



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

**Office of the Head of Operations,**  
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12<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Deputy Pearse Doherty,  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
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Dear Deputy Doherty,

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: 51860/23**

*To ask the Minister for Health if financial assistance is available to help with the purchase of braille devices; if so, the source and application process for such funding; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

Braille is a tactile reading system which can be used by people with vision loss or no vision. It is named after its inventor, Louis Braille (1809-1852), a Frenchman who developed the system after a childhood accident had left him blind. Braille can be read either on embossed paper or by using refreshable braille displays that connect to computers and smartphone devices.

With regard to braille as an assistive technology for education services, necessary supports are provided through the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) Technical Aid Grant.

This is the responsibility of the Department of Education via the National Council for Special Education. This is administered through its network of Special Education Needs Officers (SENOS), who are responsible for processing applications.

Further information on the grant is available at the following link:  
<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/237c68-assistive-technology-grant/#>

For employment/social protection purposes, supports are provided via the Workplace Equipment Adaptation Grant.

In Health Services, it is understood that the process for application for braille devices was subsumed into the Community Funded Schemes, which took over a number of different processes and application forms that would formerly have been in use by CHO Areas.



The Community Funded Schemes is a collective name for all of the many products, supports, supplies, appliances and aids that are provided through community services. There is an extensive range of assistive technology products and services provided to hundreds of thousands of individuals living with a wide variety of different medical conditions, under the CFS.

The HSE currently spends in excess of €250m per annum on these products and services. The scale of the programme is extensive and many thousands of items are provided from community based services across the country. Every PHN, continence advisor, clinical nurse specialist, occupational therapist, physiotherapist, dietician, speech and language therapist, podiatrist and orthotist, who prescribes an appliance, a sip feed, a prosthetic, oxygen or one of the many thousands of items used to support service users in the community, has a role to play in delivery of these extensive services.

The budget for CFS sits within the Primary Care function of the CHO's. Based on satisfying the eligibility criteria, people living with disabilities are like other people living with a broad range of medical conditions, eligible for Medical/surgical aids and appliances that facilitate and/or maintain mobility and/or functional independence. The HSE provides assistive devices to thousands of people with disabilities to enable them to maintain their health, optimise functional ability and to facilitate care in their primary care setting.

Further information regarding braille can be obtained from organisations such as the Irish National Braille and Alternative Formats Association, Childvision, Vision Ireland -formally known as NCBI and Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI).

The HSE has an Expert Advisory Group that is developing medical information in accessible formats for people with disabilities – the Accessible Resources EAG. Further information will be available on the website in due course.

As per the UNCRPD, the HSE has sought to include input from both Provider Organisations, for example Vision Ireland (formally known as NCBI) and Disabled Peoples' Organisations (DPOs) (organisations which are made up of disabled people both as members and their management structures, for example Voice of Vision Impairment (VVI).

It is important to ensure that when identifying the formats that should be developed in order to reach and communicate with the largest amount of disabled people and be the most cost efficient, that people who are visually impaired are involved.

While many people with visual impairment have preferences for braille, visually impaired participants have also raised the possibilities regarding forms of technology such as smart phones and screen readers etc. Participants have emphasised the importance of ensuring that documents developed by the HSE can reach a wide audience of visually impaired people and be cost efficient.

Documents produced should;

- Be read by screen readers
- Be available in Large Print
- Be available in Easy Read material
- Be available as videos that are closed captioned with Irish Sign Language

Yours Sincerely,



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

