



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Cúnta Náisiúnta
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Deputy Colm Burke
Dáil Eireann,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.

04/10/2023

PQ 39689/23 - To ask the Minister for Health when the national discharge and annual review plan will be implemented for existing paediatric eye care patients aged eight years and over; if this will be implemented nationally, given that it is being progressed in some areas while discussions are continuing in relation to the fee structure; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

And

PQ 39690/23 - To ask the Minister for Health to confirm if paediatric eye care patients aged eight years and over who are entitled to State support and funding but have been forced to pay for private treatment due to long wait times; if those who are now not existing patients will be denied access to State funding for an annual review delivered by independent optometrists under the new paediatric pathway; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Burke,

I refer to your parliamentary questions, which was passed to the HSE for response.

The Primary Care Eye Services Review Group (PCESRG) Report was launched on 28th June 2017. The Report sets out the current service levels, service provision models and the consultation process undertaken with patients, advocates, ophthalmic staff and representative bodies. It also highlights the limitations of the current model of service delivery and sets out the way forward for a significant amount of eye services to be delivered in a Primary Care setting. The recommendations from the PCESRG Report complement the Model of Care developed by the National Clinical Programme for Ophthalmology.



As per the Primary Care Eye Service Review Group Report (2017) recommendation, it is acknowledged that a large proportion of the management of children could be provided by other eye care professionals, i.e. at age 8, the child can be discharged from the Primary Care Eye Service, and the independent high street optometrist can complete the annual refractive review if clinically appropriate (with a referral pathway back into the eye service if needed).

The Health Act of 1970 makes provision for ophthalmic services to children who can get free eye tests and treatment under pre-school developmental checks. School health services also complete eye screening and refer children for free treatment to the local HSE service, which may be in Primary Care or the hospital. Regarding reimbursement, the current Community Ophthalmic Service Scheme (COSS) contract does not cover optical examinations for children. Their examination must be conducted by an Ophthalmologist (Eye Doctor). This service is provided by Community Ophthalmic Physicians employed by the HSE; therefore, reimbursement of examinations is not provided by the PCRS. The COSS scheme does provide for dispensing spectacles and optical devices by optometrists and dispensing opticians prescribed by Ophthalmologists to children.

Therefore, funding for the expansion of the Community Ophthalmic Service Scheme is required to enable optometrists to provide eye exams to children over eight years in a standard way across the country. There is a commitment to progress this work, and a proposal to transfer the care of children aged 8 to 12 years to the care of local private optometrists has been prepared and shared with colleagues of the DOH in the context of Budget 2024.

I trust this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'G. Crowley', written over a horizontal line.

**Geraldine Crowley,
Assistant National Director,
Enhanced Community Care Programme &
Primary Care Contracts**