

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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29th April 2025

Deputy Holly Cairns, T.D.,
Dail Eireann
Dublin 2

PQ ref 19130/25:

“To ask the Minister for Health the number of nursing home beds in County Cork from 2019 to date, by LHO; whether her attention has been drawn to the disproportionate impact such a decline has on older people in rural areas such as west Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy Cairns,

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 provision of residential services has come under increasing pressure in recent years due to a number of factors, including an increase in the number of people who are seeking access to services as a result of general population increase; increasing levels of complexity across the sector due to better and improved health care and the impacts of regulatory standards and national policy on capacity.

In addition, challenges can exist in recruiting staff to some of our more rural community hospital locations. Staff shortages can temporarily occur in our community hospitals as a result of retirements, resignations and various other leave including flexible working time arrangements which are available to our staff. Capacity at some of our community hospitals has been impacted by staffing challenges but we are committed to re-opening any temporarily-closed beds to meet the needs of region, contingent on successful recruitment. On-going recruitment campaigns are being progressed against a backdrop of a limited pool of available candidates, which is reflective of the recruitment challenges being experienced in the health sector.

The below table sets out HSE community hospital/community nursing unit bed capacity in Cork from 2019 to date – data provided includes long term and short stay beds. Community hospital bed numbers were not categorised within LHO areas for all of the years requested and consequently it is not possible to illustrate this data by LHO area for every year.

Cork Community Hospital/Community Nursing Unit Beds - 2019 to 2025 YTD							
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	March 2025
Cork CH/CNUs:	965	873	799	754	740	831	834

2020 and 2021 data reflects the impact of the pandemic on some services where measures had to be taken as required, in line with national guidance, to mitigate the high risk of infection moving in and out of residential services. As the impact of the pandemic eased, rolling temporary closures since 2022 have also impacted bed capacity periodically during the timeframe of the data requested as the Capital Investment Programme continues across many areas in this region to ensure our hospitals were fully compliant with all required standards and particularly SI 293.

These standards include regulatory requirements around an acceptable area of floor space for each resident and an acceptable number of residents for each bedroom. Any temporarily closed beds reopen when refurbishment and reconfiguration works are completed, pending maintenance of adequate staffing levels to deliver optimal care to our residents.

We continuously review our services in line with population health planning and Sláintecare principles to ensure the ongoing development of modern services across the Cork region. However, challenges can exist in recruiting staff to some of our more rural hospital locations. HSE South West has undertaken many recruitment initiatives, at both a national and international level, to fill positions at our community hospitals and maintain or increase capacity. Bed provision at any of our units requires adequate staffing levels and an appropriate skill-mix to be in place to ensure the safety of both our residents and our staff. There may be occasions where beds are not occupied to 100% capacity as a result of recruitment or staffing issues. Any increase in capacity at any of our units also requires registration of additional beds with HIQA.

Looking ahead, the Public Private Partnership development of two Community Nursing Units which are currently underway in Midleton and St Finbarr's Hospital will assist in addressing the increased demand for nursing beds in Cork. The planned opening of the new Unit at St Finbarr's Hospital will provide enhanced dementia- specific capacity for the region and both of these new units will deliver a further 38 additional residential beds into the Cork system.

HSE South West is also working to a plan to restore/increase capacity at our Cork community hospitals following the conclusion of the capital programme. It is anticipated that approximately 100 beds will return to the system on a phased basis over the next 12 to 24 months. The hospitals involved are Kanturk, Macroom, Millstreet, Heather House and Clonakilty.

It should be noted however that the changing needs of residents with regard to their complexity and specific regulatory compliance requirements govern the provision of bed capacity in today's healthcare landscape to ensure delivery in a safe and appropriate manner. The number and skill mix of staff has to be appropriate to meet the needs of residents living in our units so that they continue to receive the highest standard of care.

HSE South West is committed to maximising all available supports for older people in the West Cork area and wider region. As long as the number of people seeking access to residential care continues to increase, we will seek to identify opportunities to enhance bed capacity and availability pending maintenance of safe and adequate staffing levels to deliver optimal care to our residents.

I trust this clarifies the position and if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Daly
Head of Service for Older Persons

