



Oifig an Stiúrthóir Cúnta Náisiúnta,
Foireann Míchumais Náisiúnta,
An Chéad Urlár - Oifigí 13, 14, 15,
Áras Phlásóg na Rós, Coimpléasc Gnó na hOllscoile,
Páirc Náisiúnta Teicneolaíochta,
Caladh an Treoigh,
Luimneach.

Office of the Assistant National Director,
National Disability Team,
First Floor- Offices 13, 14, 15,
Roselawn House, University Business Complex,
National Technology Park,
Castletroy,
Limerick.

14th June 2024

Deputy Catherine Connolly,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: catherine.connolly@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Connolly,

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: 23850/24

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth to provide an update on the steps being taken to expedite the preliminary team assessments (PTA) following the High Court judgment in March 2022 which found that these comprehensive assessments carried out since January 2020 did not meet the requirements of the Disability Act 2005; the measures in place to ensure that families who have been waiting for extended periods receive the necessary support and services in a timely manner; the steps being taken to address the resource constraints and staff vacancies that are exacerbating these delays (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter

Details Supplied: Families have faced significant delays and crises. Despite assurances from the HSE that comprehensive reassessments will be provided in order of application date, there is not timeframe for when these assessments will occur. Families have been on the waiting list for over three years and these delays are preventing access to critical services and vital early intervention supports.

HSE Response

The Assessment of Need process is set out in the [Disability Act, 2005](#). The aim of an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act is to identify whether a person has a disability, the nature and extent of the disability, any health and education needs arising from that disability, as well as what services are required to meet those needs.



The judgement of Ms Justice S Phelan in the case of CTM & JA v the HSE was delivered in March 2022. This judgment found that the Preliminary Team Assessment approach described in the HSE's Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need does not meet the requirements of the Disability Act. This judgement in effect requires the HSE to deliver diagnostic assessments where necessary and appropriate as part of the Assessment of Need process. This ruling has had a significant impact operationally and has resulted in a growth in the numbers of overdue Assessments of Need. The requirement for services to prioritise the statutory Assessment of Need process has also impacted significantly on their capacity to provide necessary intervention / treatment for children with disabilities.

As a result of the Judgement, activity indicates that there has been an increase in the total number of applications 'overdue for completion', which now stands at 9,924 (including 369 applications for which an extended time-frame was negotiated with the parent on the grounds of there being exceptional circumstances as provided for in paragraph 10 of the regulations).

Overall, it is estimated that there are approximately 15,000 applications 'overdue for completion' at this time. This includes AONs currently overdue and Preliminary Team Assessments that now require diagnostic assessment.

In addition, an estimated 8,000 new AONs are anticipated during 2024 based on the number of AONs received over in 2023.

Actions to address AON waiting lists

The HSE's National Clinical Programme for People with Disability (NCPD) has led the process of developing a revised AON Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) incorporating guidance on completion of clinical assessment to replace the element of the SOP which was found to be non-compliant with the Disability Act (2005) – the Preliminary Team Assessment. This was launched on July 14th 2023.

Additional funding

Approximately €10.5m was spent to address waiting lists for clinical assessments identified through the Assessment of Need process and in 2024, €5m in one off funding has been allocated. This funding is being utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector. In addition, the HSE at local level is using time related savings to source AON assessments privately for children in the order as registered on the AOS (AON information management system).

Targeted Initiative focussed on long waiting families

A new targeted waiting list initiative is in place and the Government has allocated funding of €6.89 million to facilitate the HSE to procure up to 2,500 additional AONs, with delivery targeted over the next 6 months. This funding is in addition to existing HSE core funding of the €5m mentioned above, allocated for procurement of private assessments.

This waiting list initiative will target those families waiting longest for AONs, with the HSE reimbursing clinicians directly through the procurement of capacity from approved private providers. This provides a more equitable and fair approach rather than reimbursement of parents directly.

Funding has been allocated to each CHO area for the provision of Assessment of Need.

It is envisaged that this initiative will be progressed through the existing framework of providers procured by each CHO Area, while also seeking to expand the list with any new private provision.



Roadmap for Service Improvement 2023 – 2026, Disability Services for Children and Young People

The HSE's Roadmap for Service Improvement 2023 – 2026, Disability Services for Children and Young People was approved by the HSE Board on July 28th and launched by the Government and the HSE on Tuesday 24th October 2023.

The Roadmap is a targeted Service Improvement Programme to achieve a quality, accessible, equitable and timely service for all children with complex needs as a result of a disability and their families.

It sets out the overall aim for Children's Disability Services, provided by the HSE and its partner agencies, for every child to have a childhood of inclusive experiences where they can have fun, learn, develop interests and skills, and form positive relationships with others in a range of different settings.

Recruitment for CDNTs overall

Since 2019, more than 610 development posts have been allocated to children's disability services across the country. However, we also know that there are over 700 vacant whole time equivalent posts in our CDNTs. The HSE is operating in a very competitive global market for healthcare talent as there are significant shortages of qualified healthcare professionals across the globe. The HSE Community Operations Disability Services is working collaboratively with the CDNT lead agencies at CHO level to promote CDNTs as a workplace of choice in a competitive employment market.

The Roadmap, which is now in its implementation phase, contains a robust suite of CDNT Retention and Recruitment targets, the majority of which are now in train. For example;

- National Team Development Programme (2ND currently ongoing)
- Online lunchtime staff webinars (on-going monthly)
- Online basecamp account for staff and team managers to share innovative programmes, practices and resources across the country
- Confined Senior grade competition for CDNTs
- Marketing CDNTs as a workplace of choice
- HSE HR engagement with graduates in person and via webinar
- Recordings of CDNT staff and parents on benefits of working or receiving services from a CDNT, used for recruitment of staff off national panels
- HSE Recruitment, Reform and Resourcing has featured CDNTs on their "Service in the Spotlight", hosted on the HSE Career Hub. The 16,000 individuals now registered on the hub will receive notice of the targeted recruitment campaign for CDNTs and be encouraged to share with family and friends, extending our reach into the market.

The HSE is also progressing to commence the following;

- Student Sponsorship Programmes.
- Additional 20 Senior Clinical Psychology trainee placements.
- Confined Senior Grade competition and the upgrading of up to 60 senior posts to clinical specialist grade, initiatives to support retention, service quality and safety, and providing a career pathway.
- A recruitment plan for 462 HSCP by the end of 2024.
- 300 therapy assistants over 2023-2025 to support HSCPs in delivering most effective and efficient services in environments appropriate to each child's needs.

The Roadmap has Five Working Groups who will work under and report into the Service Improvement Programme Board via the National Service Improvement Lead for implementation of the Roadmap.

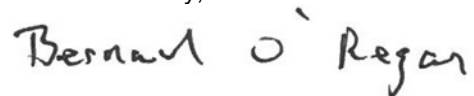
Working Group 1 **Integrated Children's Services** – has responsibility for the implementation of National Access Policy, Equity of Access to Aids and Appliances across all CHOs; and the Review of HSE Tusla Joint Protocol.



Working group 2: **Service Access and Improvement** – has responsibility for Waitlist Management and Services; Optimising Teams Efficiencies, Effectiveness and Governance; AONs overdue for completion; and the development of a National Capital plan to enable all staff of a CDNT to be co-located.

WG 3: Workforce – has responsibility for developing a recruitment strategy for all CDNTs regardless of the Lead Agency; Retention of existing CDNT staff; Deployment of Students/Trainees/New Graduates; and Development of Existing Staff.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bernard O'Regan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Bernard O'Regan
Assistant National Director
National Disability Team

