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23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023

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Dear Deputy Cullinane,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary question, which was submitted to this department for response.

**PQ 49548/23**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of children on waiting lists for an assessment of need for October 2019 to 2023, inclusive, in tabular form; the number overdue for completion and the average length of wait.*

**HSE Response**

The Assessment of Need process is set out in the [Disability Act, 2005](#). The aim of an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act is to identify whether a person has a disability, the nature and extent of the disability, any health and education needs arising from that disability, as well as what services are required to meet those needs.

The numbers of applications for AON under the Act have risen steadily since its implementation in June 2007. 7,612 applications for AON were received in the most recent 4 quarters (Q3, 2022 – Q2 2023). This was the highest number of applications received in any 12 month period since Part 2 of the Act was commenced in June 2007 and represents a 23% increase on the number of AON applications received in the previous 12 months.

The HSE has endeavoured to meet its legislative obligations under the Act. However, as a consequence of a High Court ruling of December 2009, the effect of which was to open eligibility to all persons born after 1st June 2002 who are suspected of having a disability, the number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while throughout 2022, this figure averaged 55%. This is a reflection that the AON process is an accumulative process in terms of numbers of children and young people seeking access.

The judgement of Ms Justice S Phelan in the case of CTM & JA v the HSE was delivered in March 2022. This judgment found that the Preliminary Team Assessment approach described in the HSE's Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need does not meet the requirements of the Disability Act. This judgement in effect requires the HSE to deliver diagnostic assessments where necessary and



appropriate as part of the Assessment of Need process. This ruling has a significant impact operationally and has resulted in a growth in the numbers of overdue Assessments of Need. The requirement for services to prioritise the statutory Assessment of Need process will also impact significantly on their capacity to provide necessary intervention / treatment for children with disabilities.

As a result of the Judgement, activity for the second quarter of 2023 indicates that there has been an increase in the total number of applications 'overdue for completion', which now stands at 6495 (including 236 applications for which an extended time-frame was negotiated with the parent on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations).

Overall, it is estimated that there are approximately 11,666 applications 'overdue for completion' at this time. This includes AONs currently overdue and Preliminary Team Assessments that now require diagnostic assessment.

In addition, an estimated 7,612 new AONs are anticipated during 2023 based on the number of AONs received over the previous four quarters.

Please see the table below which gives the number of AON applications overdue at the end of each quarter for 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and Q1 and Q2 2023, which is the most recent validated information available.

**Table 1: Applications overdue for completion end of each Quarter.**

Year	End of Quarter	Overdue	<1 month	1 - 3 Months	>3 Months
2019	Q1	3686	329	527	2830
	Q2	3768	381	659	2728
	Q3	4100	524	743	2833
	Q4	4644	525	863	3256
2020	Q1	5083	577	824	3682
	Q2	5533	498	1007	4028
	Q3	6058	348	921	4789
	Q4	5078	210	272	4596
2021	Q1	3503	282	306	2915
	Q2	3609	439	678	2492
	Q3	2907	460	462	1985
	Q4	1986	355	473	1157
2022	Q1	1718	267	338	1113
	Q2	2531	365	717	1449
	Q3	3494	469	832	2193
	Q4	4613	604	854	3155
2023	Q1	5484	503	775	4206
	Q2	6495	448	1075	4972

## **Actions to address AON waiting lists**

A revised AON Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) incorporating guidance on completion of clinical assessment was launched on July 14<sup>th</sup> to reflect the High Court ruling in CMT & JA vs HSE 2022. This includes also the Interim Guidance on Replacement of the PTA in the AON SOP.

### ***Additional funding***

Approximately €11m has been allocated to address waiting lists for clinical assessments identified through the Assessment of Need process. This funding is being utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector.

Progressing the outsourcing of these assessments is challenging however, in this regard, Disability Services nationally is working with HSE Procurement to develop a tender process and Service Specification for the delivery of Assessment of Need from private providers. A successful procurement process will facilitate the CDNTs to focus on the provision of intervention for children on their caseloads.

In parallel, a large scale international procurement process is also being progressed.

In addition, the HSE at local level is using time related savings to source AON assessments privately for children in the order as registered on the AOS (AON information management system).

In line with appropriate procurement procedures, Garda vetting and due diligence practice, private providers are currently being contracted by the HSE to provide assessments and / or interventions. In such instances, the HSE ensures that the contracted providers are appropriately qualified and that any assessments or interventions are provided in line with the appropriate standards.

### **Assessment of Need Administrative Hubs**


AON Administrative Hubs are now in place in Community Healthcare Areas (CHOs) 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8.

**Assessment hubs** have been established in CHOs 3, 6 and 9. CHO 3 is utilising existing staff reassigned from CDNT service. CHO 6's hub is pending recruitment of clinical specialist posts and in interim, the AON process is outsourced to a private service provider.

CHO 9 has recruited 2 of its 3 clinical specialists and recruitment of the 3<sup>rd</sup> is in train.

**It is important to note that children do not require an Assessment of Need as defined by the Disability Act (2005) in order to access a CDNT or Primary Care service.** They can be referred by a healthcare professional or parent/carer to the CDNT for children with complex needs as a result of their disability, or to Primary Care for children with non-complex needs.

Yours sincerely,



**Bernard O'Regan**  
**Head of Operations - Disability Services,**  
**Community Operations**