



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

**Office of the Head of Operations,**  
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4<sup>th</sup> April 2023

Deputy Holly Cairns,  
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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: 13460/23**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the supports available to parents of children with disabilities who require tube feeding to send them to childcare.*

**PQ: 13461/23**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the funding streams and training options available to assist parents in caring for children with disabilities who require tube feeding.*

**HSE Response**

Children require feeding tubes (including nasogastric or peg tube) for different kinds of health problems, including: congenital (present at birth,) anomalies of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, stomach or bowel, sucking and swallowing disorders (due to premature birth, injury, a developmental delay, or another condition).

Meeting the health and care requirements for children with disabilities who require tube feeding to ensure their nutritional requirements are met for normal health, growth and development, spans across various service provision including Acute Services, Primary Care and Disability Services.

Parents /carers of children who require tube feeding receive training in the acute service in advance of the child's discharge home. This will include input from various disciplines including medical, nursing, dietetic and therapy services. There is also further follow up and facility to access further training at any stage following discharge from acute services.

Companies who supply the products required for maintaining tube feeding for these children operate a 24/7 support helpline which is available to assist with any query or difficulty that may arise in the use of these feeding systems. All service users and their families/carers are made aware of the contact details for these support lines. They also offer a wide range of educational and support material, videos, etc. covering enteral feeding on their websites and these can be readily accessed by service users and their families.



Children who are tube fed may also have additional health needs. Children under the age of 6 ordinarily resident in Ireland, are entitled to free visits to a participating GP. Children are included in this scheme until the end of the month of the child's 6th birthday. The GP card covers free GP visits, including home visits and out-of-hours urgent GP care.

If the family/parents already have a medical card, there is no need to register children under 6 for this scheme.

Parents of children who require tube feeding may be able to apply for a medical card. Further information can be obtained by accessing the link below. Discretionary medical cards are reviewed and assessed by medical officers and deciding officers.

<https://www2.hse.ie/services/schemes-allowances/medical-cards/applying/apply/>

As there are many hundreds of children in Ireland with different types of feeding tubes/ requirements, further support and information can be obtained from sites such as:

<https://www.tube-feeding.com/Downloadable-Resources>

Further information can be obtained from Temple Street Children's University Hospital, Our Lady's Children's Hospital Crumlin, and Tallaght University Hospital.

### Access and Inclusion (AIM) Programme

The Department of Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) led Access and Inclusion (AIM) Programme supports children with disabilities to access and participate in mainstream preschool with their peers.

The goal of AIM is to create a more inclusive environment in pre-schools, so all children, regardless of ability, can benefit from quality early learning and care. The model achieves this by providing universal supports to pre-school settings, and targeted supports, which focus on the needs of the individual child, without requiring a diagnosis of disability.

AIM commenced in 2016, since then, it has helped children with a disability to access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme in pre-school settings nationwide.

Under this programme, DCEDIY is leading a pilot for supporting children with complex healthcare needs, including those who require tube feeding, to access the required supports in the preschool setting such as specialist nursing care.

A Model to Support Access to the Free Pre-School Year for Children with a Disability.



AIM supports are divided into two main areas, universal and targeted supports. For more information on the supports offered please see:

<https://aim.gov.ie/how-to-apply/>

Yours sincerely,

Bernard O'Regan

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

