



**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>

22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023

Deputy Carol Nolan,  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
E-mail: [carol.nolan@oireachtas.ie](mailto:carol.nolan@oireachtas.ie)

Dear Deputy Nolan,

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: 13569/23**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of speech and language therapist posts that are currently vacant across the 91 children disability network teams throughout the country; the number that have left the teams; the number that have been recruited since the National Staff Census and Workload Review was undertaken by the HSE in October 2022; if he is aware of the major retention problem in the profession; the number of children that are awaiting initial assessment; the number that are awaiting initial therapy; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

91 Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) are aligned to 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) across the country and are providing services and supports for children aged from birth to 18 years of age.

Regardless of the nature of their disability, where they live, or the school they attend, every child with complex needs and their families have access to the full range of family centred services and supports of their CDNT according to their individual needs. This includes universal, targeted and specialist supports, such as individual therapeutic intervention and access to specialist consultation and assessment when needed. Supports are provided as is feasible in the child's natural environments - their home, school and community.

Work is ongoing on mapping specialised services and supports, and paediatric supports available and gap analysis for children with highly complex needs, in order to develop standardised approaches to integrated pathways of support for CDNTs and Primary Care staff.

CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work, dietetics and others. The team works closely together in a family centred model, focusing on the child's and family's own priorities.



Disability services are provided following individual assessment according to the child's individual requirements and support needs. Speech and language Therapists on the CDNTs work together with the multidisciplinary team to meet the individual child's requirements.

The 2022 Children's Disability Network Team Staff Census and Workforce Review National Report has been circulated.

Please see the attached report.

An overall analysis of the data from 2021 and 2022 demonstrates an increase of 11% in the number of approved posts and a 2% increase in the CDNT workforce

The largest discipline within the CDNTs is Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) where there are 284.55 filled and 162.81 vacant WTE positions (447.36 total).

The table below is taken from the 2022 CDNT Staff Census and demonstrates the % change between the 2021 and 2022 CDNT Census and Workforce Review data per discipline.

*Table 14: Variance Table for WTEs by Discipline*

Discipline	% Change	
	Approved WTE	Filled WTE
<b>2022</b>	11% ↑	2% ↑
Administration	19% ↑	15% ↑
Care Assistant	-59% ↓	-62% ↓
CDNM	1% ↑	1% ↑
Dietician	30% ↑	16% ↑
Healthcare Assistant	76% ↑	336% ↑
Nursing	-3% ↓	-18% ↓
Occupational Therapist	9% ↑	-2% ↓
Other	795% ↑	716% ↑
Physiotherapist	9% ↑	-1% ↓
Play Therapist	-36% ↓	-48% ↓
Psychologist	13% ↑	1% ↑
Social Worker	16% ↑	13% ↑
Socialcare Worker	-32% ↓	-48% ↓
Family Support Worker	-18% ↓	-26% ↓
Speech and Language Therapy	10% ↑	-2% ↓

### **National Information Management System for the CDNTs (CDNT IMS)**

The development and testing of the National Children's Disability Network Team Information Management System (CDNTIMS) is currently taking place. When implemented it will provide current data on waiting lists, caseloads and other details for all CDNTs.

With regard to the number of children that are awaiting initial assessment and initial therapy, the Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) do not collect activity or waiting list data by individual discipline as this does not align with the interdisciplinary model of care. Discipline-specific data is not available in Disability Services.



The most recent data that is available is provided in the table below and shows the number of children that are waiting for an initial contact with a CDNT in the 9 CHO Areas. This Dataset represents end of December 2022 activity reports.

Status report	CHO 1	CHO 2	CHO 3	CHO 4	CHO 5	CHO 6	CHO 7	CHO 8	CHO 9
No of children waiting 0-3 months for an initial contact @month end	481	132	294	181	179	120	185	361	87
No of children waiting 4-6 months for an initial contact @month end	315	231	209	164	217	120	258	498	119
No of children waiting 6-12 months for an initial contact @month end	341	1,275	316	272	395	266	672	367	354
No of children waiting over 12 months for an initial contact @month end	186	80	366	1488	1275	685	1551	1903	2302

Please also note that this is an interim dataset as we await the roll out of the National Information Management System and some individual CDNTs indicate that they do not have a system in place to capture this level of activity, therefore there are gaps in data returns for some of the CHO Areas.

### Retention and Recruitment

In relation to Children's Services in particular, the HSE and Lead Agencies are operating in a very competitive global market for healthcare talent as there are significant shortages of qualified healthcare professionals across the globe.

In partnership with our Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNT) Lead Agencies, we continue to explore a range of options to enhance the recruitment and retention of essential staff into our CDNTs. In addition, the HSE Community Operations Disability Services is working collaboratively with our partnering Lead Agencies to promote CDNTs as a workplace of choice in a competitive employment market.

Options to support the recruitment of staff for the CDNTs currently being progressed include:

- Targeted National Recruitment for CDNTs
- Targeted International Recruitment for CDNTs with an agreed relocation allowance
- Sponsorship Programme for therapy grades

In addition, the following options are being explored:

- Apprenticeship Programme for therapy grades
- Employment of graduates as therapy assistants as they await CORU registration
- Expansion of therapy assistants in the system with HSE supporting individuals to return to education to qualify as therapists.

The HSE has launched International Recruitment campaigns for qualified healthcare professionals. To support these international campaigns, the HSE is working in partnership with CORU, the regulator, and government departments to maximise this pool. In addition, some of the CDNT Lead Agencies are also progressing International Recruitment.

Some further points to note in relation to recruitment and retention of CDNT staff include the following:

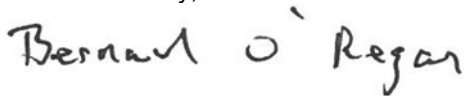
- There are panels in place for occupational therapists, psychologists, physiotherapists, and speech and language therapists.
- National Disability Operations is currently reviewing the area of Assistant Therapy Grades.

Filling the current staffing vacancies will take time. In the interim, the HSE continues to drive a number of initiatives to reduce waiting times for children and families. These include sourcing therapy assessments and interventions externally via private service providers.



Another key focus of HSE Disabilities is staff retention. A comprehensive Team Development Programme 2020/2021 was provided for Children's Disability Network Managers (CDNMs) and cascaded to all team members. The programme, designed to support establishment of the new teams and implementation of a child and family centred model of services, will also support staff retention. All resources from this programme are now accessible online for CDNT staff. A further CDNT Training and Development Programme 2022/2023 has been launched, with dedicated funding and based on competency gaps identified and prioritised by the teams. A secure online site has been set up for CDNMs and their staff to facilitate sharing of training and development resources as well as clinical and service good practice models in place across the country. The HSE and partner Lead Agencies are committed to providing ongoing training and development for CDNT staff supporting their professional development and retention, and promoting CDNTs as an attractive place to work.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernard O'Regan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

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

