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16th February 2022

Deputy Neasa Hourigan
Dail Eireann,
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Dear Deputy Hourigan

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 5452/22

To ask the Minister for Health if his Department has costed the recommendations made in the report of the review of the health services for persons with autism spectrum disorders; if the necessary funding will be made available to implement these recommendations; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

Following the commissioning and publication of the *Review of the Irish Health Services for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder* (the Review) the HSE commenced implementation of a Service Improvement Programme for the Autistic Community based on the recommendations of the Review. €2m funding was secured in the 2020 budget for this project.

National Autism Programme Board

A National Autism Programme Board was established with the responsibility for leading the implementation of the Review report recommendations. The Board consists of senior operational and clinical decision makers as well as independent professional / academic support. Importantly, the Programme Board has representation of persons with lived experience of Autism participating as equal members of this collaborative team effort.

Implementation Priorities and Health Service Developments

In implementing the recommendations of the Review Report, the Programme Board has been tasked with leading out on an agreed set of priorities that will have greatest impact in terms of shaping how services can be delivered to people with Autism and in respect of creating greater awareness of Autism in terms of supporting communities in promoting inclusion and fostering positive attitudes.

The agreed set of priorities are summarised as follows;

- i.* Implement a Programme of Awareness Raising / Engagement with the Public;



- ii. Build professional capacity and competence amongst key professionals working with Autistic people, including the implementation of a tiered model of assessment as recommended in the ASD Review Report.

Awareness Working Group:

Information available to the autistic community, family members, carers and service providers was limited and inconsistent from region to region and did not always reflect current understanding and approaches.

The HSE, through the work of the Awareness Working Group has taken a comprehensive approach to addressing this and is reviewing existing content, seeking the views of the Autistic Community, Family Members, Carers and Service Providers on this content and working to ensure it can be produced and made accessible to people all over the country, online and in print.

This quality process has been progressing and will continue into next year.

The Awareness Stream of the programme is designed to respond to the call for greater clarity amongst clinicians and service providers regarding both autism and the supports available to people with autism.

There are a number of individuals with the lived experience participating in this group.

- The availability of comprehensive accessible information relating to autistic people, their families, and healthcare workers working in the field
- The development of an online knowledge hub combined with a helpline aimed at providing contemporary information in relation to:
 - Location and types of services,
 - Tools and resources for service users, their families and clinicians and
 - Signposting to other essential community, voluntary and statutory based supports and services.


The outputs from this work will have wider application and benefits across all disability services.

Assessment and Pathway Working Group:

The Assessment and Pathways working group aims to develop a Standardised Assessment approach for use in all services dealing with the assessment of those with autism to ensure that every assessment is of an acceptable and agreed standard, regardless of which service is being accessed. In addition, it seeks to agree a standardised service user journey and the implementation of a consistent core service offering across those providing services to people with autism.

The Working Group, including people with lived experience of autism, has consulted widely with key stakeholders in the design and formulation stage of the project; this is particularly important in the context of the implementation of a tiered approach to assessment. The draft protocol is being piloted in four Community Healthcare Organisations.

Yours sincerely



Deirdre Scully,
AND Change Planning and Delivery, Disability and Mental Health Services