



Office of the Assistant National Director
Access and Integration

HSE Mental Health Services,
St. Loman's Hospital,
Palmerstown, Dublin 20
D20HK69

Oifig an Stiúrthóir Náisiúnta Cúnta
Rochtain agus Comhtháthú: Seirbhísí
Meabhairshláinte FSS
Ospidéal Naomh Loman
Baile Phámar, Baile Átha Cliath 20
D20HK69

www.hse.ie
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e: PQReps.NatMHOPS@hse.ie

Deputy Cathal Crowe.
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

14th October 2024

PQ Number: 39834/24

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the estimated full-year cost to the Exchequer of extending free primary care counselling to all GP card holders. -Cathal Crowe

Dear Deputy Crowe,

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 provides Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC) 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 the service. CIPC is available in each HSE Regional Health Area and provides up to eight counselling sessions with a professionally qualified counsellor/therapist. CIPC counsellors utilise a range of counselling interventions depending on presenting issues and assessed needs.

Depression and anxiety constitute the main reasons for referral to CIPC. It is generally accepted that 90% of mental health needs can successfully be addressed in primary care settings. CIPC therefore provides a person-centred, high-quality service 'in the right place, at the right time', for many people, in line with the Sláintecare reform programme. For GPs, CIPC offers an alternative to medication for people presenting with mild to moderate mental health difficulties.

Currently CIPC service is available to adults who hold a valid GMS card. CIPC receives an average of 17,660 referrals per year. If eligibility were to be expanded to allow access by Doctor Visit Card holders it is estimated that:

- The population eligible for the service would increase by approximately one third - 399,842 people
- The increase population eligible for the service would generate at least a 30% increase in referrals to the NCS CIPC service - approximately 5,886 additional referrals per year
- The increase in referrals would require an equivalent increase in staffing provision
- Each CIPC contract offered includes an initial assessment and up to 8 counselling sessions at an average cost of €1008 per contract
- Full year cost for provision of counselling contracts to 5,886 additional referrals is estimated at €5,933,088



- This costing estimate does not include the cost of additional Senior Counsellor/Therapists to provide clinical governance or business support required to ensure provision of a safe and effective service

Assumptions:

- Recruitment of sufficient counsellor/therapist capacity to deliver additional counselling sessions
- All current vacant posts are filled
- Clients attend a typical counselling contract of an initial assessment and up to 8 sessions

Costing does not include:

- Additional cost of clinical governance and administration resources required
- Cost of service delivery including accommodation, heat, light, staff costs such as travel, training, induction etc.

Yours Sincerely,

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

Tony McCusker
General Manager
Access and Integration; HSE Mental Health Services