



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.

4th July 2025

Deputy Paul McAuliffe,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: paul.mcauliffe@oireachtas.ie

PQ: 31990/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the number of children as of 1 June 2025 or latest date available, that were awaiting a first assessment from the HSE under the Disability Act 2005, for each local health office area, in tabular form.

Dear Deputy McAuliffe,

Thank you for your Parliamentary Question referenced above, which has been forwarded to me for direct reply.

Assessment of Need under the Disability Act 2005-

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. It is important that service users are aware that 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 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. The HSE endeavours to meet the legislative obligations under the Act, however compliance with timeframes continues to prove difficult due to increased demand, case management complexity and access to resources. In Q1 2025, 7% 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 Q1 2025, now stands at 15,296 (including 1,055 applications for which an extended timeframe 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 8% on the end 2024 figure of 14,221. This is largely due to the following:

- A further 3,131 new applications were received in Q1 2025, a 20% increase on the figure for the same period last year of 2,603.
- 1,412 AONs were completed in Q1 2025, a 65% increase on the same period in 2024 of 849. The percentage of these AONs that show 'No Disability' has increased from 15.8% in 2010 to 26% in Q1 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 Assessment of Need 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.

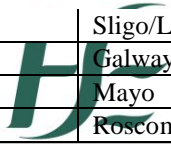


- The non-commencement of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004). The number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while at end Q1 2025, this figure has increased to 70%.
- The education system drives a significant proportion of AON demand. It is noted that children may be recommended for an AON for reasons other than educational supports, as concerns about need for therapeutic interventions may be identified by school staff. The only statutory right to an AON process is under the Disability Act 2005. A disability diagnosis may be required to access certain educational supports and there is a need for a better understanding for families around the nature of an assessment required for educational purposes, specifically where the assessment is not required to be a statutory AON under the Disability Act 2005.

Please see the table below which gives the number of AON applications overdue at the end of Q1 2025 as extracted from the AOS (AON information management system). This is the most recent data available.

Table 1: Applications overdue for completion end of Quarter 1 2025

RHA	LHO	Total Overdue ¹	Overdue/ Exceptional Circumstances ²	Overdue/ No Exceptional Circumstances
HSE Dublin & North East		4855	593	4262
	Cavan/Monaghan	337	2	335
	Louth	711	43	668
	Meath	673	51	622
	North Dublin	1809	279	1530
	Dublin North Centre	330	45	285
	North West Dublin	995	173	822
HSE Dublin & Midlands		5694	52	5642
	Dublin South City	484	4	480
	Dublin South West	1509	4	1505
	Dublin West	1425	0	1425
	Kildare/West Wicklow	1692	1	1691
	Laois/Offaly	526	43	483
	Longford/Westmeath	58	0	58
HSE Dublin & South East		2257	327	1930
	Carlow/Kilkenny	153	2	151
	Tipperary S.R	90	2	88
	Waterford	147	3	144
	Wexford	198	3	195
	Dublin South East	417	81	336
	Dublin South	398	78	320
	Wicklow	854	158	696
HSE South West		1265	13	1252
	Kerry	59	0	59
	Cork North	340	3	337
	Cork North Lee	576	7	569
	Cork South Lee	247	3	244
	Cork West	43	0	43
HSE Mid West		434	1	433
	Clare	59	0	59
	Limerick	224	1	223
	Tipperary N.R	151	0	151
HSE West & North West		791	69	722
	Donegal	297	11	286

 Sligo/Leitrim	21	19	2
Galway	217	39	178
Mayo	207	0	207
Roscommon	49	0	49
Total	15296	1055	14241

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 Q1, 2025, 1,412 AONs were completed, which is a 65% increase on the same period in 2024 of 849. 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.

However, despite 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 that by the end of 2025, there could be as many as 24,796 AONs due for completion: AONs overdue at end of Q1 2025 (15,296); new AONs received in 2025 (8,000); 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, a legal entitlement under the Disability Act 2005 reflects the increase in population and of families exploring all options for accessing services for their child.

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