



**Oifig an Stiúrthóir Cúnta Náisiúnta,**  
Foireann Míchumais Náisiúnta,  
An Chéad Urlár - Oifigí 13, 14, 15,  
Àras 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.

31<sup>st</sup> October 2024

Deputy Pauline Tully,  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
E-mail: [pauline.tully@oireachtas.ie](mailto:pauline.tully@oireachtas.ie)

Dear Deputy Tully,

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: 39165/24**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the progress being made in addressing the delivery of assessment of need and therapy services for disabled children and the implementation of the Roadmap for Service Improvement 2023-2026; and if he will make a statement on the matter.*

**HSE Response**

The Health Services Executive, and the Lead Agencies it funds, have been working continuously to drive improvements and develop supports for children with Disabilities.

**Assessment of Need under the Disability Act 2005**

There has been a 25% increase in the number of applications for AON received in 2023 – from 6,775 in 2022 to 8,472 in 2023. This growth has continued into 2024, with a further 5,345 received to end Quarter 2 (1,087 up on same period last year).

The increased numbers of applications for Assessment of Need, which is a legal entitlement under the Disability Act 2005, is a reflection of the increase in population and of families exploring all options for accessing services for their child.

The Disability Act outlines the statutory timelines under which Assessments of Need under the Act must be completed. In summary, the assessment report must be completed within 6 months of the date the application was received. While the HSE endeavours to meet its legislative obligations under the Act, it has struggled to achieve compliance with these timeframes. At end of Quarter 2, 2024, 10% of assessments were completed within the timeframes set out in the Disability Act 2005 and accompanying Regulations.



The total number of applications ‘overdue for completion’ at end of Quarter 2, 2024, now stands at 11,131 (including 521 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) – which represents an increase of 25% on the end 2023 figure of 8,893.

### **Actions to address AON waiting lists**

The HSE’s National Clinical Programme for People with Disability (NCPDP) 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 in July, 2023.

### **Additional funding**

Approximately €10.5m was spent in 2023 to address waiting lists for clinical assessments identified through the Assessment of Need process and in 2024, an additional €5m in one off funding has been allocated. This funding is being utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector. The HSE at local level is also using time related savings to source AON assessments privately for children in the order as registered on the AOS (AON information management system) in line with the date of receipt of a completed AON application.

### **Targeted Initiative focussed on long waiting families**

A targeted waiting list initiative commenced in May 2024 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 targets 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.

As the outsourcing body, the HSE is progressing this through the existing framework of providers procured by each CHO Area, while also seeking to expand the list with any new private provision.

Please see Table 1 below which gives information on the numbers of outsourced under this initiative AONs completed for June, July and August 2024.

**Table 1**

<b>2024</b>	<b>Number of AONs completed under new initiative</b>	<b>Cost</b>	<b>Average Cost per AON</b>
June	379	€1,245,455	€3,300
July	342	€1,155,703	€3,379
August	371	€1,173,031	€3,162
<b>Total to date</b>	<b>1,092</b>	<b>€3,574,189</b>	<b>€3,273</b>

### **Childrens Disability Services**

In line with the Progressing Disability Services model, 93 CDNTs are aligned to 96 Community Healthcare Networks (CHNs) across the country and are providing services and supports for children aged from birth to 18 years of age. Each CDNT covers a specific geographical area and holds a waiting list for children with complex needs residing in that area.

The model of service for all CDNTs is family-centred and based on the needs of the child. This includes universal, targeted and specialised supports and interventions, as appropriate to the individual child and family. It is based on the



objectives of empowering and supporting parents and others who are with the child on a daily basis to facilitate the child's developmental needs.

The CDNTs are currently providing services and supports for over 42,000 children (Per August interim metrics report) and strategies and supports for urgent cases on the waitlist where staffing resources allow. However, there are significant challenges for CDNTs including:

- Significant staffing vacancies
- Growth in numbers of children with complex needs as a result of their disability.
- Growth in demand for Assessment of Need, diverting further resources away from interventions

## **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 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.

The Roadmap, now in its implementation phase, has established four Working Groups which report into a Service Improvement Programme Board every month which in turn reports to the Roadmap Oversight Group chaired by the Minister of State, Ann Rabbitte.

