



Head of Service for Older Persons
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22nd February 2024

Deputy Colm Burke, T.D.,
Dáil Éireann
Dublin 2

PQ ref 6000/24:

“To ask the Minister for Health what action his Department is taking to address home support waiting lists in CHO4;”

PQ ref 6001/24:

“To ask the Minister for Health what action his Department is taking to recruit more home care workers in CHO4;”

PQ ref 6002/24:

“To ask the Minister for Health the total number of people in CHO4 currently waiting for home support; the current average length of time between approval of home support and commencement of home support;”

PQ ref 6003/24:

“To ask the Minister for Health what percentage of home support assessments in CHO4 were carried out using interRAI assessment in 2023; what progress has been made to date on rolling out the interRAI assessment tool in CHO4; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

PQ ref 6004/24:

“To ask the Minister for Health how clients on waiting lists are prioritised for home support in CHO4; and how the waiting list is managed locally in CHO4;”

PQ ref 6005/24:

“To ask the Minister for Health the total number of consumer directed home support (CDHS) home care packages currently being delivered in CHO4; if clients on home support waiting lists are being informed about CDHS;”

PQ ref 6006/24:

“To ask the Minister for Health if consideration would be given to increase the number of hours delivered by private and non-profit home care providers in CHO4 in order to alleviate the home support waiting list; and if he will make a statement on the matter”.

Dear Deputy Burke,

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

Despite a significant level of service provision, the demand for Home Support nationally and regionally continues to grow as the population aged over 65 years increases. Provision of Home Support is a core service for older people and their families and is an essential service for thousands of people across the country. It is highly valued by service users and their families



because it enables older people to live independently and with dignity in their own homes for longer. It also enables many older people to return home following acute hospital admission. For these reasons, improving access to this service is a Government and HSE priority.

With regard to **PQ 6000/24**, if Home Support staff (HSE or private providers) are not available to deliver support, then the request for a home support service is waitlisted. Those people who are on the waiting list have been clinically assessed and the waiting list is regularly reviewed, as staffing resources become available, to ensure that individual cases continue to be dealt with on a priority basis within the available staffing, having regard to the client's assessed needs. Referrals are prioritised depending on their care needs. Many clients receive a service within days of approval but others are placed on a wait list, due to non-availability of carers.

Our wait list is made up of both clients who are awaiting a new service (i.e. currently are not in receipt of any service), and clients who are awaiting additional hours/part of the originally prescribed service (i.e. they are receiving some home support). Waiting lists are constantly being validated to ensure they are correct and significant work has been undertaken to address the waiting list for home support in CKCH. Priority is given to those clients requiring discharge from hospital and with higher levels of dependency.

In relation to **PQ 6001/24**, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare continues to work towards increasing Home Support provision and reducing waiting lists across the region; however, challenges are ongoing and well-documented nationally in relation to recruitment and retention of staff with certain areas experiencing increased pressures. Approved private providers, who work with the HSE in fulfilling Home Support service requests, are experiencing similar staffing issues.

As you will be aware, addressing the shortage of care workers in Ireland is an urgent priority for Government, with an implementation group established to implement the report of the Strategic Workforce Advisory Group on Home Carers and Nursing Home Health Care Assistants, in areas including pay and conditions of employment. There are challenges in the sector, particularly on the workforce side. Progress has been made and we are delivering more support hours than ever and we currently have sufficient funding for home support hours but do not have the carers to deliver it.

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare continues to recruit staff to approved Health Care Assistant Home Support posts which have been sanctioned for filling. Since the introduction of the current recruitment pause, derogation has been sought and granted for a total of 49 Health Care Assistant staff. There is a Health Care Assistant Home Support panel in place in both Cork and Kerry for the purpose of recruitment and approved posts are being offered on a continuous basis.

With regard to **PQ 6002/24**, across Cork and Kerry there are currently 8,293 people receiving a Home Support Service with 33,264 hours of support being provided (*week commencing 12th February 2024*). 1100 clients in Cork and Kerry are awaiting a new or additional/partial Home Support Service. The majority of clients who are prescribed Home Support have a service commence almost immediately. However, on occasion, part of the prescribed service may not be put in place - this would be predominantly down to lack of carer availability in the area.

Our waiting list is made up of both clients who are awaiting a new service (i.e. currently are not in receipt of any service), and clients who are awaiting additional hours/part of the originally prescribed service (i.e. they are receiving some home support). Clients currently on our wait list have been awaiting either additional/partial or new service for a period of up to 30 weeks. However, many of our clients are allocated full or partial service shortly after application. It is difficult to quantify an average waiting time between approval and commencement of home support for the entire CHO as areas can differ in terms of staff availability, with challenges arising predominantly in our more rural areas. Many of our clients are receiving a Monday to Friday service; where clients have been approved for a seven day service we are unfortunately often challenged in relation to staffing at weekends. We cannot ask any home carer to work seven days per week and we have been endeavouring over the last number of years to recruit additional staff to bolster service delivery.



