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15th April, 2025

Mr. Liam Quaide., T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 16837/25

"To ask the Minister for Health the psychology waiting-list numbers and exact wait-times, in months and years, for children and adolescents in each integrated health area of the South West Regional Health Area primary care services, in tabular form, to also include numbers of years waiting for young people waiting more than twelve months; and as part of this data, the longest wait-time in years and months, as of March 1st 2025."

Dear Deputy Quaide,

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 table below outlines the numbers waiting as at end of March 2025

| Waiting Time | North Cork | North Lee | South Lee | West Cork | Kerry |
|-----------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-------|
| 0-12 weeks | 80 | 95 | 126 | 43 | 68 |
| > 12 weeks ≤ 26 weeks | 90 | 155 | 176 | 37 | 65 |
| > 26 weeks ≤ 39 weeks | 83 | 162 | 156 | 39 | 122 |
| > 39 weeks ≤ 52 weeks | 88 | 172 | 178 | 54 | 121 |
| > 52 weeks | 446 | 1375 | 1539 | 315 | 589 |
| > 1 year - 2 years | 245 | 642 | 614 | 170 | 273 |
| > 2 years - 3 years | 178 | 403 | 501 | 110 | 201 |
| > 3 years - 4 years | 25 | 339 | 344 | 35 | 115 |
| > 4 years | 0 | 82 | 80 | 0 | 0 |

Having considered the psychology risks for the region, HSE South West has advertised a Director of Psychology to provide adequate governance overall for psychology services in the region. This is to ensure that limited resources can be reviewed and reconfigured based on population needs. Priority will need to be given to critical services such as primary care to help reduce waiting times and bringing the timelines for children awaiting psychological supports within the Sláintecare targets.

Given the backlog and cumulative increase in the rate of referral to Primary Care Services, a significant increase in staffing is required to be in a position to meet these targets. Where psychologists are not in place, a skill mix will be considered which may include professionally trained staff offering a level of therapeutic support to children and families to meet children's needs. Whilst awaiting the Director of Psychology recruitment, senior management locally are presently proactively working with the Psychology Managers in Primary Care and Mental Health Services in the region to optimise access to psychological services as far as possible.

The aim of this is to implement a transformative model which will not only address the timelines associated with psychology services, but also identify alternative suitable pathways which can be offered to parents/guardians and children as more timely measures to address some presenting needs whilst they await expert clinical supports, treatment and care.

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Whilst awaiting the Director of Psychology recruitment, senior management locally are presently proactively working with Psychology Managers in Primary Care and Mental Health Services in the region to optimise access to psychological services as far as possible.

The aim of which is implement a transformative model which will not only address the timelines associated with psychology services, but also identify alternative suitable pathways which can be offered to parents/guardians and children as more timely measures to address some presenting needs whilst they await expert clinical supports, treatment and care. The initial step was to use existing panels to fill all vacant posts as far as possible. This has been complete as of 1st February 2024.

A project plan is in development to scope additional input options. The following are key priorities:

Enhancing access to Psychologists in the region:

- Local interviews will take place in April 2025 to target 7 graduates from the UCC Doctoral programme mapping these graduates to critical vacancies in staff grade posts across CAMHS and Primary Care from September 2025. All contracts will be permanent appointments.
- Any C.V. received locally will be processed and local interviews held to appoint to critical priority posts.
- Comprehensive review of staffing grades by area to ensure effective governance of more junior staff. This is critical to both attract and retain psychologists).
- Review of current training partnerships in the region. At present HSE fund 11 training places for clinical psychologists in UCC and 2 for Educational Psychology in Mary Immaculate College. Subject to enhance senior staffing, the number of training places could be enhanced with suppression of unable to fill posts.
- National Recruitment efforts will continue with new staff and senior campaign due to be held in July and December 2025 respectively.
- Explore the development of a Regional Transfer Policy to allow grade-to-grade movement within the region.
- Review of staffing grades by area to be conducted to ensure effective governance of more junior staff to be completed. This is critical to both attract and retain psychologists.
- Working with procurement to seek international providers that can offer online psychological assessments and interventions using telepsychology given difficulties with local recruitment.
- Scoping an international recruitment drive to attract psychologists to the region using existing relocation packages with consideration of enhanced packages subject to local approval
- A comprehensive review will take place of existing care packages and pathways for children and families (including families who presently are accessing ED in crisis). This will lay a foundation and act as a needs assessment for future service development under the Director of Psychology role with the support of senior management and the REO.
- Consultation will take place with other Psychology Managers and services nationally, to review examples of good practice and how to optimise services, in the HSE South West Region.



If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah McAleer
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Cork Kerry Community Healthcare