

**Deputy Charles Ward TD**  
**Leinster House**  
**Kildare Street,**  
**Dublin 2**

**29<sup>th</sup> August 2025**

**Re: PQ 39652/25**

***To ask the Minister for Health the addiction services currently available in County Donegal for young people and children aged under 18; the number of patients served; the current waiting list for these services; the services they provide; and if she will make a statement on the matter.***

Dear Deputy Ward,

I refer to your recent correspondence in relation to the above received to this office on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2025. Please accept my apologies for the delay on issuing this response to you.

I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position of Donegal Mental Health Service (DMHS).

Addiction Services for Service Users under the age of eighteen in Donegal ranges from supporting young people who are affected by carer/parental substance mis-use (Hidden Harm) to those affected by their own substance use.

Services are divided across four tiers covering the treatment spectrum from mild, moderate to severe. Addiction treatment provision is provided from TIER1 - TIER 4. The HSE deliver at a TIER 3 level (specialist community) and also fund services covering Tier 1, Tier 2 and Tier 4.

It should not be the norm for those under the age of eighteen to attend a specialist community addiction team (TIER 3). The needs of young people are best served and met through services provided across tier 1 and tier 2 (see attached for a breakdown of the Four Tier model) which covers prevention, education and brief Intervention.

- In Sligo/Leitrim HSE Tier 3 provides addiction services covering Sligo, Leitrim, and South Donegal. (Specialist Service)
- Donegal services cover County Donegal to the Laghey line; Sligo covers south of the Laghey line. Resources: [nwdrugtaskforce.ie](http://nwdrugtaskforce.ie) or [HSE.ie](http://HSE.ie).
- There are two dedicated Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNS) in Addiction that covers the under 18 service both in Sligo and Donegal. One is based in Donegal, the other in Sligo. The Donegal worker covers under 18's and the 18- 24 age group.
- Referrals are received via GP's, Families, Schools, Allied Health Professionals and also from many of the tier two services like Jigsaw and Foroige.
- **Donegal referrals received into TIER 3 for under 18's is approximately four referrals per quarter i.e. twelve annually.**
- **There is no waiting list for HSE Tier 3 addiction treatment in Donegal.** All young people under the age of 18 are seen on referral - it would be very rare that a young person would wait more than three days.
- The Tier 3 services are based in Letterkenny however, the CNS also travels to satellite locations around the county depending on need and individual referral.

#### **Regional Family and Counselling Supports**

- The Northwest Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Force offers the services of a Family Addiction Support worker covering South Donegal, and assists families and children affected by someone else's substance misuse. They also run the Strengthening Families Programme which is evidence-based and aims to support coping and resilience within families:  
Resource: [nwdrugtaskforce.ie](http://nwdrugtaskforce.ie)

## Broader Youth Supports (TIER 1 & TIER 2)

While not focused solely on addiction, these services can be supportive for emotional and behavioral needs in young people and may cover mild to moderate substance misuse.

- Donegal Youth Service serves over 11,500 young people each year (aged 3–30) across the county, offering mental, emotional, and social supports through clubs, one-to-one mentoring, and youth projects.
- Foroige - roll out the youth alcohol education & prevention project.
- Jigsaw Donegal, located in Letterkenny, provides early-intervention mental health & wellbeing support for youths aged 15–25, and is available across the county.  
Resources: [Drugs and Alcohol Ireland](#) or [Donegal Youth Service](#).
- Alcohol Forum - SFP programmes and MPACT programs - both evidence and skill based family intervention programmes.
- The HSE Child Psychology Service caters to children and young people (up to 18 years) showing emotional or behavioral difficulties, available at multiple locations including Letterkenny, Dungloe, and Donegal Town.  
Resource: [Donegal Youth Service](#).
- Additional services include **CAMHS teams** in North, South, and Inishowen Donegal for more serious mental health needs.
- HSE Drugs & Alcohol Helpline (1800 459 459) open to all ages including parents or guardians seeking help.  
Resources: [Donegal Youth Service](#) or [HSE.ie](#) or [1drugs.ie](#).
- SAOR - training available widely in Donegal - to equip communities to respond to alcohol & substance misuse

## National & Youth-Focused Residential Options

There are no residential youth treatment centers in Donegal. The only one available in Ireland is in Kilkenny. There is a national referral pathway to access this service. Residential services are the least used for young people and should be a last resort. DMHS send approximately one to three young persons to this facility annually.

### Aiséirí Aislínn (Ballyragget, Co. Kilkenny)

Aiséirí operates a residential addiction treatment centre for adolescents aged 15 to 21 yrs. It offers both a standard rehabilitation programme and, since recently, an onsite detox unit, Lá Nua. Referrals come from across the country via HSE services, GPs or families ([drugs.ie](#), [aiseiri.ie](#)).

In Summary, the mainstay of addiction treatment for young people is at community TIER 1-3 level (lesser attending Tier 3). Schools and clubs provide education and support as do the many youth organisations. If in depth assessment and treatment is needed children are referred to the HSE Community Drug and Alcohol Services for care planning and treatment. Children can be referred on to TIER 4 Residential care as required from here.

I hope this information will be of assistance however should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

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**Paul Cartin**

Acting General Manager  
Mental Health Services CHO1 CDLMS