

**Head of Service Primary Care**

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Ms Emer Currie TD,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2

Email: emer.currie@oireachtas.ie

PQ 20544/25 – *“To ask the Minister for Health the number of children currently waiting for speech and language therapy, psychology, and occupational therapy in primary care services in CHO9; the corresponding average waiting times in weeks, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter” - Emer Currie TD*

Dear Deputy Currie,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Speech and Language Therapy (SLT)

Integrated Health Areas Dublin North County and Dublin North City & West Primary Care Speech and Language Team have advised:

No. of children currently waiting for Speech and Language Therapy		
Waiting Initial Assessment:	Waiting Initial Therapy:	Waiting Further Therapy:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0-4 months: 529• 4-8 months: 712• 8-12 months: 580• 12-18 months: 797• 18-24months: 505• 24+ months: 264	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0-4 months: 432• 4-8 months: 434• 8-12 months: 388• 12-18 months: 414• 18-24 months: 355• 24+ months: 220	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 0-4 months: 383• 4-8 months: 453• 8-12 months: 426• 12-18 months: 559• 18-24 months: 499• 24+ months: 278

The following actions are being taken while children are on the SLT waiting list:

- An information talk and resource pack is provided to parents of children under 6 years of age who are waiting for assessment. This provides information on early Speech and Language development and how to support communication development at home.
- An information talk is provided to parents of children who stammer while waiting for assessment.
- The service is developing a drop in advice clinic to support those waiting for Speech & Language therapy and it is hoped it will be up and running by mid-summer 2025.
- At the point of assessment advice, information and sign posting is provided to relevant support services or clinical resources.
- Families are offered appointments with advice clinic for guidance and support while awaiting the assessment/therapy, information leaflet attached.
- SLT Pilot Scheme has commenced in IHA where prioritisation will be given to children under 3 years who are deemed to have the highest need.
- There has been a selective mutism pathway created for children who are unable to speak in certain situations

The following actions are being taken to reduce the SLT waiting list:

- Group therapy is provided when clinically appropriate which facilitates seeing as many children as possible at the same time while meeting their needs.
- The waiting times for parent mediated interventions are managed across the networks. This ensures that waiting times are equalised across networks for these interventions. Where possible these interventions are offered within twelve months of referral.
- The Under 3s pathway is an assessment and intervention pathway. This has significantly reduced waiting times for children under 3.
- The SLT team focus on managing the waiting lists across clinics / networks to ensure they are comparable.
- SLT team review service provision to identify scope for efficiencies and to ensure effective care.
- Constant focus on evidence based service provision and adaptation by supporting staff in continuous professional development.

Psychology

Integrated Health Areas Dublin North County and Dublin North City & West Primary Care Psychology team have advised:

Psychology Waiting List							
Child Wait List	0-12 weeks	12-26 weeks	26-39 weeks	39-52 weeks	52+ weeks	Total	Longest waiter
Total	897	789	531	526	1979	4,720	492 weeks

* These waiting times are due to appropriate transfers from Child Disability Network Teams under the National Access Policy with backdating to original date of referral to Disability services. One child's original date of referral to Disability was over 9 years ago. Longest waiting time for non-transfer cases is approximately (IHA DNC) 3.9yrs / (IHA DNC&W) 3.5yrs.

The demand for Paediatric Primary Care Psychology services in the Integrated Health Areas of Dublin North County and Dublin North City & West has grown 40% since 2019, as a result of increasing need at community level and changes to the threshold to access supports in secondary care and specialised paediatric services.

Primary Care Psychology services streamlined delivery of services during the past years as well as moving to offering hybrid attendance models to improve accessibility to core services.

Psychology Advice Clinics provide immediate support to children and families waiting for the service. There are nine Psychology Advice Clinics each fortnight across the area. Interventions such as parent information workshops are also offered to support children waiting for individual appointments or with non-complex needs. I have attached a flyer for your convenience.

Occupational Therapy

Integrated Health Areas of Dublin North County and Dublin North City & West Primary Care Occupational Therapy team have advised:

Number of Children waiting on Occupational Therapy Appointments						
	0-12 weeks	12-26 weeks	26-39 weeks	39-52 weeks	52+ weeks	Total
Up to four years and 11 months of age	171	205	119	87	315	897
Five to 18 years of age	379	440	267	371	2689	4146

Occupational Therapy Advice Clinics are offered to those children who are on the waiting list. I have attached a leaflet for your convenience. Under the HSE Service Plan for 2025 a new Pay and Numbers Strategy was agreed between Government and the HSE during 2024.

HSE are actively working to address the vacancies within Primary Care recognising the importance of these roles have, in supporting our communities. Waiting lists have lengthen substantially due to a large increase in referrals over the last year with reduced resources. Despite our ongoing recruitment efforts, filling these posts has proven to be challenging due to various factors. We apologise for the inconvenience caused and greatly appreciate your patience and understanding as we work through this.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Kirwan
Acting Head of Service Primary Care
HSE Integrated Health Areas of Dublin North County and
Dublin North City & West