



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,

25th February 2025

Deputy David Cullinane,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: david.cullinane@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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: 6973/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth her plans to address staffing deficits in children's disability network teams; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

Childrens Disability Services

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 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.

Workforce

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.

Recruitment of staff is active and ongoing across Disability services, including the CDNTs, throughout the country.

The 2024 National CDNT Staff Census was run on 16/10/2024 and a CDNT Workforce Report will be published in due course.

The returning data outlines a marked increase in the recruitment rate and filling of vacant positions across CDNTs. In the period 16/10/23 to 16/10/24, there was a 17% increase in CDNT staffing levels, with an additional 272+ WTE across the teams, with 204 of the 272 WTE being Health & Social Care Professionals.

The 16/10/24 CDNT Workforce vacancy rate was running at 22% or 529.77 whole time equivalent (wte). Vacant posts are those posts that require recruitment to fill the role. This is a noted improvement on the 2023 vacancy rate.

However, there is significant work required and ongoing to address the high vacancy rate in CDNTs as follows:

- To achieve the 2024 staffing level improvements and to address the 2025 vacancy rate, there is intensive recruitment efforts across the HSE, Section 38s and Section 39s to onboard staff.
- Recruitment efforts are bolstered by optimising access to relevant applicant pools: the opening up of HSE panels, HSE advertising streams and candidate pools (CareerHub 38k+ registered applicant pools) to CDNTs in the Section 38s and Section 39s – this gives a substantial expansive boost in advertising and engagement into targeted applicant pools.
- In addition, to boost recruitment by improving the perception of working in Disabilities and CDNTs, there is sustained outreach and engagement: Multiple engagements to secondary schools, HEIs, international applicants representing wider HSE, Section 38s and Section 39s.
- To further support the service provision by Health and Social Care Professionals on the CDNTs, there is ongoing development of additional disciplines to expand skills mix and applicant pools. In 2024, the role of Health & Social Care Assistant (Therapy Assistant) was developed for use by all CDNTs which is viewed as major enabler by CDNT Health and Social Care Professionals.
- These activities form part of an ongoing suite of initiatives to populate vacancies, increase retention and improve the capacity to deliver services in Children's Disability Network Teams.
- With regard to wider Disability services, which would include services for adults and children, capacity is being further boosted by an additional 963+ WTE on the 31/12/23 figures.

The HSE is 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.

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.

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 the above described marked growth in CDNT staffing levels in 2024, particularly in Health & Social Care Professionals roles.

The CDNT vacancy rate remains high and intensive work will continue in 2025 to bolster CDNT services through ensuring there are sufficient team members to deliver the services children and their families need.

Yours Sincerely,

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

