

17th February 2025

Minister Michael Healy Rae. T.D.,
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

PQ ref 2418/25

"To ask the Minister for Health her plans to increase the number of respite beds in the Dingle/Tralee area of County Kerry (details supplied); and if she will make a statement on the matter."

Details Supplied: Minister we currently have two respite beds in Dingle Community Hospital. In the past there was 2 in Tralee Community but now there is none. This is of huge importance to our communities that we can offer more respite beds in the Dingle/Tralee areas. 2 respite beds is simply not enough.

Dear Deputy Healy-Rae,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The provision of residential respite 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 respite 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.

Respite care for older persons is generally a pre-planned short admission of one or two week's duration and dependent on the needs of the carers. Access to a respite bed is dependent on bed availability, and can be arranged by an individual's primary care team/public health nursing service.

There are currently 2 respite beds operational in West Kerry Community Hospital. These beds are allocated from the respite list currently managed by the Public Health Nursing service. Respite bed access is allocated early in the year for the year ahead and there is no issue in reallocating a bed from the waiting list if a cancellation arises. Respite services are available further afield for service users in the area and options can be explored and discussed with the Public Health Nursing service regarding referral.

It is acknowledged that there is significant demand for respite care in the Kerry region and the HSE is planning how to develop and enhance capacity in all units, including Tralee CNU. We are working to a recruitment plan to optimise services and capacity in our Kerry Community Hospitals/Community Nursing Units. It should be noted however that the opening of additional beds at any of our units does require adequate staffing levels to be in place, including an appropriate number and skill-mix of staff, to ensure the safety of both our residents and our staff. Any increase in capacity at any of our units would also require registration of the additional beds with HIQA.

The HSE is committed to maximising all available supports, including respite services, for older people in the Kerry region. As long as the number of people seeking respite bed access continues to increase, we will constantly seek to identify opportunities to enhance respite bed capacity and availability pending maintenance of safe and 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 Kerry region.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Daly
Head of Service for Older Persons

