



Oifig an Stiúirthóra Náisiúnta Cúnta  
Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte

Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin, Baile Phámar,  
Baile Átha Cliath 20, D20 HK69

Office of the  
Assistant National Director  
Mental Health Operations

St Lomans Hospital, Palmerstown,  
Dublin 20, D20 HK69

[www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie)  
[@hselive](mailto:@hselive)

t: 01-6207304

e: [PQReps.NatMHOPS@hse.ie](mailto:PQReps.NatMHOPS@hse.ie)

Deputy Paul Murphy.  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

6<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**PQ Number: 40641/23**

**PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health to outline the approach that is to be taken by CAMHS in circumstances where an applicant had diagnosed autism and potentially has ADHD, whether CAMHS will assess for ADHD. – Paul Murphy**

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Dear Deputy Murphy,

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.

CAMHS provide specialist mental health services to those aged up to 18 years, who have reached the threshold for a diagnosis of moderate to severe mental health disorder that require the input of multi-disciplinary mental health teams.

#### **Referral and Access to CAMHS**

When deciding if a child or adolescent needs to attend CAMHS, a number of factors are considered by the CAMHS team. These include consideration of the child or adolescent's clinical presentation, their level of social and family support and the availability of resources and treatment options at primary care level or within community networks. It is the role of the CAMHS team to decide if the child or adolescent reaches the threshold for community CAMHS, i.e. whether their mental disorder is moderate to severe.

#### **Moderate to Severe Mental Disorders**

Mental disorders are often described on a continuum of severity, ranging from mild to moderate to severe. A number of factors are taken into account when defining whether someone has a moderate to severe mental disorder and these include the diagnosis, formulation, the duration of the symptoms and level of functioning in daily living.

In practice the term *moderate to severe* means that the mental disorder is severe enough to cause substantial distress to the child or their family or others. The child or adolescent would have a significant impairment in functioning in various aspects of their life including development, family relationships, school, peers, self-care and play or leisure activities.



### **Referral Criteria**

Children or adolescents referred to community CAMHS must fulfil the following criteria:

- The child or adolescent is under 18 years old.
- Consent for the referral has been obtained from the parent(s).
- The child or adolescent presents with a suspected moderate to severe mental disorder.
- Comprehensive treatment at primary care level has been unsuccessful or was not appropriate in the first instance.

There are some children and adolescents with complex clinical issues who may present with a number of difficulties and a moderate to severe mental health disorder at the same time. Where the child or adolescent presents with a moderate to severe mental health disorder, it is the role of CAMHS to provide appropriate multi-disciplinary mental health assessment and treatment for the mental health disorder. This may involve joint working or shared care with other agencies including HSE Primary Care, Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT's) and other agencies supporting children and adolescents.

The Joint Working Protocol Primary Care, Disability and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service recommends that a co-operative and collaborative culture between Primary Care, Disability and Child and Adolescent Health Services must be promoted. An important aspect of this joint working is that all services facilitate children accessing the appropriate service as early as possible to prevent multiple referrals and/or re-referrals in order to facilitate timely access to appropriate support

The Primary Care, Children's Disability and Child and Adolescent Mental health services aim to make the referral process as seamless and timely as possible by collaborating to provide comprehensive information to families and other referrers and by communication with all relevant parties effectively and efficiently. When information indicates that there is more than one service which could best meet the child's needs, consultation should take place with the other service to determine which is the most appropriate or whether a joint approach is indicated. An Integrated Children's Services Forum (ICSF) in each area provides a formal, regular mechanism for services to meet and discuss the individual children whose needs are not clear or who may require some level of joint assessment or intervention and for whom direct consultation between the relevant services has not led to a decision on the best arrangement for the child. In situations where differences arise in relation to the management of a case and a local joint decision cannot be agreed, the practitioners must make every effort to resolve them so that the appropriate interventions can proceed. Where this cannot be agreed, the matter must be escalated by the Chair of the ICSF to the relevant CHO Head of Service. The Chief Officers of each CHO will take responsibility to implement this protocol at operational level and a joint National Oversight Group was convened to oversee the implementation of the protocol.

Further information can be found in the CAMHS Operational Guideline available here:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/mental-health-services/camhs/operational-guideline/camhs-operational-guideline-2019.pdf>

and the Joint Working Protocol Primary Care, Disability and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/4/disability/progressing-disability/pds-programme/documents/hse-joint-working-protocol-between-primary-care-disability-and-child-and-adolescent-mental-health-service.pdf>



I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Braham'.

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**Paul Braham**  
**Senior Operations Manager (Area DON)**  
**National Mental Health Services**