



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,
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17th July 2025

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

PQ: 35344/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the number of service statements issued by each children's disability network team in each area in 2023, 2024 and to date in 2025, in tabular form, and if she will make a statement on the matter.

PQ: 35345/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the number of assessments of need completed by each children's disability network team in each area in 2023, 2024 and to date in 2025, in tabular form.

PQ: 35346/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the number of children on waiting lists for an assessment of need, by area, in 2023, 2024 and to date in 2025, in tabular form; the number overdue for completion; and the number completed with a service statement.

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

Thank you for your Parliamentary Questions referenced above, which have been forwarded to me for direct reply.

The Assessment of Need process is set out in the Disability Act, 2005. The aim of an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act is to identify whether a person has a disability, the nature and extent of the disability, any health and education needs arising from that disability, as well as what services are required to meet those needs.

The Disability Act outlines the statutory timelines under which Assessments of Need under the Act must be completed. In summary, the assessment report must be completed within 6 months of the date the application was received. While the HSE endeavours to meet its legislative obligations under the Act, it has struggled to achieve compliance with these timeframes. In Q1 2025, 7% of assessments were completed within the timeframes set out in the Disability Act 2005 and accompanying Regulations.

The total number of applications 'overdue for completion' at end of Q1 2025, now stands at 15,296 (including 1,055 applications for which an extended time-frame was negotiated with the parent on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations) – which represents an increase of an 8% on the end 2024 figure of 14,221. This is largely due to the following:

- A further 3,131 new applications were received in Q1 2025, a 20% increase on the figure for the same period last year of 2,603.
- 1,412 AONs were completed in Q1 2025, a 65% increase on the same period in 2024 of 849. The percentage of these AONs that show 'No Disability' has increased from 15.8% in 2010 to 26% in Q1 2025.



- The judgement in the case of CTM & JA v the HSE March 2022 found that the Preliminary Team Assessment (PTA) approach described in the HSE's SOP for Assessment of Need did not meet the requirements of the Disability Act. The HSE is now required to deliver diagnostic assessments where necessary and appropriate as part of the AON.
- The number of applications for AON under the Act has risen steadily since its implementation in June 2007, largely driven by the High Court ruling in 2009 which confirmed that eligibility for AON applies to persons born on or after 1st June 2002.
- The non-commencement of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004). The number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. **At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while at end Q1 2025, this figure has increased to 70%.**
- The education system drives a significant proportion of AON demand. It is noted that children may be recommended for an AON for reasons other than educational supports, as concerns about need for therapeutic interventions may be identified by school staff. The only statutory right to an AON process is under the Disability Act 2005. A disability diagnosis may be required to access certain educational supports and there is a need for a better understanding for families around the nature of an assessment required for educational purposes, specifically where the assessment is not required to be a statutory AON under the Disability Act 2005.

2025

Please see the table below which gives the number of AON applications overdue at the end of Q1 2025 as extracted from the AOS (AON information management system). This is the most recent data available.

Table 1: Applications overdue for completion end of Quarter 1 2025

RHA		Total Overdue ¹	Overdue/ Exceptional Circumstances ²	Overdue/ No Exceptional Circumstances
HSE Dublin & North East		4855	593	4262
HSE Dublin & Midlands		5694	52	5642
HSE Dublin & South East		2257	327	1930
HSE South West		1265	13	1252
HSE Mid West		434	1	433
HSE West & North West		791	69	722
Total		15296	1055	14241

Please see the Table below which gives the number of Assessment Reports Completed at end of Q1 2025

Table 2: Assessment Reports Completed at end of Q1 2025

RHA		No Disability	Disability	Total for Qtr.	Within Timeline	% Within Timeline
HSE Dublin & North East		131	385	516	11	2%
HSE Dublin & Midlands		56	131	187	17	9%
HSE Dublin & South East		111	227	338	24	7%
HSE South West		30	185	215	11	5%
HSE Mid West		20	31	51	1	2%
HSE West & North West		20	75	95	33	35%
Total		368	1034	1402	97	7%



Please see table 3 below. Service Statements completed at end of Quarter 1 2025

In 2025, Quarter 1 data indicates that there were 1,412 Assessment of Need reports completed in this period. There were 487 Service Statements issued to the applicant during this quarter; 45% were dispatched within the 1 month timeline. These numbers do not include reviewed or modified service statements. Please see Table 3 below.

