



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

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3<sup>rd</sup> February 2023

Deputy Patricia Ryan,  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
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Dear Deputy Ryan,

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: 3943/22**

*To ask the Minister for Health the assistance available to persons wishing to provide and train an autism assistance dog; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

Pet animals can enhance the quality of life for many people. A companion dog may be suitable for a child with autism who doesn't need a dog for safety when out in public places, but may benefit from the companionship of a dog at home.

It is important to note that the Disability sector makes a distinction between Therapy/Companion and Assistance Dogs.

Therapy/Companion dogs don't require the same level of training and are only placed for companionship. A Companion Dog acts as a constant companion to the child with autism in their home environment helping to give them a sense of responsibility, reassurance and support.

Assistance Dogs are highly trained and help to control and improve the child's behaviour in public places. Assistance Dogs also help children with autism to develop coping mechanisms, improve communication skills, sense of responsibility, confidence, ability to learn and participate in social activities. All these benefits improve the long term quality of the life of the child and reduce the need for other costly supports and interventions.

It is not possible for individuals to independently provide and train an autism assistance dog.

Assistance Dogs are essentially working dogs and have to be accredited with Assistance Dogs International (ADI). There are Standards and Guidelines in place, which form the basis for ADI Accreditation.



Dogs must undergo extensive training and rigorous assessments to meet the standard required to be an assistance dog. The dogs that qualify as assistance dogs will have spent 18-24 months within a training programme undergoing regular assessments and evaluation.

In Ireland there are four organisations that have accreditation with Assistance Dogs International, Inc. (ADI). These are:

- Autism Assistance Dogs Ireland;
- Irish Dogs for the Disabled;
- Irish Guide Dogs for the Blind
- My Canine Companion - Autism Service Dogs

Assistance Dogs International, Inc. (ADI) is a worldwide coalition of non-profit programs that train and place Assistance Dogs. Founded in 1986 from a group of seven small programs, ADI has become the leading authority in the Assistance Dog industry.

Assistance Dogs organisations that pass ADI's accreditation process become ADI Accredited Member programs and are regularly assessed to ensure they meet the highest standards in the industry.

The HSE values Assistance Dogs' services to children with autism and has fully supported organisations' applications to other funding bodies such as the Scheme to Support National Organisations in the Community and Voluntary Sector (SSNO).

The financial support afforded by an SSNO Grant would enable such organisations to grow and expand operations and significantly increase the number of dogs placed each year with children on the autistic spectrum.

More information regarding services and how to access a companion therapy dog or an autism assistance dog can be obtained at:

<https://www.autismassistancedogsireland.ie/companion-dogs>

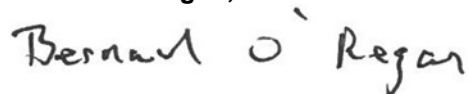
<https://www.mycaninecompanion.ie/>

In addition, the HSE funds a range of organisations which provide services to people with autism, their carers and families. For example, Aslam provides an Information Helpline and will direct any queries to other relevant organisations and supports. Please see weblink below.

<https://asiam.ie/information-line>

Yours Sincerely,

**Bernard O'Regan,**



**Head of Operations –Disability Services,  
Community Operations**

