



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,
Castletroy, Limerick.

8th August 2025

Deputy Barry Heneghan,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: barry.heneghan@oireachtas.ie

PQ: 44194/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality if she will outline any new funding or staffing measures being put in place to clear the assessment of need backlog, particularly in high-pressure areas such as CHO9; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

PQ: 44195/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the timeframe within which she expects the current backlog in disability assessments and supports for children to be resolved; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Heneghan,

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%.**

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.

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