



Oifig Náisiúnta Sláinte Béal,
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Deputy John Lahart
Dáil Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

PQ 35931/25: To ask the Minister for Health to outline the measures being taken to address the backlog in HSE dental check-ups for primary school children; whether a catch-up programme is planned for children who missed their second-class dental assessments due to Covid-19 related delays; if he will clarify whether any reimbursement or tax relief is available to families who have had to pay for private dental care in the absence of public provision; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Lahart,

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

The Health Service Executive delivers dental services to children under the age of 16, provided through 17 Dental Areas, all of which continue to provide routine services. The school dental service provides examination and any necessary preventive and restorative treatment noted at examination. The programme commences with 6th class and follows with 2nd and 4th class. The ability to offer services to each of the school years has been limited due to availability of dental staff. As part of targeting of resources, each dental service maintains a commitment to urgent/emergency treatment for the relief of pain, infection, and the sequelae of trauma.

The ability to be able to provide services including addressing backlogs, is resource dependent. After COVID-19, a limited amount of additional funding was made available, which did not include the ability to increase staffing. Several areas undertook initiatives to utilise this money. The funding was not allocated to address long term increases in staffing.

The Department of Health has provided significant funding of €24.2m over the past number of years to oral health initiatives. The HSE have frameworks in place which are administered through the National Oral Health Office, providing additional capacity through private providers. These initiatives have enabled access to treatment for orthodontics and orthognathic patients on HSE dental and orthodontic waiting lists.

The implementation of Pay and Numbers strategy created WTE limits within the 6 Health Regions based on end of year 2023. As a result, previous vacancies were no longer available for recruitment, the impact of which has been varied across several different Dental and Orthodontic service areas. Governance structure implementation within the new Regions has required the development of local recruitment processes to ensure Regions remain within their WTE ceilings.

The HSE undertook an additional review of vacancies which arose in 2024 for prioritised recruitment. The Chief Officer and REOs have identified 34.7 WTE vacancies in 2024 across oral health services nationally, to be prioritized for filling.

Under the NSP 2025, an additional 15 WTE were provided to increase capacity targeted at reducing waiting times for the current community dental service for children and those with additional needs. Funding for these posts was provided for 6 months in 2025 and full year in 2026 to facilitate recruitment time.

Financial supports for citizens

Financial supports available towards a dental procedure for individuals are across a range of different systems.

The Revenue system enables relief on the cost of health expenses which can be claimed as a family member or dependent. The types of expenses that qualify for relief and how to claim them is available from the Revenue website and depend on the nature of the dental procedure.

There are two structured schemes, The Northern Ireland Planned Healthcare Scheme (NIPHS) and Cross Border Directive Scheme, which are designed to provide funding for patients. Access to these schemes is through the HSE and is initiated by patients. Patients identify their healthcare provider, fund treatment directly and claim refund through these schemes. Refunds are administered through the HSE. Oral Health services have been reimbursed through both schemes.

The HSE's 2025 National Service Plan aims to continue to develop services and implement waiting list initiatives across a range of dental and orthodontic services and maximise activity across these services to manage waiting lists and waiting times. The service plan supports the implementation of the Government's National Oral Health Policy, Smile Agus Sláinte, including the development of comprehensive oral healthcare packages for roll-out to children aged from birth to seven years of age.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but if you require further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Anne O'Neill
Assistant National Director, Oral Health