



Mari O'Donovan,
Interim Head of Service,
Cúram Príomhúil
FSS an Iardheiscirt

Áras na Ceachan,
Páirc Ghnó agus Teicneolaíochta,
Bóthar na Modh Feirme,
Corcaigh. T12 XHT4

Mari O'Donovan,
Interim Head of Service,
Primary Care
HSE South West

Caha House,
Business and Technology Park,
Model Farm Road,
Cork. T12 XHT4

southwest.hse.ie
E: Mari.ODonovan@hse.ie

22nd September, 2025

Mr. Michael Cahill, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref: 45449/25

"To ask the Minister for Health the current waiting time for a child to access psychology services via primary care in County Kerry".

Dear Deputy Cahill,

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.

Please see table hereunder outlining details of those awaiting psychological treatments in Kerry. This data is collected as part of agreed national key performance indicators.

KERRY Primary Care Child, Adolescent & Family Psychology Service

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025 (August 31 st)
Referral Rate to End Yr	102	168	232	291	440	303
No. waiting Yr End	217	330	487	543	941	1022

There are a number of key factors that have led to the significant increase in Psychology waiting lists in the past 5 years.

- **Societal Events:** Covid-19 has played a significant role in impacting the psychological well-being of our population, but children were particularly hit with the loss of social connection and disruption to school and critical development of peer relationships. An event such as the pandemic and indeed, the current world political climate, has resulted in children being far more aware of potential harm and risk in society, resulting in higher rates of anxiety and depression. We have also noted significant increases in the rate of self-harm in young people presenting to ED's and this reflects the emotional distress experienced in that age cohort.
- **Increased Demand:** There has been a change in practice nationally as to which children should be seen in primary care services. Historically, children with disabilities would have been seen in Disability service. As of 2022, children with mild non-complex disability are now being directed to Primary care psychology for assessment and intervention. There has also been a significant increase in public awareness of and demand for assessment for ADHD and Autism.
- **National and International Shortages of Qualified Psychologists:** There is currently a national and international shortage of professionally trained Psychologists. It has been difficult for the HSE South West to fill vacancies across all service, including Primary care services in both Cork and Kerry. At present, between 45 to 50% of approved WTEs are filled across Primary Care teams. These are funded posts that have been historically unable to fill via national

Seirbhís sláinte a thógáil a bhfuil ár bpobal bródúil aisti
Building a health service our community is proud of



and local recruitment campaigns. It continues to be difficult to fill posts in more rural areas away from urban centres. The level of approved posts is not sufficient to meet the population's needs in the HSE South West Region. The ratio of staff to population in the HSE South West region is much lower than in other parts of the country.

Significant work is currently underway to enhance access to psychological services in Kerry within Primary Care. A Regional Director of Psychology was appointed in June 2025, with a specific focus on reviewing psychological services, including workforce planning, reviewing the service provision model and considering other psychological support services that can meet the needs of the population.

As part of this review, recruitment has advanced to fill all allocated vacancies in the Kerry Primary Care Psychology Service.

There has also been a significant increase in 2025 for Doctoral training places for Psychology (Clinical and Educational programmes) in the region. A total of 18 trainees have been funded by HSE South West and commenced in September 2025. This is part of a sustained trainee programme which now has 45 trainees in the system over a 3-year cycle. The aim is that all graduates will be offered a permanent post in the region on completion of training, capitalising on the investment, improving staff to population ratios and reducing waiting list. A significant number of the 17 anticipated graduates in 2026 will be targeted at primary care vacancies in Cork and Kerry.

In addition, national Primary Care funding was allocated to HSE South West mid-year 2025 to initiate waiting list initiatives to increase access to psychological intervention for children and young people on existing primary care waiting lists. Kerry Primary Care Psychology is at an advanced stage in setting up grant aid agreements with a number of voluntary/community partner organisations across Kerry to recruit suitably qualified mental health clinicians/counsellors/psychotherapists to engage with 'in-reach' waiting list initiative to address mental health / psychological needs of children and young people on the Primary Care Psychology waitlist. These waiting list initiatives (WLI's) will commence from 15th September 2025 and continue initially through Quarter 4 of 2025. It is envisaged that up to 100 children will be removed from the waiting list, with the majority of these offered primary care level psychological intervention (6 – 10 sessions) by allocated therapists by year end through the WLI. Core Primary Care Child, Adolescent & Family Psychology Service staff will allocate and monitor the WLI inputs and will continue to impact waiting list alongside WLI therapists.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Mari O'Donovan
Interim Head of Service - Primary Care,
HSE South West