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Deputy Kenny,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

19/05/2025

PQ 30563/25: To ask the Minister for Health the current status of homebirth service provision, including any timelines or milestones the HSE in the northwest has set for reintroducing these services; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Kenny,

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Home birth services may be provided by the HSE by two primary means – firstly by these services being provided by Self-Employed Community Midwives (SECMs) operating under a service agreement with the HSE and overseen by the relevant maternity service or alternatively in a small number of areas by midwifery teams employed directly by the respective maternity service.

There is currently no HSE homebirth service in the northwest of Ireland. The primary reason for this is that there are currently no active SECMS in the region, with the last SECMS operating in the region nearly 15 years ago.

Currently the HSE West Northwest maternity network is exploring ways to address the absence of this service and to improve the range of services in the region for normal risk pregnant women and their infants.

Initiatives underway in this regard include:

- Implementing a supported care antenatal pathway in each of the five HSE 5 maternity units in the region;
- Launching an enhanced postnatal pathway (Postnatal Hub) in Sligo University Hospital and Portlaoine University Hospital in 2022.
- Opening a Home from Home rooms with pool facilities in Sligo University Hospital, Galway University Hospital and Portlaoine University Hospital. Plans are underway to develop similar facilities in Mayo University hospital and Letterkenny University Hospital in the next 12 months.
- Revising existing processes with a view to capturing the number of women who express an interest in the option of a home birth service. This now includes formal requests that are received to the Designated Midwifery officer in the region, as well as more informal enquiries./ requests to the antenatal clinics across the region.
- In June 2025 an expression of interest campaign was advertised to Midwives working in the region who are interested in gaining experience in the provision of a home birth service. This campaign is ongoing.

- Exploring funding opportunities for to progress alternative models of home birth service i.e. direct provision of homebirth services by midwifery teams employed directly by the respective maternity services.

In summary the HSE acknowledges and fully supports the importance of providing pregnant women with a range of choices as described in the National Maternity Strategy including the option of home birth where clinically safe to do so.

However, the practical implementation of a home birth service in the Northwest presents does present challenges. Notwithstanding these, the HSE is and will remain committed to the development of services in the region which are patient centred and offer meaningful choice to women.

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Mary-Jo Biggs, General Manager, National Women and Infants Health Programme