



Oifig an Cheannaire Oibríochtaí,
Na Seirbhísí Míchumais/An Rannán Cúram Sóisialta,
31-33 Sráid Chaitríona, Luimneach.

Office of the Head of Operations,
Disability Services/Social Care Division,
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29th November 2023

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: padraig.osullivan@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy O'Sullivan,

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: 51008/23

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth if he plans to outsource speech and language therapies to private companies for children in order to reduce waiting lists; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

The HSE is committed to delivering efficient high quality services to all eligible service users.

The National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay ensures that children are directed to the 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. Children may access supports from a Children's Disability Network Team or from Primary Care depending on the complexity of their needs.

Primary Care Services

Primary Care Services have advised that in 2022, there were 192,514 patients seen by HSE Speech and Language Therapy in Primary Care. It is worth noting that COVID-19 has posed significant challenges for many service areas in 2020, 2021 and 2022. The resulting ongoing impact is seen in the increased number of referrals and subsequent waiting lists for Primary Care Services.

Funding for waiting list initiatives is once off and limited, given the length and continuum of care patients require for Speech and Language, it is best provided for within the HSE.

Outsourcing of Speech and Language Therapy poses challenges among which are the lack of large scale providers in this service area and the key requirement for the HSE to ensure clinical governance for any patient transferred to a private provider.



Childrens Disability Services

91 Children's Disability Network Teams (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.

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. Some of the universal supports which CDNTs are providing for children and families waitlisted for interventions include drop in advice clinics, talks and information sessions for families on topics such as sleep, communications, toilet training as identified from review of referral information.

As a waiting list initiative this year, the HSE's National Director of Community Operations approved the use of time related savings from vacant therapy posts as a short term measure whilst recruitment campaigns progress to commission privately sourced therapies and other evidence informed services and supports for children waitlisted for CDNT service and their families.

Childrens Disability Services Grant Scheme

Additional funding has been provided to Childrens Disability Services under a new grant scheme.

The Children's Disability Services Grant Fund is open to organisations, including community groups and service providers and aims to support children who are on a waiting list for Children's Disability Network Team services.

Funding can be awarded for up to 3 years, to the end of 2026. Successful projects will need to add value to existing HSE children's disability services and describe the expected benefit to children.

An approved service providers list will be set up based on successful applications, from which the Children's Disability Network Managers will draw down supports for their CDNTs' waitlisted children and families based on prioritised needs.

The closing date for applications was Monday 20th November 2023.

The funding requests for projects ranged from as little as €1,000 to larger proposals for up to €3m over 3 years.

Some of the proposals included a speech and language therapy service for 33 children aged under 6 year of age.

Successful projects will need to:

- add value to existing HSE children's disability services
- state the expected benefit to children

Yours Sincerely,



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