Table 3 Service Statements Completed

RHA	LHO	Total	Within Timeline	% within timeline
HSE Dublin & North East		136	37	27%
HSE Dublin & Midlands		14	7	50%
HSE Dublin & South East		188	126	67%
HSE South West		90	4	4%
HSE Mid West		21	14	67%
HSE West & North West		38	29	76%
Total		487	217	45%

With regard to 2023 and 2024 information, please see Table 4 to Table 9 in Appendix 1.

Actions to address AON waiting lists

The HSE's National Clinical Programme for People with Disability (NCPDP) led the process of developing a revised AON Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) incorporating guidance on completion of clinical assessment to replace the element of the SOP which was found to be non-compliant with the Disability Act (2005) – the Preliminary Team Assessment. In developing this, the HSE included a wide range of stakeholders, including families, providers, staff and representative bodies. The revised AON Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was launched in July 2023.

Additional funding

In Q1, 2025, 1,412 AONs were completed, which is a 65% increase on the same period in 2023 of 849. This increase is due in part to the funding of €4.5m (in addition to €5m in non-core funding) that has been allocated in Budget 2025 to assist with sustainably addressing the Assessment of Need (AON) backlog. This additional funding is building on the €6.89 million allocated by the Government in 2024 for a targeted waiting list initiative that commenced end of May 2024.

Information received from the Health Regions indicates that under this targeted initiative, 3,636 AONs have been commissioned from private providers/assessors from June 2024 to March, 2025

However, despite this increased activity in relation to AON, the number of people overdue an Assessment of Need is growing as demand outstrips system capacity. In this regard, we anticipate that by the end of 2025, there could be as many as 24,796 AONs due for completion: AONs overdue at end of Q1 2025 (15,296); new AONs received in 2025 (8,000); and 1,500 Preliminary Team Assessments carried out under the previous Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), an approach found by the High Court not to have met the requirements of the Disability Act.

The increased numbers of applications for Assessment of Need, which is a legal entitlement under the Disability Act 2005, is a reflection of the increase in population and of families exploring all options for accessing services for their child.

However, an AON is not required to access Primary Care, Children's Disability Services or Mental Health Services providing services including assessment, goals setting, intervention and follow up services. This direct access ensures more efficient and timely access for many families. The situation in relation to AON is not the same in every area. The numbers of applications in some areas have historically been significantly lower than other areas. This reflects a



service model used in those areas to engage with families as soon as practicable and support them to access services without them having to resort to the Assessment of Need legal route.

This will be explored by the HSE in the context of the Roadmap for Service Improvement actions relating to Services Access and Improvement, with the objective to spread this good practice across all teams nationally, and rebalancing the demand for AON with CDNT Service Provision, including workshops with families and with staff on how this can be achieved.

The Programme for Government includes a commitment to review the Disability Act and we await further clarification on the timing and scope of this. In the meantime, we are also focusing on a communication campaign to ensure families know that an AON is not a requirement to access services. In addition, the following steps are being taken to improve access to timely AONs:

- We are reviewing the current Standard Operating Procedure to develop a more tiered approach to AON.
- We are engaging with Dept. of Education to remove school principals' requirement that an AON report is needed to determine educational need.
- Additional resource has been allocated in 2025 to increase the numbers of Assessment Officers and Liaison Officers. These will be prioritised to those areas, primarily in Dublin and Cork, with the longest waiting lists for AON.
- We are increasing the numbers of Assessment Officers and Liaison Officers. These will be prioritised to those areas, primarily in Dublin and Cork, with the longest waiting lists for AON.
- 5 AON Administrative Hubs and 3 AON Assessment Hubs have been established, which will inform the core of a service improvement plan that will also include increased learning and support for staff involved in AON. Improvements will include:-
 - Single point of contact for families and other services, allowing better awareness and appropriate signposting/diversion
 - Increases in efficiency and speed of assessment
 - Ability to review all referrals in the one process, and ensure clear chronological order for starting process in line with HSE SOP
 - Better communication amongst AO, and other staff, including updates in practice due to legal cases
 - Better sharing of knowledge and experience, and support to AO – leading to more standardised and consistent approaches
 - Better tracking of referrals
 - More efficient and better data collection
 - Clinicians working directly with Assessment Officers and all clinical staff delivering AON to promote education, training, enhanced governance, clinical supervision and collective understanding across AON.
- We are introducing a Single Point of Referral Access for all Children's Primary Care, Disability and CAMH Services, in 2025, in line with existing models of good practice. AON will be included in this leading to better processes and communication around AON
- We will continue to procure of capacity from approved private providers.
- We will continue the roll out of initiatives to address staff vacancy rates in Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs), building a pipeline of supply of health and social care professions.