Waiting lists are constantly being validated to ensure that they are correct, with priority given to those being discharged from hospital.

CKCH continues to endeavour to deliver a home support service to as many clients as possible in the face of a challenging employment environment and an increasing demand for home support. The ageing population is also directly impacting our workforce with HCA (Home Support) staff retirements or resignations. Another challenge which we have faced throughout the year is competing with the private and voluntary sectors to access the same skilled workforce, and more recently the pause on recruitment. Since the COVID pandemic, and with Ireland currently at full employment with unemployment rates dipping to their lowest levels since records began, there also appears to be a shift away from caring roles, such as the HCA (Home Support) role, towards other employment sectors.

In relation to **PQ 6003/24**, the development of a reformed model of service delivery for home support and the testing of this across four pilot sites nationally (including Community Health Network 13 in this region) has concluded. The rollout of interRAI as the single assessment tool for care needs in the community will assist with equitable resource allocation and InterRAI standardised outputs will be used to determine prioritisation and levels of care required. Service users will be assured of a fair and transparent care needs assessment.

The interRAI assessment system is now in place in the CHN 13 pilot site (Bandon, Kinsale and Carrigaline) and is being used for all new referrals for the home support service. A small percentage of existing service users are also being assessed using interRAI when a request for an increase in service is indicated.

Breakdown of InterRAI assessments conducted in 2023 in Bandon, Kinsale & Carrigaline:

- 94% of assessments: Home Support
- 4% of assessments: Nursing Home Support Scheme
- 2% of assessments: Other.

Percentage of applications for home support in 2023 in CHN 13 that were carried out using the InterRAI assessment tool:

- Kinsale - 56%
- Bandon - 37%
- Carrigaline - 51%

To facilitate the wider introduction of interRAI assessments in this region to replace the Comprehensive Geriatric Assessment, approval has been granted for the appointment of 18 InterRAI facilitators – 14 based in the Community Healthcare Networks and 4 based within the Integrated Care Programme for Older Persons (ICPOP) service. 4 Facilitators are currently in place - 1 post based in the pilot site in the Community (CHN 13) and 3 posts located in the Integrated Care Programme for Older Persons (ICPOP) service. Training of InterRAI teams is progressing to enable further roll out of this assessment tool.

With regard to **PQ 6004/04**, all of our clients are assessed individually by their Public Health Nurse to determine their care requirements. Applicants on the waiting list will generally be offered support by reference to their chronological date on the waiting list. However, where applicants who are at risk are on the waiting list and in order that those applicants at greatest risk receive supports (including those being discharged from hospital), Home Support will be offered on the basis of Priority Ranking Score – those who score highest will be taken from the waiting list ahead of persons who have scored lower. Where a number of applicants have equal priority status, chronological order will apply to determine which of that group of applicants is to be offered the next available support/resource. The Home Support Resource Managers regularly review their waiting lists and in addition, Health Care Assistants report observed changes in a client's condition and an up to date review may then be requested from the client's Public Health Nurse.

In relation to **PQ 6005/24**, Consumer Directed Home Support (CDHS) is not currently available within CHO 4. The application form which Service Users complete as part of the application for



home support references CDHS but Home Support services in the Cork Kerry Healthcare region are currently only delivered either directly by HSE employed staff or on its behalf by a combination of approved private providers who operate under service level agreements with the HSE. CDHS has not yet been implemented in this area as a method of home support service delivery though it has been piloted in some CHOs. It is not possible at this stage to provide a timeline for implementation of CDHS in CHO4.

With regard to **PQ ref 6006/24**, when a request for home support is received, the HSE's priority is to identify availability to deliver that support. Capacity is sought both within our own home support service and with our approved private providers. If the HSE's home support service does not have available home support staff, then the request is sent out to the private providers and if any of those providers has capacity the service will be delivered by them. At present, approximately 25% of our service is provided by private providers with the remainder provided by the HSE. What this means is that private providers at present have capacity to provide service to 25% of our clients. If private providers have capacity to provide service to more than 25% of requests, then we will avail of that capacity. The request will always be sent to private providers if we do not have available staff to allocate the service. However, increasingly, our private providers are experiencing similar recruitment and retention issues to ourselves, resulting in some applications being waitlisted until availability arises within either sector (HSE or private).

Cork Kerry Community Healthcare is acutely aware that there are capacity issues across both direct and indirect provision of Home Support throughout the region. Our population is growing and it is also ageing and this means that demand for home support services is projected to increase substantially. Improving access to home support is a service priority for Cork Kerry Community Healthcare and, to this end, we continue to utilise all avenues to fulfil our service requirements.

I trust this clarifies the position. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Jackie Daly
Head of Service for Older Persons