



Oifig an Stiúrthóra Náisiúnta Cúnta
Oibríochtaí Meabhairshláinte

Ospidéal Naomh Lómáin, Baile Phámar,
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Deputy David Cullinane
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

08th August 2024

PQ Number: 30364/24

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health the cost of delivering universal counselling; and the number of WTE required, by grade.-David Cullinane.

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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 HSE National Counselling Service provides Counselling in Primary Care (CIPC) to adult patients experiencing mild to moderate psychological difficulties who present in the primary care setting. Currently all adults in receipt of a medical card are eligible for the service. CIPC is available in each HSE CHO area and provides up to eight counselling sessions with a professionally qualified counsellor/therapist. CIPC counsellors utilise a range of counselling interventions depending on presenting issues and assessed needs.

Depression and anxiety constitute the main reasons for referral. It is generally accepted that 90% of mental health needs can successfully be addressed in primary care settings, and for many, CIPC therefore provides a person-centred, high-quality service 'in the right place, at the right time', in line with the Sláintecare reform programme. For GPs, CIPC offers an alternative to medication for people presenting with mild to moderate mental health difficulties.

Currently CIPC service is available to the adult GMS population only. It receives on average 17, 660 referrals per year. If eligibility is expanded to allow universal access by the general adult population it is estimated that:

- The population eligible for the service would increase three fold from 1,230,094 to 3,930,572 [based on 2022 Census population data <https://data.cso.ie/>]
- This three-fold increase in the population eligible for the service would generate at least a three-fold increase in referrals to the NCS CIPC service - approximately 52,100 referrals per year.



- A threefold increase in demand for the service would require an increase in staffing numbers of Counsellor/therapists from current staffing level of approximately 200 counsellor/therapists [employed and contract] to 600 i.e. 400 additional WTE Counsellor/Therapists.
- Senior Counsellor/Therapists would be required to ensure clinical governance. In the context of universal access to counselling 100 additional senior counsellor/therapist posts would be required to provide clinical governance for the expanded service.
- Business support needs include adequate administrative support to ensure efficient service provision: 1 Grade IV per 10 clinical staff (40); 1 grade VI per 5 grade IV staff (8).

Estimate Costing - Expansion of CIPC to All Adults	No.	Costing [including ER PRSI]
WTE Counsellor/Therapist	400	36,028,569
WTE Senior Counsellor/Therapist	100	10,738,856
WTE Grade VI	8	2,245,085
WTE Grade IV	40	612,776
Total full year cost		49,865,397

https://healthservice.hse.ie/documents/4325/FINAL_1_January_2024_Pay_Scales_v3.pdf

The expansion of counselling services would also have an impact on the ability to provide the service within existing premises and accommodation and would likely require leasing of property which is unquantifiable at this time.

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Mc Cusker
General Manager
National Mental Health Services