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Cúraim Sláinte Chorcaí Thuaidh agus
Thoir.

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Ghnó agus Teicneolaíochta, Bóthar na Modh
Feirme, Corcaigh

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29th July 2025

Mr. Thomas Gould., T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 38864/25

“To ask the Minister for Health the number of overnight respite beds for children and adults respectively in Cork in 2019 and 2024 in tabular form.”

Dear Deputy Gould,

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

OLDER PERSONS

Residential (or overnight) 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 can be arranged by an individual's Public Health Nurse/Community Nurse and is dependent on bed availability. The Public Health Nursing service manages the schedule for respite beds and will, where a cancellation arises, offer available beds so that optimal use is made of the available capacity.

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.

Residential respite care for older persons may be provided in the community in HSE residential care settings, by agreement with voluntary organisations or by contracted private facilities. Many of our HSE community hospitals provide what we call short-stay beds as well as long-stay residential care. Categorisation of short stay beds in our community hospitals includes respite care beds, specialist geriatric rehabilitation beds, palliative care beds, transitional care beds and convalescence beds and the people using these beds generally stay for a number of days or weeks.

Short stay beds, including respite beds, can be interchangeable for use in response to particular service needs in residential care units at any given time (i.e. temporary re-designation of a bed from respite to palliative care). The below table sets out short stay bed availability for beds categorised as respite beds in Cork community hospitals/community nursing units in 2019 and 2024, noting that bed numbers and bed categorisation can fluctuate from month to month subject to service needs:

HSE Community Hospital Bed Designation:	2019	2024
Respite Beds	63	46

It should be noted that these figures relate to publicly managed (or HSE) older persons residential units only and do not take into account respite beds sourced through contractual arrangement with voluntary and private providers.



2019 data reflects the relevant public bed status prior to the outbreak of Covid-19 in 2020. From March 2020, due to the COVID pandemic, respite services were temporarily suspended to mitigate the high risk of infection moving in and out of residential services. The HSE worked towards the safe recommencement of respite care during the pandemic in consultation with Public Health and based on national guidance.

It should also be noted that there has been a temporary reduction in total respite bed capacity within publicly managed facilities which is mainly attributable to adherence to regulations under Statutory Instrument 293 which necessitated the reconfiguration of a number of community nursing units. The Capital Investment Programme was stood up to address this issue and ensure SI 293 compliance. These regulations specifically address accommodation requirements, including bedroom size and the provision of sanitary and dining facilities, of designated nursing homes.

Some respite services in our community hospitals may be temporarily affected by rolling short term closures as the Capital Investment Programme continues across many areas in this region to ensure that our hospitals are fully compliant with all required regulations and standards. Respite bed data reflects these temporary closures as refurbishment and reconfiguration works continue in our units. Any temporarily closed beds reopen when works are completed pending maintenance of adequate staffing levels to deliver optimal care to our residents.

DISABILITY SERVICES

The HSE and its funded agencies provide respite care for children and adults with disabilities. Respite can occur in a variety of settings and for various lengths of time, depending on the needs of the individual service user, their family or carer and according to available resources.

HSE South West Disability Services is acutely aware of the demand for respite services for people with disabilities and, on receipt of very welcome funding, has significantly invested in respite services in recent years. HSE South West Disability Services continues to invest in respite services, proactively seek alternative respite models and utilise all available funding to provide respite services for all children and adults who require them. We are working with service providers to create new residential and alternative respite supports for children and adults and welcome any additional funding to continue to invest in these vital services.

HSE South West Disability Services chair a Regional Respite Forum which manage the referrals and respite service provision for the Cork population. There is a forum for respite for adults and a forum for respite for children. The purpose of each Forum is to ensure there is equitable access to respite services consistent with each person's assessed needs and preference. HSE personnel and relevant service providers comprise membership of each Forum.

Children's Respite Services Cork

Residential respite services for children under 18 years of age is delivered by a range of organisations namely; Cope Foundation, Enable Ireland, St. Joseph's Foundation, CoAction and the Brothers of Charity. There are a total of 29 beds.

In 2023, HSE South West Disability Services provided funding to Enable Ireland to increase respite for children in the Lavanagh Centre, Curraheen, Cork. This resulted in an increase in bed nights from 138 bed nights in early 2023 to 552 bed nights per annum from 2024 onwards.



Adult Respite Services Cork

Residential respite services for adults in Cork is delivered by Brothers of Charity, COPE Foundation, St Joseph's Foundation, CoAction, Enable Ireland, RehabCare and Abode. 88 residential respite beds comprising 28 full time places and 60 part time places are provided.

HSE South West Disability Services have worked to improve access to residential (overnight) respite services for adults with disabilities in Cork in recent years. This has resulted in the establishment of a regional respite house for those residing in Cork which provides 5 beds on a full-time basis.

The HSE National Business Intelligence Unit has collected data on overnight respite from 2020 onward and therefore I am unable to provide you with 2019 data.

The following table provides the number of respite overnights delivered to adults and children in Cork in 2020 and in 2024.

Number of overnights accessed by people with a disability (ID/ Autism/ Physical & Sensory Disability) in Cork	
2020 (Full Year)	2024 (Full Year)
7,245	14,184

In addition to residential respite, HSE South West Disability Services provides a range of alternative respite models for children and adults. These include afterschool clubs and in home support for children and outreach supports and holiday breaks for adults. This ensures that respite is provided in the manner which best meets the needs of the child/adult and their families.

HSE South West Disability Services is acutely aware of the demand for respite services and, on receipt of very welcome funding, has significantly invested in respite services in recent years. HSE South West Disability Services continues to invest in respite services, proactively seek alternative respite models and utilise all available funding to provide respite services for all children and adults who require them. HSE South West Disability Services are working with service providers to create new residential and alternative respite supports for children and adults in 2025 and welcomes any additional funding to continue to invest in these vital services.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Sonya Cotter

Integrated Healthcare Area Manager Cork North and East

HSE South West Health Region