



Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
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16th November 2023

Deputy Marian Harkin,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: marian.harkin@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Harkin,

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: 48373/23

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth his plans to deal with the crisis in children's disability services due to lack of early intervention services; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

The HSE is committed to the delivery of appropriate services for children with disabilities, is working to address waiting times and continues to work with families and staff to develop services that meet their needs. There are various approaches being taken to ensure improvement to the delivery of services to children with disability

The National Access Policy to CDNT and Primary Care services

The National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay ensures that children are directed to the most appropriate service based on the complexity of their presenting needs i.e. Primary Care for non-complex functional difficulties and Children's Disability Network Teams for complex functional difficulties. This policy also supports the transition of a child between Primary Care and Children's Disability Network Team where their needs may change as they grow.

Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs)

In line with the Progressing Disability Services model, resources assigned to children's disability services are allocated to the 0 – 18 Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) rather than to a dedicated early intervention team or school age team. 91 CDNTs are aligned to 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) across the country and are providing services and supports for children aged from birth to 18 years of age.



CDNTs are teams of health and social care professionals, including nursing, occupational therapy, psychology, physiotherapy, speech and language therapy, social work and others. The team works closely together in a family centred model, focusing on the child's and family's own priorities.

Children and their families have access to a range of services and supports of the CDNT according to their individual needs. This includes universal, targeted and specialist supports, such as individual therapeutic intervention and access to specialist consultation and assessment when needed. Supports will be provided as is feasible in the child's natural environments - their home, school and community.

The CDNTs are currently providing services and supports for 45,741 children and strategies and supports for urgent cases on the waitlist where staffing resources allow.

Roadmap for Service Improvement for Disability Services for Children and Young People

The HSE is committed to prioritising the needs of children. Substantial work has been undertaken by the HSE to develop a Roadmap for Service Improvement for Disability Services for Children and Young People which was approved by the HSE Board on July 28th and was launched by the Government and the HSE on Tuesday 24th October 2023.

The Roadmap is a targeted Service Improvement Programme to achieve a quality, accessible, equitable and timely service for all children with complex needs as a result of a disability and their families. It sets out the overall aim for Children's Disability Services, provided by the HSE and its partner agencies, that for every child to have a childhood of inclusive experiences where they can have fun, learn, develop interests and skills, and form positive relationships with others in a range of different settings.

Implementation of the Roadmap for Service Improvement Actions will:

- Ensure children are referred to the most appropriate service (National Access Policy)
- Reduce the waiting time for children currently waitlisted for CDNTs
- Optimise use of voluntary and private disability service providers for assessments and interventions.
- Improve HSE's legislative compliance for AONs as defined in the Disability Act
- Improve outcomes for children and families and their experience of CDNT service
- Enable teams to optimise service effectiveness and efficiencies, and opportunities to collaborate with community networks such as Children and Young People's Services Committees.
- Improve staff retention on CDNTs in the long-term as a good place to work.

Many of the 60 actions contained in the Roadmap have already been progressed, for example:

- **Roadmap Governing Structures:** Draft TOR and membership for each of the have been forwarded to DCEDIY for their input. Letters of invite are being drafted for the five working groups and Service Improvement Board members and Chairs.
- Roadmap events are being planned in the CHOs including HSE, Lead and Partner Agency staff, and in addition dedicated workshops with CDNMs
- **National Service Improvement Lead** was appointed on September 11th 2023.
- National Director of Community Operations has commenced engagement with Chief Officers, National Disabilities, Primary Care and Mental Health re **Integrated Children's Services**
- **Family Forums:** 69 of 91 have commenced meeting, and in turn, 5 of 9 CHO **Family Representatives Groups** have commenced, and reps nominated onto the CHO CDNT Governance Group.



- **Individual Family Support Plan template and Guidance** has been issued to CDNTs to drive a consistent approach to application of this foundation for family centred practice
- **CDNT supports:**
 - National CDNT Training Programme, building team competencies, is now 90% delivered with the remainder to be completed by Q1 '24.
 - Monthly lunchtime webinars for CDNT staff on topics of their choice continue with the purpose to share and spread good practice models of service in place across the country.
- **Framework of Approved Providers:** The scheme is currently open for applications until Nov 27th with notification due to successful applicants in early December. The scheme is applicable to organisations currently providing services for, or that are appropriate for children with disabilities, and will be accessible by Children's Disability Network Teams to offer waitlisted children and families additional supports whilst they await CDNT services
- **First Intervention for Waitlisted Children:** National Guidance for CDNTs and families has been drafted, to provide clarity on its purpose and to ensure this support is meaningful and empowering for families whilst the robust Retention and Recruitment plan for CDNTs progresses. The draft was circulated to the 9 PDS Leads and a sample of CDNMs and then to parent reps on the National Steering Group from feedback. A 2nd draft will be shared with CDNMs in advance of the above mentioned workshops, in order to take on board further feedback during the events, prior to issuing a final Guidance.
- **Independent Review of CDNT service model:** Project Outline drafted with the NDA has been submitted to DCEDIY for approval. Researcher interview completed and successful candidate has been panelled. This Review will be completed in 12 months from commencement
- A webinar was delivered on the **Revised AON SOP** including Interim Guidance for Assessors on Replacement of the PTA and the document widely circulated. An Assessment Officers (AOs) workshop was delivered which included a presentation by legal services updating AOs on the AON and implications of recent court cases. An AON FAQs document is now being developed.
- A National **AON tender process** will be completed this month to put in place a Framework of Service Providers as a Waiting List Initiative to support CHOs to achieve their targets. However, it is anticipated that this is not going to add significant additional capacity beyond what CHOs have already sourced directly with private providers. Learning from this tender process will be shared with CHOs to support standardisation across CHOs.

The actions also include a robust suite of CDNT Retention and Recruitment targets, the majority of which are now in train. For example;

- National Team Development Programme (delivery of the 2ND extensive two year programme prioritised by the CDNMs will be completed by Mar '24)
- Online lunchtime staff webinars (on-going monthly)
- Online basecamp account for staff and team managers to share innovative programmes, practices and resources across the country
- Confined Senior grade competition for CDNTs - completed
- Additional 20 Senior clinical psychology trainee placements
- Marketing CDNTs as a workplace of choice
- HSE HR engagement with graduates in person and via webinar
- Recordings of CDNT staff and parents on benefits of working or receiving services from a CDNT, used for recruitment of staff off national panels



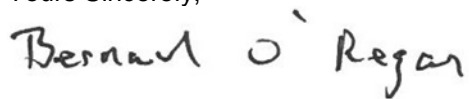
- HSE Recruitment, Reform and Resourcing has featured CDNTs on their “Service in the Spotlight”, hosted on the HSE Career Hub. The 16,000 individuals now registered on the hub will receive notice of the targeted recruitment campaign for CDNTs and be encouraged to share with family and friends, extending our reach into the market.

The HSE acknowledge the current challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff and work is also progressing to commence the following;

- Student Sponsorship Programmes
- Targeted recruitment campaigns for senior and staff grade therapies will commence in early December 2023 to fill existing vacancies on HSE, S.38 and S.39 Lead Agency teams.

In addition, Minister of State Anne Rabbitte has convened a Disabilities Workforce Enhancement Group, including National Disability Operations Team and NCPPD representation, focused on the immediate, medium and long term sustainability of Disabilities workforce, including CDNT.

Yours Sincerely,



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

