



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

**Office of the Head of Operations,**  
Disability Services/Social Care Division,  
31-33 Catherine Street, Limerick.

T: 00353 (0) 61 483369  
Suíomh Gréasáin/Website: <http://www.hse.ie>

17<sup>th</sup> July 2023

Deputy Holly Cairns,  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
E-mail: [holly.cairns@oireachtas.ie](mailto:holly.cairns@oireachtas.ie)

Dear Deputy Cairns,

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: 32225/22**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the steps he is taking to provide services for autistic adults/adults with autism; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

Disability services are provided based on the presenting needs of an individual rather than by the diagnosis of the individual or the actual type of disability. Services are provided following individual assessment according to the person's individual requirements and service needs.

Based on presentation to the GP, individuals can be referred on to adult psychology in Primary Care or the Multidisciplinary Adult Disability Team.

It is acknowledged however, that the current system is very variable across the country and does not adequately serve the needs of adults with autism. In many areas adult assessments are only available privately, this is an unsatisfactory situation and we are working to address this.

**National Autism Programme Board**

A National Autism Programme Board was established with the responsibility for leading the implementation of the Review report recommendations. The Board consists of senior operational and clinical decision makers as well as independent professional / academic support; importantly, the Programme Board has representation of persons with lived experience of Autism participating as equal members of this important collaborative team effort.

**The Service Improvement Programme**

Following the commissioning and publication of the Review of the Irish Health Services for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (the Review) in November, 2017, the HSE initiated a Service Improvement Programme for the Autistic Community comprising of a number of Service Improvement Projects. The Programme aims to respond to the need for greater awareness amongst clinicians and the general public regarding both the autistic community and the support for Service Providers working with people with autism.



This programme was subsequently renamed to The Service Improvement Programme (SIP) for the Autistic Community, due to use of language and that we should refer to autistic people.

The Service Improvement Programme for the Autistic Community work streams are as follows:

1. The identification of a Standardised Assessment/Pathway approach for use in all services dealing with the assessment of those with autism to ensure that every assessment is of an acceptable and agreed standard, regardless of which service is being accessed.
  - The pilot protocol has been developed and has been operational in CHO 2 and CHO 9 since April 2022. Following an initial review of progress in September 2022, the protocol has been further refined and is currently being extended to additional Community Health Networks in CHO 2 and CHO 9, and to two new CHO's, CHO 4 and CHO 7, commencing late Q3 2023.
2. Building Awareness of the autistic community and the services and supports available to those with autism, both within the Service User, Family Member and Carer communities, and within the Service Providers themselves.
  - The content pages for the website has been developed and reviewed by the Subject Matter Expert's (SMEs), this is progressing to user testing phase in early Q3.
  - Phase 1 of the work on the development of a national service directory is completed, with the inclusion of all HSE delivered services into the directory. Phase 2 will commence in Q4 to capture all HSE funded voluntary sector services for inclusion in the directory.
  - On completion of user and accessibility testing, the directory and content will go live on the new HSE autism information website.

### **Autism Information Line**

The HSE funds AsIAM to provide a phone line for the autistic community for a three year period.

With HSE support, AsIAM operates the Information Line by phone and instant messaging for not less than 20 hours per week (presently 5 hours a day, 4 days per week) with email support provided Monday-Friday.

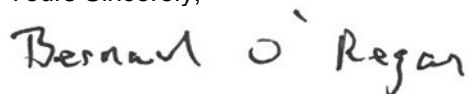
The calls will be responded to by either a clinician or an appropriately qualified autistic advisor to ensure appropriate responses and supports to meet the needed and concerns of the range of callers and to inform follow-on activity.

The aim of the service over the next three years will be to develop the range of information resources, seminars and programmatic activity so that callers will receive the information and support they need. The service will operate within the "Partnership for Change" model, building on the capacity of individuals and families to manage the challenges of everyday life. All callers will receive a follow-on email summarising their call and where required, providing follow-on information and tools.

The service will be widely promoted nationally through a co-branded information campaign and will operate on both a phone line and instant messaging basis.

Annual insight reports, in addition to interval data reports, on calls received and topics explored, will be provided to inform HSE and government policy in the area of autism.

Yours Sincerely,



**Mr Bernard O'Regan,  
Head of Operations - Disability Services,  
Community Operations**

