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08/10/2025

Deputy Clarke
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ 56522/25: To ask the Minister for Health the number of WTE lactation consultants currently employed by the HSE

Dear Deputy Clarke,

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position on the various areas and issues you raised.

Breastfeeding is a key public health priority supporting both maternal and infant health. The HSE and the Department of Health continue to advance actions under the HSE Breastfeeding in a Healthy Ireland Action Plan 2016–2023, the national framework for promoting and supporting breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding rates increased from 60.3% in 2023 to 61.9% in 2024 at the first Public Health Nurse (PHN) visit, and from 42% to 44% at the 3-month PHN check. Skilled breastfeeding support is available in all maternity hospitals and community services, complemented by the online “Ask our breastfeeding expert” live chat on mychild.ie, which answered 2,250 queries over the past year. There are also 225 free breastfeeding support groups listed nationwide. To strengthen supports, and build on the progress achieved in recent years, the HSE has also recently launched a new Infant Feeding Survey in partnership with the National Perinatal Epidemiology Centre (NPEC) to gather parental feedback and inform service improvements.

The number of lactation consultant posts within the HSE has increased almost fourfold, from 15.42 WTE in 2017 to 60.68 WTE as of September 2025, with a further 11 posts in recruitment. Every maternity unit and CHI hospital now has at least one infant feeding/lactation post, while each PHN service has a minimum of 0.5 WTE to ensure continuity of breastfeeding support from hospital to home. The tables below provide the requested information on current and vacant lactation consultant posts:

Status of Infant Feeding/lactation posts - Oct 25

HSE Services	WTE in post	Vacant	In recruitment
19 maternity hospitals	36.85	5.35	3.91
CHI	1		1
32 DPHN areas	22.83	3.5	6.1
	60.68	8.85	11.01

I trust this clarifies the matter.

Yours sincerely,

Davinia O'Donnell,

General Manager,

National Women and Infants Health Programme