

Head of Service for Older Persons
HSE South West - Health Service Executive
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Ceann na Seirbhíse do Dhaoine Scothaosta
FSS Iardheiscirt - Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
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15th April 2025

Deputy John Paul O'Shea, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

PQ ref 15821/25:

"To ask the Minister for Health the number of patients approved for home support in Cork and waiting for the care to commence; the HSE's plan on recruitment of home support workers; the way the HSE and agencies providing the care are being allocated; if this is completed on the date home support is awarded or on location and availability of carers; and if she will make a statement on the matter".

Dear Deputy O'Shea,

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.

The HSE South West Home Support department is the largest provider of home care in Ireland and even with the large number of Health Care Assistant staff that we have, we constantly require more staff because of the ever-increasing demand for our service. HSE South West's geographical area encompasses Kerry and Cork, covering approximately 16,390 square kilometres and serving a population of more than 700,000 people.

Well documented recruitment and retention challenges mean that we are often unfortunately forced to maintain a waiting list for our service requests in some areas, with rural locations often facing particular pressures. The ageing population has impacted our workforce with HCA (Home Support) staff retirements or resignations. Another challenge which we have faced is competing with the private and voluntary sectors to access the same skilled workforce. Since the COVID pandemic, and with Ireland currently at full employment with unemployment rates dipping to their lowest levels since records began, there also appears to be a shift away from caring roles, such as the HCA (Home Support) role, towards other employment sectors.

This is not a funding issue, it is a workforce availability issue. Capacity is and has been an on-going issue within the home support service, for both the HSE and for our approved private providers, for some time. Nationally, budget spend on home support has increased year on year. To have the budget but to be short of carers is frustrating for families and for this organisation.

There are currently **497** clients across Cork city and county waiting for a new home support service to commence, while **322** existing clients are awaiting additional hours.

In order to meet the growing demand for home support and enhance our capacity to deliver same, HSE South West continues strident recruitment efforts in the Cork region in the face of an often challenging employment environment. When recruiting Health Care Assistants, higher density urban areas have access to a wider pool of prospective staff. Delivery of home support is also easier to roster in urban areas when travel times are shorter between clients and can be assisted by public transport. Private providers, who assist the HSE in delivering home support, are also more plentiful in urban locations. Consequently, service delivery is often more clustered in areas with higher population densities.

Initiatives underway in the HSE South West region to counter capacity issues in the home support sector include the appointment of two dedicated recruitment coordinators for Health Care Assistants (Home Support) with campaigns running throughout the year. The most recent recruitment campaign for Health Care Assistants (Home Support) staff was undertaken in January which, following screening and interview, identified 86 potential candidates for Cork and Kerry positions. Pending completion of recruitment checks, the outcome of this campaign will be utilised to address requirements in the Home Support Service across the region.

With regard to allocation of service, the HSE's Home Support Service is a demand led service and currently an individual assessment is undertaken in the Community by the Public Health Nursing Service to determine the individual's care requirements. In the Acute Sector, the Discharge Co-Ordinators forward referrals to the Liaison Community Support Team who review the clients for service and request the necessary service in the home. Acute Hospital Service requests are prioritised over all other referrals except for Palliative care requests in the Community.

All referrals for home support are allocated a Priority Rating based on the client's assessed need, and it is on this basis that service is awarded in chronological order. Where a number of applicants have equal priority status, chronological order will apply to determine which of that group of applicants is to be offered the next available support/resource. However, as noted, this is dependent on carer availability in the area, both within the HSE's own staffing complement and that of our private providers.

Waiting lists are constantly being validated to ensure that they are correct and up to date. Health Care Assistants report observed changes in a client's condition and an up to date review may then be requested from the client's Public Health Nurse.

When a request for home support is received, the HSE's priority is to identify availability to deliver that support. Capacity is sought both within our own home support service and with our approved private providers. If the HSE's home support service does not have available home support staff, then the request is sent out to the private providers and if any of those providers has capacity the service will be delivered by them. The request will always be sent to private providers if we do not have available staff to allocate the service. However, increasingly, our private providers are experiencing similar recruitment and retention issues to ourselves, resulting in some applications being waitlisted until availability arises within either sector (HSE or private).

HSE South West is acutely aware that there are capacity issues across both direct and indirect provision of Home Support throughout the region. We will continue to work in tandem with senior management and our Department of Health colleagues to identify strategies to reduce our waiting lists. Our population is growing and it is also ageing and this means that demand for home support services is projected to increase substantially. Improving access to home support in the Cork area and the wider region is a service priority for HSE South West and, to this end, we will consider and utilise all available avenues to fulfil our service requirements.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Daly
Head of Service for Older Persons

