



**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,**
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13th May 2025

Deputy Conor D McGuinness,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House, Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: conor.mcguinness@oireachtas.ie

PQ: 21926/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of children currently awaiting an assessment of need, including the duration of their wait times, by county; and the measures being taken to address these delays.

PQ: 21927/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the reason, despite the statutory requirement under the Disability Act 2005 for assessments of need to be completed within six months, only a small percentage were completed within this timeframe in recent years; and the actions that are being taken to improve compliance.

PQ: 21928/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the reason behind the significant increase in overdue assessments of need in certain counties over the past year; and the specific interventions that are planned to address this surge.

PQ: 21929/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth to detail the impact of the High Court ruling in March 2022 on the HSE's assessment processes; and the way in which this has influenced the current backlog in assessments of need.

PQ: 21930/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth to provide information on the allocation and utilization of funds spent in recent years to address waiting lists for assessments of need, including outcomes achieved and any plans for additional funding.

PQ: 21931/25

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the steps being taken to address the disparities in waiting times for assessments of need across different counties, particularly in areas with the highest numbers of overdue assessments outside Dublin.

Dear Deputy McGuinness,

Thank you for your Parliamentary Question referenced above, which has 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. 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.

Please see the table on the next page which outlines AON Applications overdue for completion. This is the most recent information for Quarter 1, 2025. Months overdue are calculated based on the statutory timelines of 3 months from start of stage 2 and no more than 6 months from the application date. This overdue figure does not include applications that have been put on hold, are closed or are ineligible for Assessment. Due to the limitations of the current Assessment of Need database, we are unable to provide any further breakdown of AONs are overdue for completion.

Table 1 - AON Overdue: Quarter 1 2025

RHA	LHO	Overdue	<1 month	1 - 3 Months	>3 Months
HSE Dublin & North East		4855	248	397	4210
	Cavan/Monaghan	337	17	41	279
	Louth	711	58	78	575
	Meath	673	39	75	559
	North Dublin	1809	69	108	1632
	Dublin North Centre	330	25	22	283
	North West Dublin	995	40	73	882
HSE Dublin & Midlands		5694	200	500	4994
	Dublin South City	484	15	45	424
	Dublin South West	1509	50	96	1363
	Dublin West	1425	30	122	1273
	Kildare/West Wicklow	1692	57	133	1502
	Laois/Offaly	526	38	70	418
	Longford/Westmeath	58	10	34	14
HSE Dublin & South East		2257	137	292	1828
	Carlow/Kilkenny	153	11	18	124
	Tipperary S.R	90	6	5	79
	Waterford	147	12	25	110
	Wexford	198	17	24	157
	Dublin South East	417	13	61	343
	Dublin South	398	29	56	313
	Wicklow	854	49	103	702
HSE South West		1265	123	176	966
	Kerry	59	8	10	41
	Cork North	340	22	47	271
	Cork North Lee	576	60	64	452
	Cork South Lee	247	27	47	173
	Cork West	43	6	8	29
HSE Mid West		434	17	30	387
	Clare	59	4	6	49
	Limerick	224	6	15	203
	Tipperary N.R	151	7	9	135
HSE West & North West		791	64	110	617
	Donegal	297	8	19	270
	Sligo/Leitrim	21	6	9	6
	Galway	217	17	36	164
	Mayo	207	25	42	140
	Roscommon	49	8	4	37
Total		15296	789	1505	13002



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 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 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.

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 2023 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.

Information received from the Health Regions indicates that under this targeted initiative, 3,636 AONs have been commissioned from private providers/assessors from June 2024 to March, 2025. 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, is a reflection of the increase in population and of families exploring all options for accessing services for their child.

However, it is important that service users are aware 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.

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 in order to better understand the challenges that face children's disability services across the country, including the current situation regarding Assessments of Need.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Aoife O'Donohue,
Stiúrthóir Náisiúnta Cúntóir, Seirbhísí Mhíchumas, Rochtain agus Imeachadh,
Assistant National Director, Disability Services, Transformation & Programme Coordination,
Access & Integration