



29/04/2024

Deputy Brid Smith  
Dáil Eireann,  
Dublin 2.

**PQ ref 13349/24**

To ask the Minister for Health if he is aware of the lack of developmental screening for children in the Dublin 8, 10, 12 and 20 areas, and that parents are being sent questionnaires in place of screenings; if he will acknowledge that this is not an appropriate replacement for face-to-face developmental screenings with trained professionals and that parents often feel unequipped to be able to administer and/or interpret these questionnaires; if he will further accept that early identification and intervention is crucial for addressing developmental issues and that the current situation may have serious implications for children who do not receive these important developmental checks; the issues in terms of recruitment of public health nurses; the steps being taken to address this; when parents in these areas will have these necessary developmental screenings by PHNs resumed for their children; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

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Dear Deputy Smith,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you regarding your parliamentary question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for a response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The Health Service Executive can confirm that the Public Health Nursing Service in the areas of Dublin 8,10,12 &20 are experiencing a significant shortage of Public Health Nurses, Community Registered Nurses, Healthcare Assistants and Clinical Nurse Specialists. There has been detailed planning of work at site-specific levels to proactively manage staff retirements, staff transfers, staff vacancies, maternity leave, and sick leave (short and long term) on front-line services. The service is currently awaiting approval to progress recruitment campaigns, due to the current pause on recruitment in the HSE. The indications at this point suggest that there may be an insufficient number of applicants to fill current PHN vacancies. The CHO has also engaged with the Integrated Graduate Nurse Scheme and regrettably was unable to fill positions through this programme.

Unfortunately, the staff shortages have meant that some areas have moved to a Priority 1 (P1) service as per the National Caseload Prioritisation Procedure for the PHN Service. This means that some services will not be provided, and this includes developmental checks. This decision will regrettably impact the delivery of services to some users. Site-specific Contingency Plans continue to be refined monthly. Reconfiguration and integration of services, reorganisation of existing work, and redeployment of staff will continue to underpin the department's contingency plans.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but if you have any queries or require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

**Brian Kearney**

Head of Primary Care, Dublin South, Kildare & West Wicklow Community Healthcare