile Átha Cliath D24 XNP2

Office of the Director
National Ambulance Service

Rivers Building, Tallaght Cross
Tallaght, Dublin, D24 XNP2

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Deputy Denis Naughten TD
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

23 November 2022

PQ 55731/22

To ask the Minister for Health if he will provide recognition and professional status for highly qualified staff in the National Ambulance Service; and if he will make a statement on the matter. - Denis Naughten

Dear Deputy Naughten,

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for response.

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) operates from over 100 locations throughout Ireland and our services are delivered by over 2,200 NAS staff members. Our Intermediate Care Service and pre-hospital emergency care services are staffed in line with the standards established by PHECC (Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council) and include Emergency Medical Technicians, Paramedics and Advanced Paramedics. The National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) is staffed by Emergency Call Takers, Emergency Dispatchers, Clinical Nurse Managers, Control Supervisors and Control Managers. Our Critical Care and Retrieval Service (NASCCRS) is staffed by Consultants, Critical Care Nurses and EMTs.

All NAS Operations (including Emergency Services, Intermediate Care Services, Critical Care and Retrieval Services, Aeromedical Services and Specialist Operations) are supported by a number of key units which include: Corporate Affairs (including Business Management, Stakeholder Engagement and Legal Services), Planning and Infrastructure (including Portfolio Management, Service Planning, Fleet, Logistics, Estate, Technology, Data and Business Analytics), Finance (including procurement compliance), Human Resources (including HR Operations, Employee Relations and Staff Health and Wellbeing), Paramedicine (including Tertiary Education, Professional Development and Clinical Improvement) and the Clinical (including Clinical Strategy and Evaluation, Clinical Development, Clinical Informatics and Quality and Patient Safety) Directorate functions.

Vision 2020 Strategic Plan:

The National Ambulance Service (NAS) Strategic Plan, Vision 2020 commenced in 2016 and is about to be succeeded by a new Strategy.

The revenue requirement identified at the outset of Vision 2020 was €49.3m. Funding of €6.5m was provided between 2016 and 2020 towards implementation of Vision 2020. Further funding of €10m was allocated in 2021 to continue this strategic development but very much in a context of fighting the Covid-19 pandemic.

Achievements and Progress:

Investment in Vision 2020 to 2021 has led to a number of deliverables including the following:



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- The introduction of The Clinical Hub at the National Emergency Operations Centre (NEOC) to advise on alternative pathways for low acuity patients.
- The establishment of a number of alternative care pathways including the Pathfinder project, which sees specific older patients treated in their home, rather than attending a Hospital ED and the Community Paramedicine project which has been introduced in both rural and urban settings following a successful pilot.
- The Intermediate Care Service, which was established to undertake low acuity transfers, now carries out on average 85-90% of inter-hospital transfers.
- A new Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) was established in the South-West of the country in 2019 and carries out on average over 500 taskings each year.

As part of Budget 2022, €8.23m was allocated to the National Ambulance Service for the continued implementation of initiatives aligned to NAS strategic reform. This funding, which involves an additional 128 WTE's, is facilitating:

- The training and recruitment of additional paramedics to further support baseline capacity needs identified in the NAS 2016 Baseline and Capacity review (49 WTEs).
- The further strengthening of capacity in the National Emergency Operations Centre Clinical Hub to provide advice on alternative care pathways for low acuity patients and free up emergency capacity (8 WTEs).
- Addressing historical tactical and operational management deficits within the NAS; (42 WTEs).
- Providing for enhanced governance arrangements within the NAS (29 WTEs).
- Up to 3rd November, 175 new starters and 26 ICO's.

Separately, it should be noted that sanction has been given to the NAS in 2022 to recruit an additional 200 WTEs under a separate Covid-19 related funding stream to provide for a strengthened Emerging Threats Team. This follows a Government Decision to establish a permanent capability in the NAS to respond in a timely manner to future emerging threats to the delivery of public health services, such as that posed by the recent pandemic.

Capacity Review and Workforce Plan:

NAS have an urgent need to recruit additional staff as, currently, recruitment efforts are being surpassed by service demand. The scale of growth in demand is unprecedented and unexpected with a 14% growth since 2019, the last year from which we can develop reliable calculations that have not been skewed by the impact of COVID-19.

This is a significant jump on the growth rate prior to 2019, which was about 3% per year. The projected number of the population aged over 65 will double to nearly 1.6 million in the Republic of Ireland by 2051. An increase in life expectancy is a major public health achievement but it presents both opportunities and challenges. This increase in demand is an issue that is being experienced by health and ambulance services both in Ireland and internationally.

As NAS moves to treat more patients over the phone or in their homes, the diversity of roles will continue to grow and include Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists and Mental Health Nurses.

Based on the recent outputs of the capacity and demand analysis commissioned in July 2021 and the new developments set out in our draft Strategic Plan, the subsequent National Ambulance Service (NAS) HR Workforce Plan 2022 – 2026 which we have now developed recommends 2,161 additional staff, across a broad spectrum of roles to ensure we are better placed to meet this expected demand and support planned new developments.



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Given the nature, volume and complexity of work carried out by the NAS, the development of a workforce plan was vital to ensure that the NAS adopts a detailed and analysis based approach focused on predicting and planning the capacity we will require into the future if we are to provide high quality, safe and person centred emergency and urgent care services against the background of ever rising demand.

Staff Retention

A key part of our workforce planning is supporting retention. We recognise that the myriad of opportunities that now exist across the HSE presents tremendous career advancement for our staff. Whilst the HSE still retain these staff in new roles, we are focused on understanding how we can improve the working environment and support for our existing staff. We are also working to completely re-design the structure of our organisation and in doing so, create career opportunities for those who want to progress and advance.

To this end, we continue to work closely with our trade unions partners on key areas of concern including reducing late finishes, improving access to meal breaks, reducing the travel distance to calls, facilitating staff transfers close to home and improving rostering and workforce planning arrangements.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Colette Walsh
Assistant National Director of HR
National Ambulance Service