Working Group 1 **Integrated Children's Services** – has responsibility for the implementation of National Access Policy and the Primary Care, Disability, CAMHS Joint Working Protocol, 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.

Working Group 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.

Working Group 4: **Communication and Engagement** – has responsibility for developing and ensuring the delivery of a rolling Communication Plan for the Roadmap and CDNT service, which is a key priority; review and updating the HSE PDS Website to meet information needs of families, further Staff Engagement and Workshop days and ensuring sustainability of the Family Forums and Family Representative Groups.

A 5<sup>th</sup> group: will focus on optimising integration between Education and Health and support for special schools. Discussions are ongoing between DCEDIY and Department of Education in regard to its set up and shared leadership.

The Roadmap contains 60 actions of which 12 have been completed and the majority of remaining actions are in train. These include a robust suite of 21 staff retention and recruitment actions.

### **Special Schools**

In line with Government policy, the HSE has recruited approximately 80 of the 135 additional posts provided for by Government to restore supports to special schools to pre-reconfiguration levels.

HSE National Disabilities continue to engage with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Education in the context of ongoing discussions to explore further initiatives to progress the return of therapists to Special Schools.

In August 2024, Government asked the HSE to initiate a pilot of dedicated supports, under the governance of the CDNTs, to six special schools initially, two in Dublin and four in Cork.

The HSE continues work with Lead Agencies to recruit staff for provision of on-site therapy supports in the six schools and meanwhile, progressing interim measures including redeployment of existing staff from CDNTs, private service providers, and engaging recently retired therapists.



The HSE is working with representatives from DCEDIY, Dept. of Education and the NCSE at the National Oversight Group to lead the overall Pilot. In addition, local working groups have been established and are currently developing a joint working model of service.

A further ten schools are to be included in the Pilot and the National Oversight Group has commenced consideration of which schools are to be included. It is expected that this will be concluded and the schools announced later in October 2024.

## Recruitment

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 demand for these HSCP professions significantly outstrips supply both nationally and internationally. The HSE Resourcing Strategy '*Resourcing our Future*' was launched in May 2023 to ensure a sufficient domestic supply of health care staff. The strategy is being implemented by the services locally to maximise the resourcing and delivery of publicly funded health services for the future.

Seven of the disciplines working in children's disability teams have been included on the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's Critical Skills Occupations List.

However, through ongoing effective work with our funded agencies with regard to recruitment, we undertook a focused Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) recruitment and interview process in 2024.

Work is ongoing to increase recruitment into disability services from recruitment stage through to promotional activity. Webinars were held in July 2024 '**Working in a Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) to increase interest in CDNTs and the presentation from this is available** through <https://careerhub.hse.ie/cdnt-webinar/>

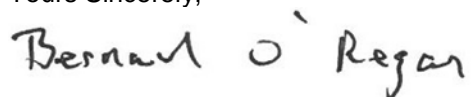
These webinars were well attended with all participants encouraged to register their interest for a job within Children's Disability Network Teams through [Childrens Disability Network - HSE Career Hub](#)

The HSE is optimising multiple applicant engagement opportunities to encourage uptake of CDNT vacancies including recruitment fairs, outreach to third level colleges and secondary schools, presence at national events such as the recent Ploughing Championships and virtual engagements. In addition, the clinical placements in CDNTs have been increased so that students graduate with an interest in and familiarity with CDNTs.

To optimise recruitment into our funded agencies, the HSE are facilitating direct access for funded agencies to existing HSE HSCP panels which will shorten the recruitment process for them and will provide direct access to competent and eligible candidates. The HSE have also enabled our funded agencies to advertise their vacant posts through our advertisement channels which provides them with direct access to the substantial candidate pools registered the HSE's CareerHub portal.

These activities form part of an ongoing suite of recruitment initiatives to populate vacancies on Children's Disability Network Teams.

Yours Sincerely,



**Bernard O'Regan**  
**Assistant National Director**  
**National Disability Team**



