

14th March 2025

Mr. Danny Healy Rae, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2.

PQ ref 9200/25

“The Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the services available for children with autism in the Killarney area, to help with interacting with people, play therapy, speech and language; if there are any funding or grants available to parents to help with the costs of private therapy for their child; and if she will make a statement on the matter.”

Dear Deputy Healy-Rae,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to respond to your parliamentary question submitted to the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth.

Children’s services are provided based on the complexity of each child’s presenting needs rather than based on their diagnosis. Some children with autism have complex needs and access supports from a Children’s Disability Network Team (CDNT). Other children with autism have non-complex needs and access supports via primary care services.

Children’s Disability Network Teams

The South Kerry Children’s Disability Network Team (CDNT3) is managed by the Brothers of Charity Services. This team provides support to children from birth to 18 years of age who present with complex disability needs and live in the Killarney area.

The CDNT first provides an Initial Team Assessment which allows the team identify services best suited to the needs of the child. If the child requires the interdisciplinary supports provided by a CDNT, the team will meet with the family to develop an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP). This will set out the goals and determine the supports to be made available to the child and their family.

Services offered may include:

- Parent information sessions aligned with the child's IFSP.
- Workshops such as 'Early Bird Parent Training' and 'Teen Life' training
- Therapeutic Group Information Sessions
- Individual and group based intervention

Each child's IFSP is reviewed on a yearly basis to ensure their needs are met.

Primary Care Network Teams

Primary Care Services provide physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, dietetics and social work services to children within the Killarney area. Following confirmation of an ASD diagnosis, a parent/guardian is provided with the opportunity to attend an ASD information programme. All ASD reports are reviewed by a member of the multidisciplinary team to ascertain an individual child's need for service within Primary Care and to ensure onward referral is completed in line with the child's presenting needs.

Three autism-specific groups are offered to autistic primary care clients in Kerry:

1. 'Next Steps' Parent Post-diagnostic Support programme: Primary care clinicians in Kerry provide a four-part parent post diagnostic support programme called 'Next Steps' for parents of autistic primary care clients. Cork clinicians provide an adapted online version of this programme to parents of primary care autistic clients who are aged 15 to 17 years across Cork & Kerry.
2. 'Autism & Food' Parent Information workshop: Primary care clinicians in Kerry have recently started to deliver a parent information workshop entitled 'Autism & Food' for parents of autistic primary care clients with limited diets. This group had previously been provided by Cork clinicians in a centralised online manner to primary care clients across Cork & Kerry.
3. 'Talking to your child about Autism' Parent Information workshop: Cork clinicians provide a centralised online parent information workshop entitled 'Talking to your child about Autism' to primary care clients across Cork & Kerry.

Respite

Respite services may also be available to families where indicated. Applications for respite are presented to the Kerry Children's Respite Forum. Once an application is accepted, the appropriate type of respite is identified. Respite is delivered based on need and availability. Children may be waitlisted for respite in situations where the demand for service exceeds supply. HSE South West Disability Services continue to engage with the providers as there is a growing need for respite care.

The HSE has recently provided funding to a private provider to set up a weekend respite club which will enhance our respite care service. This club will provide a three hour session, morning and afternoon every Saturday. Currently engagements are



ongoing to identify families who wish to avail of this service. It is hoped that the service will commence in the next eight weeks.

I acknowledge that some families are frustrated by waiting times for services. Unfortunately, there is no facility to reimburse the cost of private assessments or therapies commissioned by families.

If you require any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Yours sincerely,

**Angela O'Neill,
Head of Disability Services,
HSE South West.**

