



Oifig an Stiúirthóra Oibríochtaí
An tSeirbhís Náisiúnta
Bloc 4, Lárionad Gnó,
Tulach Mhór,
Co. Uíbh Fhailí, R35 FH59

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WM/PQ/21765/24

28TH May 2024

Deputy Seán Crowe TD,
Dáil Éireann,
Leinster House,
Dublin 2.

PQ/21765/24

To ask the Minister for Health the number of persons treated by the Pathfinder service; the total budget allocated to the service since it became operational; and if plans are in place to expand the programme across the State.
Seán Crowe

Dear Deputy Crowe,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) National Ambulance Service (NAS) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for response.

Pathfinder is a service designed to safely keep older people who phone 112/999 in their own home rather than taking them to a hospital emergency department. It is a NAS initiative which is currently dependent on the allocation of Health and Social Care Professional (HSCP) resources from acute hospitals. Pathfinder is in operation in a number of locations around the country including Limerick, Tallaght, Tralee, Cork, Kilkenny, Waterford, Galway, Letterkenny and north Dublin and was initially intended to operate as a winter plan initiative.

The number of calls attended by the Pathfinder service in 2024 (January to April) is 10,181.

As part of future strategic planning, NAS has proposed the stabilisation, implementation and expansion of a model that is informed by a clinical evaluation of the current model, currently underway, and which has already identified some challenges and some changes that a future model will need to address, if further expansion is to be considered, e.g.:

- Relativity to the construct of the local ICPOP Teams, many of which are now established and include a Geriatrician post.
- Integration with ICPOP teams to facilitate improved referrals and increased ED avoidance (some Pathfinder teams work very closely with ICPOP teams while others do not).
- The need for and sustainability of Clinical Specialist HSCP posts in the Pathfinder team when Senior HSCP posts can practice unsupervised.
- Not all teams operate consistently, e.g. some will respond to patients in Nursing Homes while some do not.
- While NAS Pathfinder is rostered on a 12/7 basis, acute hospital provided HSCPs work on a 5/5 basis and are not available at weekends.





**Oifig an Stiúrtóra Oibríochtaí
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- NAS needs to put in place a HSCP Leadership post, reporting to the NAS Clinical Director to lead the development of HSCP posts across NAS services into the future.

While it is important that the acute system accrues the benefits of developing any ED avoidance pathway for patients, it is also clear from the above requirements that this is likely to be more successful in terms of cross pathway referral, if the teams are co-terminus with ICPOP teams rather than aligned to acute sites.

For now, the HSE National Service Plan 2024 does not make any provision for the long term funding of such services. Therefore, the focus remains on evaluating the model on 2024 to inform any potential expansion from 2025 onwards.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

William Merriman
Director of Operations
National Ambulance Service

