



Oifig an Stiúrthóir Cúnta Náisiúnta,
Foireann Míchumais Náisiúnta,
An Chéad Urlár - Oifigí 13, 14, 15,
Áras Phlásóg na Rós, Coimpléasc Gnó na hOllscoile,
Páirc Náisiúnta Teicneolaíochta,
Caladh an Treoigh,
Luimneach.

Office of the Assistant National Director,
National Disability Team,
First Floor- Offices 13, 14, 15,
Roselawn House, University Business Complex,
National Technology Park,
Castletroy,
Limerick.

4th April 2025

Deputy Darren O'Rourke,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: darren.orourke@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy O'Rourke,

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.

15780/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of assessments of need that result in no diagnosis and no need for support afterwards; for a breakdown of same, by CHO, for 2023, 2024 and to date in 2025; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

15781/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of assessments outsourced and the cost of same, by CHO, for 2023, 2024 to date in 2025; and if she will make a statement on the matter..

HSE Response

Assessment of Need

The Assessment of Need process is set out in the Disability Act, 2005. The aim of an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act is to identify whether a person has a disability, the nature and extent of the disability, any health and education needs arising from that disability, as well as what services are required to meet those needs.

The Disability Act outlines the statutory timelines under which Assessments of Need under the Act must be completed. In summary, the assessment report must be completed within 6 months of the date the application was received. While the HSE endeavours to meet its legislative obligations under the Act, it has struggled to achieve compliance with these timeframes. In 2024, 10.4% of assessments were completed within the timeframes set out in the Disability Act 2005 and accompanying Regulations.



The total number of applications 'overdue for completion' at end of 2024, now stands at 14,221 (including 618 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) – which represents an increase of 60% on the end 2023 figure of 8,893. This is largely due to the following:

- A 26% increase in the number of applications for AON received in 2024 – from 8,472 to 10,690.
- A total of 4,162 AONs were completed in 2024. The percentage of these AONs that show 'No Disability' has increased from 15.8% in 2010 to 22% in 2023.
- The judgement in the case of CTM & JA v the HSE March 2022 found that the Preliminary Team Assessment (PTA) approach described in the HSE's SOP for Assessment of Need did not meet the requirements of the Disability Act. The HSE is now required to deliver diagnostic assessments where necessary and appropriate as part of the AON.
- The number of applications for AON under the Act has risen steadily since its implementation in June 2007, largely driven by the High Court ruling in 2009 which confirmed that eligibility for AON applies to persons born on or after 1st June 2002.
- The non-commencement of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004). The number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. **At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while throughout 2024, this figure averaged 67%.**
- The education system drives a significant proportion of AON demand. It is noted that children may be recommended for an AON for reasons other than educational supports, as concerns about need for therapeutic interventions may be identified by school staff. The only statutory right to an AON process is under the Disability Act 2005. A disability diagnosis may be required to access certain educational supports and there is a need for a better understanding for families around the nature of an assessment required for educational purposes, specifically where the assessment is not required to be a statutory AON under the Disability Act 2005.

Disability

The Disability Act defines disability as: "disability", in relation to a person, means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment;

For the purposes of Part 2 of the Act this substantial restriction is construed as meaning a restriction which:

- Is permanent or likely to be permanent, results in significant difficulty in communication, learning or mobility or in significantly disordered cognitive processes and
- Gives rise to the need for services to be provided continually to the person, or if the person is a child, to the need for services to be provided early in life to ameliorate the disability.

So in this context, the definition of 'disability' in the Act is not linked to a diagnosis or a named condition, and not everyone who presents with difficulties would fit the terms of this definition.

The Assessment Officer is appointed by the HSE, and coordinates and arranges Assessments of Need as required under Part 2 of the Disability Act (2005). Assessment Officers are experienced health care personnel who are obliged to perform their duties within the AON legislation (Disability Act); the HSE Assessment of Need Standard Operating Procedure; and the Interim Health Information Quality Authority standards for the Assessment of Need.

As part of the process, the Assessment Officer will conduct a desktop examination of the application to include evidence of disability. If the Assessment Officer is satisfied that an applicant does not meet the definition of disability under the Act, the assessment report is issued including the determination that, according to the evidence available, they do not meet the criteria to be defined as having a disability. The applicant will be advised on how to access services to meet their needs.

If during the desktop analysis the Assessment Officer is uncertain regarding the existence of a disability, the applicant will be referred for a clinical assessment under the Act.



The table below provides summary details of the number of AONs completed each year with the percentage of those that indicated 'No Disability' in accordance with the Disability Act, 2005.

Table 1

	No	Yes	Total	% of No
Total 2024	1261	2901	4162	30.30%
Total 2023	849	2356	3205	26.49%
Total 2022	1013	2058	3071	33.00%

With regard to request for 2025 data, Assessment of Need under the Disability Act 2005 reports are generated quarterly, one month in arrears. Information pertaining to Quarter 1 2005 (January, February, March 2025) will not be available until April/May 2025.

