

Head of Service for Older Persons
HSE South West - Health Service Executive
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Ceann na Seirbhíse do Dhaoine Scothaosta
FSS Iardheiscirt -Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Teach Caha, Párc Ghnó & Teicneolaíochta
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26th June 2025

Deputy James O'Connor, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

PQ ref 34991/25:

“To ask the Minister for Health her Department's plans to increase home support services for older people in Cork County; and if she will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy O'Connor,

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.

HSE South West is acutely aware that there are capacity issues across both direct and indirect provision of Home Support throughout the region. Even with the large number of Health Care Assistant (HCA) staff that we have, we constantly require more staff because of the ever-increasing demand for our service. Recruitment and retention challenges in the home support sector are well documented and these are particularly acute in our more rural locations. Higher density urban areas have access to a wider pool of prospective staff when recruiting and service delivery is easier to roster when travel times are shorter between clients and can be assisted by public transport. Private providers, who assist the HSE in delivering home support, are also more plentiful in urban locations.

The ageing population is also directly impacting our workforce with HCA (Home Support) staff retirements or resignations. Another challenge which we have faced is competing with the private and voluntary sectors to access the same skilled workforce. Furthermore, there appears to be a shift away from caring roles, such as the HCA (Home Support) role, towards other employment sectors. To illustrate the challenges we are encountering, in 2024 there were 105 HCA Home Support staff recruited in this region, but this was negatively offset by 161 retirements/resignations, leaving a net loss of 56 staff.

In order to meet the growing demand for home support and enhance our capacity to deliver same, HSE South West continues strident recruitment efforts in the Cork region in the face of an often challenging employment environment. We have two dedicated Recruitment Coordinators for Health Care Assistant (Home Support) recruitment, with campaigns running throughout the year. A recruitment campaign for Health Care Assistants (Home Support) staff was undertaken in this region in January and a further campaign is taking place this month (June 2025) with the focus for placement of successful candidates in those areas where home support staff are needed most.

All of our offices are delivering as much support as they can within available capacity in the face of staff shortages (which can arise not only because of resignations or retirements but also because of unscheduled or unexpected leave) and increased demand. We strive to maintain service for those who already have secured support while also doing our best to deliver new or additional support to as many clients as possible.

We believe that the Future Operating Model will bring a more subjective approach to home support prescribing and enhance the quality and efficiency of service delivery. This model aims to provide equitable access to high-quality,

regulated home care and address challenges in the sector. The Home Support service in this region has been involved in a National Home Support Banding Pilot via our InterRai team, which is providing learning regarding operational aspects of home support services to support interRAI rollout nationally. This single assessment tool will underpin and support person centred services and appropriate, equitable and timely resource allocation.

Engagement is ongoing with our colleagues in the Public Health Nursing service to identify, where appropriate, supplementary pathways to meet the needs of Older Persons in the community such as Day Care and Meals on Wheels services. Together with home support, this triangle of supports working in collaboration with each other can make an important difference to the life of an older person at home.

We continue to work across care groups and with senior management and Department of Health colleagues to identify strategies to address capacity challenges and improve the quality of life for older persons living in their own communities in Cork city and county. Our population is growing and it is also ageing and this means that demand for home support services is projected to increase substantially. Improving access to home support in the Cork area and the wider region is a service priority for HSE South West and, to this end, we will continue working to identify solutions to the current recruitment challenges being faced in this sector.

I trust this clarifies the position. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Daly
Head of Service for Older People

