



Oifig an Stiúrthóir Cúnta Náisiúnta,
Foireann Míchumais Náisiúnta,
An Chéad Urlár - Oifigí 13, 14, 15,
Áras Phlásóg na Rós, Coimpléasc Gnó na hOllscoile,
Páirc Náisiúnta Teicneolaíochta,
Caladh an Treoigh,
Luimneach.

Office of the Assistant National Director,
National Disability Team,
First Floor- Offices 13, 14, 15,
Roselawn House, University Business Complex,
National Technology Park,
Castletroy,
Limerick.

26th February 2025

Deputy Rory Hearne,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: rory.hearne@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Hearne,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

PQ: 6427/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth to report on work being done in respect of early diagnosis interventions and access to services as referenced in the Disability chapter of the Programme for Government.

HSE Response

The Programme for Government 2025 aims to

“Ensure children and their families who need early intervention and therapy input can access that support in a timely way by increasing staffing, training more therapists, and prioritising children’s disability teams to deliver supports and services”

As per the National Service Plan 2025, the HSE is committed to improving the provision of integrated services to children by:

- Establishing a single point of access for all children, in conjunction with child and adolescent mental health services and primary care services
- Increasing access to therapy services through the recruitment of 40 therapy staff, 20 therapy assistants and 15 clinical psychology placements
- Reducing the waiting list for access to Children’s Disability Network Team (CDNT) supports by 10%, by increasing staffing levels in line with the agreed Disability Pay and Numbers Strategy (PNS)
- Fully implementing a minimum of 50% of the actions from the *Roadmap for Service Improvement 2023-2026 Disability Services for Children and Young People* by the end of 2025



The National Access Policy

The National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay ensures that children are directed to the appropriate service based on the complexity of their presenting needs i.e. Primary Care for non-complex functional difficulties and Children's Disability Network Teams for complex functional difficulties.

Children's Disability Services

The transfer of functions of disability services from the Department of Health to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth in March 2023 was undertaken to enable a more direct focus on disability services, this includes a focus on Children's Disability Network Teams.

In line with the Progressing Disability Services model, all 93 CDNTs, aligned to 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) across the country, are in place and are providing services and supports for children aged from birth to 18 years of age.

Each CDNT covers a specific geographical area and holds a waiting list for children with complex needs residing in that area.

The model of service for all CDNTs is family-centred and based on the needs of the child. This includes universal, targeted and specialised supports and interventions, as appropriate to the individual child and family. It is based on the objectives of empowering and supporting parents and others who are with the child on a daily basis to facilitate the child's developmental needs.

The CDNTs are currently providing services and supports for 43,000 children and strategies and supports for urgent cases on the waitlist where staffing resources allow. However, there are significant challenges for CDNTs including:

- Significant staffing vacancies
- Growth in numbers of children with complex needs as a result of their disability.
- Growth in demand for Assessment of Need, diverting further resources away from interventions

Roadmap for Service Improvement 2023 – 2026, Disability Services for Children and Young People

The HSE's Roadmap for Service Improvement 2023 – 2026, Disability Services for Children and Young People is a targeted Service Improvement Programme to achieve a quality, accessible, equitable and timely service for all children with complex needs as a result of a disability and their families.

The Roadmap, has four Working Groups which report into a Service Improvement Programme Board every month which in turn reports to the Roadmap Oversight Group which was chaired by the Minister of State

Working Group 1 **Integrated Children's Services** – has responsibility for the implementation of National Access Policy (NAP) and the Primary Care, Disability, CAMHS Joint Working Protocol (JWP), Equity of Access to Aids and Appliances across all CHOs; and the Review of HSE Tusla Joint Protocol.

Working Group 2: **Service Access and Improvement** – has responsibility for Waitlist Management and Services; Optimising Teams Efficiencies, Effectiveness and Governance; AONs overdue for completion; and the development of a National Capital plan to enable all staff of a CDNT to be co-located.