With regard to breakdown per CHO in 2023 and 2024 please see tables 2 and 3 below.

Table 2

2023: Assessment reports completed and indicating No Disability or Disability

CHO	No Disability	Disability	Total for 2023
AREA 1	24	298	322
AREA 2	16	90	106
AREA 3	18	34	52
AREA 4	214	541	755
AREA 5	91	44	135
AREA 6	66	255	321
AREA 7	95	383	478
AREA 8	204	455	659
AREA 9	121	256	377
Total	849	2,356	3,205

Table 3

2024: Assessment reports completed and indicating No Disability or Disability

CHO	No Disability	Disability	Total for 2024
AREA 1	30	181	211
AREA 2	28	143	171
AREA 3	17	40	57
AREA 4	195	780	975
AREA 5	267	189	456
AREA 6	103	332	435



AREA 7	39	212	251
AREA 8	160	391	551
AREA 9	422	633	1,055
Total	1261	2901	4162

Outsourced Assessment of Need

With regard to the number of assessments outsourced and the cost of same, by CHO, for 2023, 2024 to date in 2025, it is not possible to give this data.

Reports are generated from the Assessment Officer System Database which does not distinguish between Assessments of Need which were outsourced or which were completed by the HSE CDNTs.

In addition, information regarding Quarter 1 2025 will not be available until April/May 2025.

Please see Table 4 below which gives data on the numbers of Applications received and completed per year since 2022. The numbers overdue at the end of each year is also given

As stated, please note that this information is extracted from the Assessment Officer System Database which does not distinguish between Assessments of Need which were outsourced or which were completed by the HSE CDNTs.

Table 4

Year	Number of Applications for AON received	Number of AONs completed	Number of AONs 'overdue for completion'
2022	6,755	3,071	4,613
2023	8,472	3,205	8,893
2024	10,690	4,162	14,221

Actions to address AON waiting lists

The HSE's National Clinical Programme for People with Disability (NCPPD) led the process of developing a revised AON Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) incorporating guidance on completion of clinical assessment to replace the element of the SOP which was found to be non-compliant with the Disability Act (2005) – the Preliminary Team Assessment. In developing this, the HSE included a wide range of stakeholders, including families, providers, staff and representative bodies. The revised AON Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was launched in July 2023.

Additional funding

Approximately €10.5m was spent in 2023 to address waiting lists for clinical assessments identified through the Assessment of Need process and in 2024, an additional €5m in one off funding has been allocated. This funding is being utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector. The HSE at local level is also using time related savings to source AON assessments privately for children in the order as registered on the AOS (AON information management system) in line with the date of receipt of a completed AON application.

Targeted Initiative focussed on long waiting families

This waiting list initiative has targeted those families waiting longest for AONs, with the HSE reimbursing clinicians directly through the procurement of capacity from approved private providers. This provides a more equitable and fair approach rather than reimbursement of parents directly. This initiative was progressed through the existing framework of providers procured by each CHO Area and also sought to expand the list with any new private provision.

Information received from the CHO Areas indicates that under this targeted initiative, 2,479 AONs have been commissioned from private providers/assessors from June to December, 2024 at a cost of €8,229,919. This suggests that the average cost per AON is €3,320.



	Number of AONs	Cost	Average Cost per AON
June	379	€1,245,455	€3,300
July	342	€1,155,703	€3,379
August	371	€1,173,031	€3,162
September	318	€1,080,993	€3,399
October	344	€1,174,933	€3,416
November	365	€1,155,168	€3,165
December	360	€1,244,636	€3,457
Total to date	2,479	€8,229,919	€3,320

However, despite this increased activity in relation to AON, the number of people overdue an Assessment of Need is growing as demand outstrips system capacity. Current activity for AON indicates that the number of applications 'overdue for completion' stands at 14,221; in addition we estimate that we have a further 2,500 Preliminary Team Assessments requiring a reviewed assessment. This places the backlog at 16,721 AONs.

The increased numbers of applications for Assessment of Need, which is a legal entitlement under the Disability Act 2005, is a reflection of the increase in population and of families exploring all options for accessing services for their child.

However, an AON is not required to access Primary Care, Children's Disability Services or Mental Health Services providing services including assessment, goals setting, intervention and follow up services. This direct access ensures more efficient and timely access for many families.

The situation in relation to AON is not the same in every area. The numbers of applications in some areas have historically been significantly lower than other areas. This reflects a service model used in those areas to engage with families as soon as practicable and support them to access services without them having to resort to the Assessment of Need legal route.

This will be explored by the HSE in the context of the Roadmap for Service Improvement actions relating to Services Access and Improvement, with the objective to spread this good practice across all teams nationally, and rebalancing the demand for AON with CDNT Service Provision, including workshops with families and with staff on how this can be achieved.

Yours Sincerely,

Bernard O'Regan
Assistant National Director
Access and Integration,
Disability Services

