



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

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7th June 2023

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: richard.boydbarrett@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Boyd Barrett,

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: 24189/23

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the estimated full-year cost of ensuring that the timelines for assessment of needs, outlined in the Disability Act 2005, are adhered to for every child that is in need of such an assessment; and if he will make a statement on the matter

HSE Response

The Assessment of Need process is set out in the [Disability Act, 2005](#). The aim of an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act is to identify whether a person has a disability, the nature and extent of the disability, any health and education needs arising from that disability, as well as what services are required to meet those needs.

The numbers of applications for AON under the Act have risen steadily since its implementation in June 2007. 7144 applications for AON were received in the most recent 4 quarters (Q2, 2022 – Q1 2023). This was the highest number of applications received in any 12 month period since Part 2 of the Act was commenced in June 2007.

The HSE has endeavoured to meet its legislative obligations under the Act. However, as a consequence of a High Court ruling of December 2009, the effect of which was to open eligibility to all persons born after 1st June 2002 who are suspected of having a disability, the number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while throughout 2022, this figure averaged 55%. This is a reflection that the AON process is an accumulative process in terms of numbers of children and young people seeking access.

A High Court judgement delivered on 11th March 2022 has impacted on the completion of assessments since that date. As a consequence of the judgement, Assessment Officers cannot complete assessments based on the agreed Preliminary Team Assessment format. As a result, activity for the first quarter of 2023 indicates that there has been an increase in the total number of applications



'overdue for completion' is 10,655, which includes 5,171 Preliminary Team Assessments requiring an assessment and 5,484 AONs overdue at the end of Q1 2023 (including 180 applications for which an extended time-frame was negotiated with the parent on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations). In addition, an estimated 7005 new AONs are anticipated based on the number of AONs received over the previous four quarters.

Based on an average of 36 hours to complete each AON, it is estimated that 660 Whole Time Equivalent clinicians would be required to complete this total of 17,660 AONs within the next 12 months.

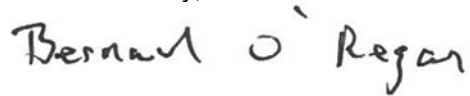
Approximately €11m has been allocated to address waiting lists for clinical assessments identified through the Assessment of Need process. This funding will be utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector. A successful procurement process will facilitate the Children's Disability Network Teams to focus on the provision of intervention for children on their caseloads.

In parallel, a large scale international procurement process is also being progressed.

In addition, the HSE at local level uses time related savings from time to time to source AON assessments privately for children in the order as registered on the AOS (AON information management system). In such instances, the HSE ensures that the contracted providers are appropriately qualified and that any assessments or interventions are provided in line with the appropriate standards, appropriate procurement procedures, Garda vetting and due diligence practice.

The HSE is committed to the delivery of appropriate services for children with disabilities and working with families and staff to develop services that meet their needs. It is important to note that children do not require an Assessment of Need to access health services and parents may refer their child directly to their local Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT).

Yours Sincerely,



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

