



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,
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Roselawn House, University Business
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30th July 2025

Deputy Pádraig Rice,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: padraig.rice@oireachtas.ie

PQ: 42641/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the number of children and young persons on waiting lists for an assessment of need, by health region and integrated healthcare area; age category; and time waiting, in tabular form.

PQ: 42625/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the average wait time for assessment of needs referrals, by regional health area and integrated healthcare area, in tabular form.

Dear Deputy Rice,

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 Q2 2025, 12% 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 Q2 2025, now stands at 16,593 (including 1,054 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 12% on the end of Q2 2025 figure of 15,296. This is largely due to the following:

- A further 3,482 new applications were received in Q2, 2025, making a total of 6,613 received to date in 2025 - a 24% increase on the figure for the same period last year of 5,345.
- 1,516 AONs were completed in Q2 2025, a 53% increase on the same period in 2024 of 992. The percentage of these AONs that show 'No Disability' has increased from 15.8% in 2010 to 26% in 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 AON 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. In 2008, the first full year of the implementation of the Disability Act, we received 2,535 applications for Assessment of Need; we could receive as many as 13,000 applications in 2025 (based on 6,613 in first half of the year) representing a five-fold increase.
- 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 Q2, 2025, this figure has increased to 72%.**

Please see the table below which gives the number of AON applications overdue in for Completion on 30th June 2025 as extracted from the AOS (AON information management system). This is the most recent data available. Information is now reported by Regional Healthcare Areas and LHO.

Table 1. AON Applications overdue at end of Quarter 2 2025.

RHA	LHO	Overdue	<1 month	1 - 3 Months	>3 Months
HSE Dublin & North East		5204	211	607	4386
	Cavan/Monaghan	396	21	41	334
	Louth	793	33	103	657
	Meath	817	38	114	665
	North Dublin	1833	60	202	1571
	Dublin North Centre	351	17	48	286
	North West Dublin	1014	42	99	873
HSE Dublin & Midlands		6143	173	501	5469
	Dublin South City	524	21	38	465
	Dublin South West	1602	21	116	1465
	Dublin West	1537	37	99	1401
	Kildare/West Wicklow	1828	49	107	1672
	Laois/Offaly	606	39	114	453
	Longford/Westmeath	46	6	27	13
HSE Dublin & South East		2524	153	353	2018
	Carlow/Kilkenny	160	14	20	126
	Tipperary S.R	85	4	11	70
	Waterford	169	24	24	121
	Wexford	231	15	38	178
	Dublin South East	457	22	53	382
	Dublin South	459	31	66	362
	Wicklow	963	43	141	779
HSE South West		1359	116	238	1005
	Kerry	67	6	9	52
	Cork North	333	17	44	272
	Cork North Lee	620	50	107	463
	Cork South Lee	288	33	66	189
	Cork West	51	10	12	29
HSE Mid West		447	9	42	396
	Clare	68	1	12	55
	Limerick	232	3	20	209
	Tipperary N.R	147	5	10	132
HSE West & North West		916	48	144	724
	Donegal	317	7	27	283
	Sligo/Leitrim	41	12	17	12
	Galway	256	9	39	208
	Mayo	244	14	42	188
	Roscommon	58	6	19	33
Total		16593	710	1885	13998



The average duration of the assessment process per report completed in Quarter 2 2025 was 24.93 months.

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 the first half of 2025, 2,928 AONs have been completed. 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, 4,976 AONs have been commissioned from private providers/assessors from June 2024 to June, 2025 at a cost of €17,598,314.

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 by the end of 2025, there may be as many as 23,903 AONs due for completion: AONs overdue at end of Q2 2025 (16,593); new AONs received in remainder of 2025 (6,000); 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.



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- 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