

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 May 2025

Deputy Michael Collins, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

PQ ref 24123/25

“To ask the Minister for Health the reason the provision of a home help service in west Cork is failing to deliver the required hours to people, which in turn is increasing the likelihood of re-admission to an already creaking acute hospital service”.

Dear Deputy Collins,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Questions, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

Provision of Home Support is a core service for older people and their families and is an essential service for thousands of people across the country. Despite a significant level of service provision, the demand for Home Support nationally and regionally continues to grow as the population aged over 65 years increases. Home Support is highly valued by service users and their families because it enables older people to live independently and with dignity in their own homes for longer. It also enables many older people to return home following acute hospital admission. For these reasons, improving access to this service is a Government and HSE priority.

HSE South West's geographical area encompasses Kerry and Cork, covering approximately 16,390 square kilometres and serving a population of more than 700,000 people. 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.

In common with other HSE regions, we have been experiencing considerable difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff with certain areas experiencing increased pressures. Approved private providers, who work with the HSE in fulfilling Home Support service requests, are experiencing similar challenges. Furthermore, there has been an ongoing level of retirements and resignations from the Health Care Assistant (Home Support) workforce across this region in recent years. This is in part due to the age profile of the workforce and also due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic as a number of HCAs have opted for alternative careers.

The recruitment and capacity challenges that can present in our more rural locations are in contrast to higher density urban areas which have access to a wider pool of prospective staff when recruiting. Service delivery is consequently more clustered in areas with higher population densities. Delivery of home support is also easier to roster in urban areas 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 aforementioned challenges and difficulties mean that we are often unfortunately forced to maintain a waiting list for our service requests in some areas with rural locations often facing particular pressures. There are currently 61 clients across West Cork waiting for a new home support service to commence, while 65 existing clients are awaiting additional hours.

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 region, including West Cork, 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. The most recent recruitment campaign for Health Care Assistants (Home Support) staff was undertaken in this region in January which, following screening and interview, identified 86 potential candidates for Cork and Kerry positions. Pending completion of recruitment checks, the outcome of this campaign will be utilised to address requirements in the Home Support Service across the region.

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 continue to work to identify strategies to address capacity challenges and improve the quality of life for older persons living in their own communities. 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 West Cork area and the wider region is a service priority for HSE South West and, to this end, we will consider and utilise all available avenues to fulfil our service requirements.

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

Yours sincerely,

Jackie Daly
Head of Service for Older Persons