Since taking office, Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Norma Foley, and Minister of State for Disability, Hildegard Naughton, have held meetings with disability stakeholders from the HSE and Lead Agencies to better understand the challenges that face children's disability services across the country, including the current situation regarding Assessments of Need.

Yours Sincerely,

Tom McGuirk,
General Manager, Disability Services, Access & Integration



Appendix 1

2023

Table 4. Applications overdue for completion on 31st December 2023

CHO	Overdue	<1 month	1 - 3 Months	>3 Months
AREA 1	389	15	64	310
AREA 2	182	40	42	100
AREA 3	369	17	23	329
AREA 4	780	89	103	588
AREA 5	398	5	28	365
AREA 6	706	104	159	443
AREA 7	2,843	183	317	2,343
AREA 8	750	133	182	435
AREA 9	2,476	170	256	2,050
Total	8,893	756	1,174	6,963

Table 5 Number of Assessment Reports Completed 2023

CHO	No Disability	Disability	Total for 2023	Within Timeline	% Within Timeline
AREA 1	24	298	322	31	10%
AREA 2	16	90	106	18	17%
AREA 3	18	34	52	2	4%
AREA 4	214	541	755	117	15%
AREA 5	91	44	135	41	30%
AREA 6	66	255	321	17	5%
AREA 7	95	383	478	2	0.4%
AREA 8	204	455	659	181	27%
AREA 9	121	256	377	9	2%
Total	849	2,356	3,205	418	13%



Table 6. Service Statements Completed 2023

CHO	Total	Within Timeline	% within timeline
AREA 1	236	93	39%
AREA 2	7	4	57%
AREA 3	34	25	74%
AREA 4	477	19	4%
AREA 5	16	8	50%
AREA 6	225	134	60%
AREA 7	197	115	58%
AREA 8	572	193	34%
AREA 9	104	36	35%
Total	1,868	627	34%

2024

Table 7. Applications overdue for completion on 31st December 2024

CHO	Overdue	<1 month	1 - 3 Months	>3 Months
AREA 1	594	35	58	501
AREA 2	370	45	83	242
AREA 3	442	40	26	376
AREA 4	1,163	150	267	746
AREA 5	573	35	63	475
AREA 6	1,513	124	280	1,109
AREA 7	4,635	210	256	4,169
AREA 8	1,738	150	304	1,284
AREA 9	3,193	135	267	2,791
Total	14,221	924	1,604	11,693



Table 8. Number of Assessment Reports Completed 2024

CHO	No Disability	Disability	Total for 2024	Within Timeline	% Within Timeline
AREA 1	30	181	211	68	32%
AREA 2	28	143	171	6	4%
AREA 3	17	40	57	8	14%
AREA 4	195	780	975	109	11%
AREA 5	267	189	456	134	29%
AREA 6	103	332	435	13	3%
AREA 7	39	212	251	0	0%
AREA 8	160	391	551	61	11%
AREA 9	422	633	1,055	33	3%
Total	1,261	2,901	4,162	432	10%

Table 9. Service Statements Completed 2024

CHO	Total	Within Timeline	% within timeline
AREA 1	177	104	59%
AREA 2	22	5	23%
AREA 3	38	23	61%
AREA 4	443	3	1%
AREA 5	143	56	39%
AREA 6	353	266	75%
AREA 7	66	32	48%
AREA 8	182	65	36%
AREA 9	321	75	23%
Total	1,745	629	36%