



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  
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17<sup>th</sup> September 2025

Deputy Liam Quaide  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
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**PQ: 48141/25**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the total cost of outsourcing assessments of need in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024 and to date in 2025, by Health Region-CHO.*

Dear Deputy Quaide,

Thank you for your Parliamentary Question referenced above, which has been forwarded to me for direct reply.

In 2020, the HSE secured €7.8m under Slaintecare funding to address overdue Assessments of Need (AON). This funding was provided on a once off and strictly time bound basis to eliminate all AONs overdue at 30th June 2020.

With regard to the total spend on outsourcing assessments of need, in 2023, approximately €11m was allocated to address waiting lists for clinical assessments identified through the Assessment of Need process. Much of this funding was utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector.

In 2024, €6.89 million was allocated by the Government for a targeted waiting list initiative that commenced end of May 2024. This was in addition to €5m non-core funding allocated to assist with sustainably addressing the Assessment of Need (AON) backlog.

In 2025, €4.5m (in addition to a further €5m in non-core funding) has been allocated in Budget 2025 to continue to address the Assessment of Need (AON) backlog.

Information received from the Health Regions indicates that under this targeted initiative, 4,976 AONs have been commissioned from private providers/assessors from June 2024 to June, 2025.

**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 the first half of 2025, 2,928 AONs have been completed. This increase is due in part to the additional funding outlined above.



The increased numbers of applications for Assessment of Need, which is 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, 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.
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- 5 AON Administrative Hubs and 3 AON Assessment Hubs have been established, which will inform the core of a service improvement plan that will also include increased learning and support for staff involved in AON. Improvements will include:-
  - Single point of contact for families and other services, allowing better awareness and appropriate signposting/diversion
  - Increases in efficiency and speed of assessment
  - Ability to review all referrals in the one process, and ensure clear chronological order for starting process in line with HSE SOP
  - Better communication amongst AO, and other staff, including updates in practice due to legal cases
  - Better sharing of knowledge and experience, and support to AO – leading to more standardised and consistent approaches
  - Better tracking of referrals
  - More efficient and better data collection
  - Clinicians working directly with Assessment Officers and all clinical staff delivering AON to promote education, training, enhanced governance, clinical supervision and collective understanding across AON
- We are introducing a Single Point of Referral Access for all Children's Primary Care, Disability and CAMH Services, in 2025, in line with existing models of good practice. AON will be included in this leading to better processes and communication around AON
- We will continue to procure of capacity from approved private providers.
- We will continue the roll out of initiatives to address staff vacancy rates in Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs), building a pipeline of supply of health and social care professions.



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

Yours Sincerely,

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Tom McGuirk,  
General Manager, Disability Services, Access & Integration