



Stiúrthoir Réigiúnach na
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FSS an Iardheiscirt
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Mr. Michael Cahill, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 50366/25

“To ask the Minister for Health given recent figures released by the HSE regarding the horrendous growth in the number of children on waiting lists in Kerry and in the Kerry/Cork region for the years 2022 to 2025, inclusive, the reason the figures for Kerry and Kerry/Cork are much worse than other regions (details supplied); the plans in place to address it; and if she will make a statement on the matter.”

Details supplied: Primary Care Psychology - - Total figures for all children on these lists from 2020 to 2025 for Kerry grew 357% and Kerry/Cork region by 399%, while the numbers of children waiting for longer than 52 weeks for the same period grew 418% in Kerry and 480% in Kerry/Cork region. By any yardstick, these are enormous increases, and many families are being adversely impacted and urgent should I say, emergency measures must immediately be put in place, including an Emergency Taskforce and significantly increased funding and staff resources. Causes must be identified and tackled head on and Emergency Legislation utilised.

Dear Deputy Cahill,

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

WAITING LISTS

Details of those awaiting psychological treatments in Kerry are outlined in the table below. 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 31st)
Referral Rate to End Yr	102	168	232	291	440	303
No. waiting Yr End	217	330	487	543	941	1022



Reasons for Increased Waiting List in Primary Care Psychology:

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 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.

PLANS IN PLACE TO ADDRESS WAITING LISTS

Significant work is currently underway to enhance access to psychological services in Kerry within Primary Care. The REO Dr. Andy Philips, has appointed a regional Director of Psychology (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. Progress has already been made as follows:

- Advancing recruitment to fill all allocated vacancies in the Kerry Primary Care Psychology Service
- 1 x Senior Psychologist – Filled; 1 x Staff Grade – Filled; 1 x Senior Psychologist (has been regraded from Staff Grade to incentivise staff to move to the region). This post has been accepted and will join the service in the coming weeks.



- 1 x Psychology Assistant – Filled; 1 x Psychology Assistant – Vacant but approved to fill via a current national panel.
- A request has been made to enhance services via budget estimates with a proposal to increase the WTE allocation to Primary Care Psychology Services to achieve a baseline level of staffing per Community Healthcare Network area (for example, 1 x Senior; 1 x Staff Grade; 1 x Psychology Assistant for CHN1; 2 & 3)

Waiting List Initiative

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 grand 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. Confirmation of further funding into 2026 is awaited and the partner organisations and therapists are open to continuing the WLI projects. 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 & monitor the WLI inputs and will continue to impact waiting list alongside WLI therapists.

Training Capacity

There has been a significant increase in 2022/25 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.

There are several key initiatives in HSE South West at present to improve access to service.

A new Single Point of Access working group has been established under the direction of Bernard Gloster CEO of the HSE and the senior management team in HSE South West. This single point of access will support more efficient triage of children and ensure that they access the most suitable service in a timely manner. This will help reduce waiting list duplication for accessing psychology in Primary care, CAMHS and our CDNTs.

The HSE South West Child Psychology Service Waiting List Improvement Initiative Working Group has also just been established under the Regional Director of Psychology. It has three main priorities aiming to improve access to psychological services for children in the region.

The following groups are established:



1. Workforce Planning and Development

Key Actions: Deliver a regional workforce plan, identify current and future recruitment needs, support retention of existing staff, and define skill mix beyond psychology and succession planning across services. (by Q4 2025)

2. Waiting List and Capacity Solutions & Referral Pathways & Demand Management

Key Actions: Analyse and address current waiting list volumes (validation as required), map and prioritise key intervention options and build sustainable models for throughput and case flow.

Map and redesign referral pathways (internal and external) and access criteria across the region; improve demand forecasting and referral appropriateness. (by Q2 2026)

3. Clinical Service Model Innovation

Key actions: Review and standardise care models; promote evidence-based and scalable innovations that improve outcomes and align with national frameworks. (by Q2 2026)

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Flynn
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HSE South West