

22nd July, 2022

Mr James O'Connor, TD.,
 Dáil Éireann,
 Dublin 2.

PQ ref 37522/22

“To ask the Minister for Health the number of children for each LHO area in CHO4 who were awaiting a first assessment from the HSE under the 2005 Disability Act as of 1 July 2022 or the latest date available.”

Dear Deputy O'Connor,

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

Children and young people born on or after 1st June 2002 who are suspected of having a disability can apply for an Assessment of Need (AON) under the Disability Act (2005). The Act allows for an assessment of the child's health needs. The assessment of need process consists of two stages, the first stage involves a review of the referral to the assessment of need process by an Assessment Officer which is an administrative process. It is a combined desktop and information gathering exercise carried out by an Assessment Officer to include receiving an application, acknowledging its receipt, ensuring the application is completed in full, checking the child's eligibility, requesting additional reports or information from the parents if they were not supplied with the application.

Below is a summary of the number of referrals received in Cork Kerry Community Healthcare (formerly CHO 4) C from January 2022 – June 2022.

CKCH – Stage 1 Applications Received January 2022 – June 2022

AREA	January 2022	February 2022	March 2022	April 2022	May 2022	June 2022	TOTAL
Kerry	10	6	5	4	7	12	44
Cork North	3	8	10	1	5	6	33
Cork North Lee	20	26	22	15	25	31	139
Cork South Lee	13	11	13	7	19	16	79
West Cork	3	0	5	0	8	9	25
OVERALL TOTAL							320

If appropriate, the child is then referred to stage two of the process, which is for a clinical assessment to determine what a child's needs are in relation to assessments and intervention.

Disability Services does not gather data for AON in the format that you have requested. I can advise you that up to June 2022 there are 99 referrals overdue to start Stage 2 as of the 30th June 2022.

One of the issues for the HSE which has caused issues in the preparation of reports lies in the outdated database we are currently using to facilitate the case management, planning and reporting of assessments and services to children with a disability eligible to apply for an assessment under the Disability Act 2005 – The Assessment Officers System Database (AOS). The AOS database was developed by a small software development company, which no longer provides maintenance or technical support for the system.

The database is 20 years old and has not had necessary upgrades or technical changes in recent years that are generally required by IT systems, to reflect changes in policy, operational practice and user requirements. This has created many challenges for both Disability Services nationally and for system users locally. The HSE is committed to the development of a new integrated management information system for Children's Disability Services, which will include a module on the Assessment of need process under the Disability Act. This will facilitate the HSE to provide a wider range of reports on AON activity.

We have been significantly challenged in terms of the volume of applications for assessment of need for a number of years now. Initiatives in 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and into 2022 have sought to address a non-compliance in respect of the requirement under the Disability Act to assess and determine a disability (or otherwise) within a pre-determined timeline. Additionally, all of the agencies in this area, who are providing assessments and interventions, are experiencing very high volumes of referrals and as a consequence of same, they are holding wait lists both for assessments and for interventions. The level of need far exceeds the resources available.

Delays experienced due to the healthcare crisis due to Covid-19 must also be recognised. Regrettably, due to the crisis, many services such as the Assessment of Need appointments process in Cork and Kerry were severely impacted and resulted in either services ceasing operations on a temporary basis or progressed at a reduced capacity. In regard to assessments, elements of the assessment process such as desktop reviews and requests for further information (reports) continued whilst the face to face clinical element of the assessment were put on hold pending national guidelines on the resumption of services.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare acknowledges the lengthy waiting times that parents are experiencing under the Assessment of Need process. We sincerely regret that any child has to wait for an assessment and both management and staff fully appreciate the level of stress that families are experiencing due to the current waiting times. The numbers referred for assessment in Cork Kerry Community Healthcare are among the highest in the country.

Disability Services continues to engage with the Service Providers to ensure that where possible, some level of service is maintained, based on prioritising those with the greatest need.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact my office.



Yours sincerely,

Majella Daly

**Ms. Majella Daly,
Head of Disability Services,
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare**

