



HSE Acute Operations  
Unit 1A, The Dargan Building,  
Heuston South Quarter HSQ,  
St John's Road West,  
Kilmainham,  
D08NN9V

29<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Minister Colm Burke,  
Dáil Éireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2

**Re: PQ 9454/24**

**To ask the Minister for Health the number of people currently waiting on obesity clinic appointments since 2019 to 2023; and the average waiting time to access services once a referral has been made, in tabular form; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

Dear Minister Burke,

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. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The Overweight and Obesity pathway was approved by the HSE Chief Clinical Officer Clinical Forum in 2022. It is in line with the HSE Model of Care for the Management of Overweight and Obesity (2021) and sets out the services required for individuals to manage overweight and obesity. In 2024, obesity care was identified as a focus area within the Waiting List Action Plan (WLAP), building on progress made in 2023 access to obesity care.

Obesity is a chronic, relapsing disease in which excess body weight impairs an individuals' health. Severe and complex obesity requires specialist assessment and treatment. The Obesity Model of Care (2021) recommends that adults with severe and complex obesity access level 3 medical management services prior to accessing level 4 services for bariatric surgery. Historically, Ireland has limited service provision for obesity resulting in growing waiting lists and longer waiting times to access both level 3 and level 4 clinics. In 2023, specialist services for obesity received dedicated funding for the first time as part of WLAP to uplift staffing and increase service activity.



This funding was used to uplift two adult services in Ireland East Hospital Group (St Columcille’s Hospital and St Vincent’s University Hospital) and Saolta Hospital Group (Galway University Hospital) and one children’s services in Children’s Health Ireland (Temple St Hospital). Staff were on boarded in 2023.

Prior to 2023, the HSE did not collect waiting list data for obesity management and bariatric surgery nationally. These patients were included in endocrinology and general surgery waiting lists. The tables below set out data collected by the Obesity National Clinical Programme since 2023. Waiting lists vary based on the number of referrals to the service, numbers of patients seen at new appointments by the service and specific waiting list validation initiatives undertaken by the service. Waiting lists have been further impacted by increased demand for obesity care since the Covid 19 pandemic, increased recognition of obesity as a chronic disease and availability of new obesity treatments.

**Table 1 outlines the number of people waiting to access obesity clinical appointments in level 3 clinics.**

	<b>Dec 2022</b>	<b>Dec 2023</b>	<b>March 2024</b>
St Columcille’s Hospital	4532	5033	5028
Galway University Hospital	1100	1319	666
Childrens Health Ireland	392	344	388

**Table 2 outlines the number of people waiting to access obesity clinical appointments in level 4 surgical services.**

	<b>Dec 2022</b>	<b>Dec 2023</b>	<b>March 2024</b>
<b>St Vincent’s University Hospital</b>	80	17	15
<b>Galway University Hospital</b>	152	38	41

Obesity clinics do not report average waiting times to access services, wait time bands are used as a proxy for this. Table 3 sets out a breakdown by individual hospital of all patients waiting for appointments in time bands (data as of end January 2024).

**Table 3: Breakdown of patients waiting for services in time-bands as of March 2024.**

Volumes <=5 are not disclosed in the table below in line with data protection guidelines.

<b>Hospital</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>0-3</b>	<b>3-6</b>	<b>6-9</b>	<b>9-12</b>	<b>12-15</b>	<b>15-18</b>	<b>18-21</b>	<b>21-24</b>	<b>24-36</b>	<b>36-48</b>	<b>48+</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>St</b>	<b>Level 3</b>	431	335	381	402	316	345	410	419	1002	376	611	5028



<b>Columcille's Hospital</b>														
<b>Galway University Hospital</b>	<b>Level 3</b>													
		329	214	103	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	666
<b>St Vincent's University Hospital</b>	<b>Bariatric Surgery</b>													15
<b>Galway University Hospital</b>	<b>Bariatric Surgery</b>	18						8					8	41

**Key points:**

- Three specialist obesity services serve all adults and children with severe and complex obesity in Ireland and consequently, demand exceeds capacity.
- Adult services typically get 1200-1500 referrals per year. Children's services typically get 360 referrals per year.
- While years of lack of funding and demand exceeding capacity has led to significant waiting times for access to all services, new funding has resulted in uplifts in activity in all services.
- Bariatric surgery waiting lists and waiting time to access surgery has reduced significantly.
- Integrated care pathways have been developed to offer individuals on waiting list access to clinical triage/prioritisation where necessary, along with the potential to access community services where appropriate while they are waiting for Level 3 services.
- Use of technology (telehealth, electronic registers, e-referrals) has been embedded in clinical pathways.
- The additional staff are working at the top of their licence to deliver efficient, evidence-based obesity care within the structures of the multidisciplinary team.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Karen Gaynor  
Programme Manager Obesity National Clinical Programme