



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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14th September 2023

Deputy Duncan Smith,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: duncan.smith@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Smith,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary questions, which were submitted to this department for response.

PQ: 38114/23

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth to quantify how many private assessments with occupational therapists have been funded through the AON process; in which CDNT areas they have been made, and the monies spent, in tabular form; how many private assessments with speech therapists have been funded through the AON process; in which CDNT areas they have been made, and the monies spent; how many private assessments with psychologists have been funded through the AON process; in which CDNT areas they have been made, and the monies spent; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

PQ: 37418/23

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth to quantify how many private assessments with occupational therapists have been funded through the AON process, in which CDNT areas they have been made, and the moneys spent, in tabular form; how many private assessments with speech therapists have been funded through the AON process, in which CDNT areas they have been made, and the moneys spent, in tabular form; how many private assessments with psychologists have been funded through the AON process, in which CDNT areas they have been made, and the moneys spent, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

Children do not require an Assessment of Need as defined by the Disability Act (2005) in order to access a Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT) or Primary Care service. A healthcare professional or parent/carer can refer children with complex needs as a result of their disability to the CDNT, or to Primary Care for children with non-complex needs.

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 with complex disabilities



aged from birth to 18 years of age.

The CDNTs are currently providing care and therapy for over 46,000 children and strategies and supports for urgent cases on the waitlist where staffing resources allow.

Private providers are currently being contracted by the HSE and its funded agencies to provide assessments and / or interventions. In such instances, the HSE and HSE funded agencies ensure 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.

Some families source private assessments to facilitate access to educational supports such as special schools or classes. In many cases, these are unidisciplinary assessments which are usually accepted in the education sector. In general, HSE or HSE funded services, in line with best practice guidelines, use a multidisciplinary approach to assessment, specifically to ASD assessment. In these circumstances, while HSE services may take cognisance of any unidisciplinary reports that may be available, they will undertake a multidisciplinary assessment where appropriate, to confirm a diagnosis and to determine the necessary interventions.

Assessment of Need under The Disability Act (2005)

The Disability Act (2005) provides a legislated right to an Assessment of Need (AON) that outlines the health and education needs for people born on or after 1st June 2002 who are suspected of having a disability, but does not include a legislated right to service provision as an outcome of that AON.

6,755 applications for AON were received in 2022. This was the highest number of applications received in any year since Part 2 of the Act was commenced in June 2007.

The numbers of applications for AON under the Act have risen steadily since its implementation in June 2007. 7,612 applications for AON were received in the most recent 4 quarters (Q3, 2022 – Q2 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 judgement of Ms Justice S Phelan in the case of CTM & JA v the HSE was delivered in March 2022. This judgment found that the Preliminary Team Assessment approach described in the HSE's Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need does not meet the requirements of the Disability Act. This judgement in effect requires the HSE to deliver diagnostic assessments where necessary and appropriate as part of the Assessment of Need process. This ruling has a significant impact operationally and has resulted in a growth in the numbers of overdue Assessments of Need. The requirement for services to prioritise the statutory Assessment of Need process will also impact significantly on their capacity to provide necessary intervention / treatment for children with disabilities.

As a result of the Judgement, activity for the second quarter of 2023 indicates that there has been an increase in the total number of applications 'overdue for completion', which now stands at 6495 (including 236 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)

The HSE has reviewed the files of all children who received a preliminary team assessment and engaged directly with families to establish what additional assessments will be required to meet the requirements of the Act. Overall activity for the first quarter of 2023 indicates that there are approximately 5,171 Preliminary Team Assessments requiring a diagnostic assessment.

When the 5,171 Preliminary Team Assessments requiring an assessment are added to the 6,495 AONs overdue at the end of Q2 2023 (including 236 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), the total number of applications 'overdue for completion' at this time is 11,666.



In addition, an estimated 7,612 new AONs are anticipated in 2023 based on the number of AONs received over the previous four quarters.

A revised AON Standard Operating Procedure incorporating guidance on completion of clinical assessment was launched on July 14th to reflect the High Court ruling in CMT & JA vs HSE 2022.

Additional funding

Additional funding has been secured to support the delivery of additional assessments, including those procured from the private sector.

Approximately €11m has been allocated to address waiting lists for clinical assessments identified through the Assessment of Need process. This funding is being utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector.

Progressing the outsourcing of these assessments is challenging however, in this regard, Disability Services nationally is working with HSE Procurement to develop a tender process and Service Specification for the delivery of Assessment of Need from private providers. A successful procurement process will facilitate the CDNTs 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 is using time related savings to source AON assessments privately for children in the order as registered on the AOS (AON information management system).

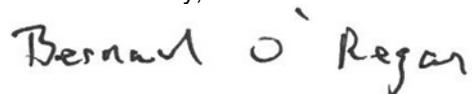
Six Regional AON Administrative Hubs are now in place in order to streamline AON processes ensuring maximum efficiencies and equity of demand across all areas.

A further 2 Regional Hubs are in various stages of development in CHO Areas 3 and 6. CHO 3 has established an AON Diagnostic Hub, reassigning some posts from CDNTs in order to address high demand for AONs while CHO 6 is in the process of developing an AON Diagnostic Hub with recruitment of clinicians in train and which also incorporates the CHO's Assessment Officer, Liaison Officer and Admin WTEs onto the team for optimal efficiency.

As mentioned above, the HSE or HSE funded services, in line with best practice guidelines, use a multidisciplinary approach to assessment, particularly to ASD assessment, to confirm a diagnosis and to determine the necessary interventions.

Information is not collated separately regarding assessments completed by different disciplines of therapists.

Yours Sincerely,



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

