



Oifig Náisiúnta Sláinte Béal,
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**Deputy Martin Daly
Dáil Eireann
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2**

49187/25: To ask the Minister for Health the measures being taken to ensure timely access to special care dentistry for adults and children with intellectual, physical, or sensory disabilities, in view of the fact that many require treatment under general anaesthetic or sedation in hospital settings; if she will address the current shortage of hospital-based services and the long waiting lists for such care; and if she will make a statement on the matter

Dear Deputy Daly,

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

HSE Community Dental Service supports patients who have additional needs in attending for routine dental care and preventive support to maintain their oral health. Each of these service areas are provided within available resources. Many children and adults with additional needs are able to cooperate with dental examinations and/or treatment. While all dentists have the capabilities and skill range to see patients with lower levels of complexities, patients with additional needs and higher levels of complexity will be seen by designated dentists in special posts.

The service may identify patients with additional needs who need operative care but are unable to cooperate without the assistance of some level of sedation. A decision to provide that care under 'waking' sedation or full general anaesthetic (GA) is prompted by either the patient's ability to cooperate or the level of treatment required.

All of the services have systems in place to manage those who have urgent (symptomatic) need for care. The ability to schedule patients for dental care under GA can be impacted by local hospital available resources, for example, unavailability of day ward or theatre staff shortages. Waiting times for GA fluctuate due to the number of new patients placed on the waiting list, number of cases completed and the time required to complete each case.

The Department of Health has supported 15 WTE additional new posts, specifically to improve staffing levels within the HSE Community Dental Service. The Chief Officer and REOs have identified 34.7 WTE vacancies in 2024 across oral health services nationally, to be prioritized for filling. The Department of Health is supportive of recruitment to the 49.7 WTE identified through these two processes, which will improve the staffing levels currently available to provide service.

The HSE's 2025 National Service Plan aims to continue to develop services and implement waiting list initiatives across a range of dental and orthodontic services and maximise activity across these services to manage waiting lists and waiting times. The service plan supports the implementation of the Government's National Oral Health Policy, Smile Agus Sláinte, including the development of comprehensive oral healthcare packages for adults and children.

I trust this information is of assistance to you, but if you require further clarification please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Anne O'Neill
Assistant National Director, Oral Health