



Ceannasaí Náisiúnta Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte  
Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin,  
Baile Phámar Baile Átha Cliath 20.  
R: [PQReps.NatMHOPS@hse.ie](mailto:PQReps.NatMHOPS@hse.ie)

Head of Operations, Mental Health Service  
St Loman's Hospital,  
Palmerstown, Dublin 20.  
Email: [PQReps.NatMHOPS@hse.ie](mailto:PQReps.NatMHOPS@hse.ie)

Deputy Mark Ward.  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

14th July 2023

**PQ Number: 25440/23**

**PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the estimated cost of providing universal counselling within primary care; the cost of providing counselling in primary care for 0-18 years, 0-25 years and over-25s, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter. –Mark Ward**

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Dear Deputy Ward,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The HSE National Counselling Service (NCS) was established in 2000 and provides counselling to adults resident in the Republic of Ireland. The aim of the NCS is to support clients to improve their quality of life and reduce their psychological distress through the provision of evidence-based, professional, client-centred counselling

Services provided by the NCS include counselling for adults who have experienced childhood abuse (CAPA) and the Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC) service established in July 2013. CIPC provides counselling to adults experiencing mild to moderate psychological difficulties who present in the primary care setting. Currently all adults in receipt of a medical card are eligible for this service. Access to CIPC is by referral from the client's GP or a member of the Primary Care Team. All clients referred are requested to opt into the service before they are allocated to a counsellor and an appointment is then offered.

CIPC is available in each HSE CHO area and provides time-limited counselling for adults experiencing common mental health and psychological difficulties. It offers a structured programme of up to eight counselling sessions with a professionally qualified counsellor/therapist.

The *Sláintecare* report (2017) and more recently, *Sharing the Vision, A Mental Health Policy for Everyone* (DOH 2020) both recommend access to counselling in primary care on a universal basis. Moving to a model of universal provision of counselling will require significant additional investment in the HSE National Counselling Service to enable it to respond to expected increased demand if eligibility is extended.



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Unfortunately, it is not possible to cost this request due to the large number of variables involved. Not all of those in the age categories: 0-18 years, 0-25 years and over-25s will experience mild to moderate psychological and emotional difficulties and/or will require access to CIPC service.

Other factors which influence the range of costs to extend the CIPC Service include:

- Availability of suitably qualified counsellor/therapist workforce
- Engagement with counselling and psychotherapy training programmes
- Sponsorship programmes
- Provision of training placements
- Future supply of appropriately qualified staff
- Provision of sufficient business support
- Recruitment of senior counsellor/therapists in order to ensure robust clinical governance
- Capital costs which may be incurred in order to ensure access to appropriate accommodation from which to deliver the service

Further work is required to develop a detailed plan to address current deficits and support the development of a sustainable service infrastructure which would enable the HSE NCS to deliver universal counselling as recommended in the *Sláintecare* report.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Mc Cusker'.

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**Tony Mc Cusker**  
**General Manager**  
**National Mental Health Services**