Working Group 3: **Workforce** – has 21 actions dedicated to Retention of specialised CDNT staff, Recruitment of new graduates and experienced staff for all CDNTs Deployment of Students/Trainees/New Graduates; and Development of Existing Staff.

Working Group 4: **Communication and Engagement** – has responsibility for developing and ensuring the delivery of a rolling Communication Plan for the Roadmap and CDNT service, which is a key priority; review and updating the HSE PDS Website to meet information needs of families, further Staff Engagement and Workshop days and ensuring sustainability of the Family Forums and Family Representative Groups.



In addition, the Cross Sectoral Group on issues for children with disabilities will be resumed in the coming weeks to drive integration and collaboration between education and health services, and supports for special schools for optimal benefit and outcomes for children with disabilities.

Staffing and Recruitment for the CDNTs

There is ongoing recruitment of Therapists to support children with disabilities, along with the recruitment of Health & Social Care Professionals, Nursing and other relevant health care workers to support children with disabilities.

Within Children's Disability Network teams (HSE, Section 38s and Section 39s) the workforce increased by 17% (272 + WTE) in the period 16/10/23 and 16/10/24. Of these 272+ WTE there were 204 additional Health & Social Care Professionals

To build on this growth, intense recruitment efforts are continuing in 2025 to continue to improve hire rates into Therapist roles and Health & Social Care Professional roles, to provide the services that children and families need.

The HSE and its funded agencies are operating in a very competitive global market for healthcare talent. There are significant shortages of qualified healthcare professionals across the globe. Seven of the disciplines working in Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) have been included on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Critical Skills Occupations List and this includes Occupational Therapists.

To address resourcing challenges, the HSE Resourcing Strategy '*Resourcing our Future*' was launched in May 2023 to ensure a sufficient domestic supply of health care staff. The strategy is being implemented to maximise the resourcing and delivery of publicly funded health services for the future. Children's Disability Services benefit from resourcing actions in the HSE Resourcing Strategy including increasing Health & Social Care Professionals training places, delivery of an apprenticeship programme for Social Workers and development of further apprenticeship programmes to support Health and Social Care Therapy delivery.

Health & Social Care Professionals training places in Higher Education Institutes have increased with a growth in clinical placements in Children's Disability Network Teams- this serves to improve recruitment of Health & Social Care Professionals into Children's Disability Network Teams. Tertiary programmes are also being developed for Health & Social Care Professionals to increase the pathways into Disability services.

Within recruitment, there is a particular focus on Irish trained overseas applicants and international recruitment with a relocation package marketed to Irish trained Health & Social Care Professionals who have travelled overseas.

The HSE and funded agencies are focused on identifying barriers to workforce growth and putting in place corrective retention and recruitment initiatives. These initiatives have led to a marked growth in CDNT staffing levels in 2024, particularly in Health & Social Care Professionals roles, including Occupational Therapists.

The HSE optimises multiple applicant engagement opportunities to encourage uptake of CDNT vacancies and wider Disability services including recruitment fairs, outreach to third level colleges and secondary schools, presence at national events and virtual engagements.

To optimise recruitment into our funded agencies, the HSE have facilitated direct access for funded agencies to existing HSE HSCP panels which will shorten the recruitment process for them and will provide direct access to competent and eligible candidates. The HSE have also enabled our funded agencies to advertise their vacant posts through our advertisement channels which provides them with direct access to the substantial candidate pools registered on the HSE's CareerHub portal.

In 2025 the HSE and funded agencies will continue to focus on maximising recruitment potential and engagement within the current applicant market to achieve workforce growth.

These activities form part of an ongoing suite of initiatives to populate vacancies and increase retention on Children's Disability Network Teams, including the key role of Occupational Therapists.

The intensive recruitment efforts in CDNTs are reflected across the growth in Disability Service workforce. Overall with the HSE and Section 38 funded Disability services there are an additional 963+ WTE across all Disability Service provision on the 31/12/23 figures.



This workforce increase across Disabilities serves to improve the services that children with disabilities need.

Yours Sincerely,

Bernard O'Regan
Assistant National Director
Access and Integration,
Disability Services

