



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,

22nd October 2024

Deputy David Cullinane,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.-
E-mail: david.cullinane@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

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: 39671/24

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of children on waiting lists for an assessment of need for each quarter of each year 2019-2024, inclusive, in tabular form; the number overdue for completion; the number of estimated PTAs waiting for a complete AON, in tabular form as reported in the Roadmap for Service Improvement 2023-2026: Disability Services for Children and Young People –

HSE Response

Assessment of Need under the Disability Act, 2005

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 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) .



We anticipate that, by the end of 2024, there will be over 18,981 AONs due for completion, comprising: AONs overdue at end of Q2 2024 (11,131); AONs expected during the remainder of 2024 (5,350); as well as 2,500 Preliminary Team Assessments carried out under the previous Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), an approach found by the High Court not to have met the requirements of the Disability Act

Assessment of Need is reported on quarterly. The most recent data available is the end of Quarter 2 2024. Please see the Table below.

Table 1: Applications overdue for Completion on 30th June 2024

CHO	Total Overdue	Overdue/ Exceptional Circumstances	Overdue/ No Exceptional Circumstances
AREA 1	437	39	398
AREA 2	264	26	238
AREA 3	380	0	380
AREA 4	849	20	829
AREA 5	523	33	490
AREA 6	975	143	832
AREA 7	3732	1	3731
AREA 8	1123	106	1017
AREA 9	2848	153	2695
Total	11131	521	10610

The number of applications ‘overdue for completion’ represents an increase of 25% on the end 2023 figure of 8,893. This is largely due to the following:

- A 25% increase in the number of applications for AON received in 2023 – from 6,775 to 8,472. This growth has continued into 2024, with a further **5,345 received to end Quarter 2** (1,087 up on same period last year).
- A total of 3,205 AONs were completed in 2023. The percentage of these AONs that show ‘No Disability’ has increased significantly from 15.8% in 2010 to 27% in 2023. The significance of this is that the AO and possibly Assessors would have spent time assessing these applications as they would have either gone through the AON process and deemed not to have a disability (as defined by the Disability Act), or they would have begun the process and been identified as not having a disability during the desk-top phase. **This trend has continued into the first half of 2024, with 32% of AONs indicating ‘no disability’.**
- The judgement in the case of CTM & JA v the HSE March 2022, which found that the Preliminary Team Assessment (PTA) approach described in the HSE’s SOP for Assessment of Need did not meet the requirements of the Disability Act. The HSE is now required to deliver diagnostic assessments where necessary and appropriate as part of the AON.
- The number of applications for AON under the Act has risen steadily since its implementation in June 2007, largely driven by the High Court ruling in 2009 which confirmed that eligibility for AON applies to persons born on or after 1st June 2002.
- The non-commencement of the Education for Persons with Special Education Needs (EPSEN) Act (2004). The number of children aged five and over, and in addition of school-going age, has risen steadily as a percentage of all applications received. **At the end of 2011, the figure stood at 26%, while throughout 2023, this figure averaged 62%. In the first half of 2024, this figure has increased to 68%.** This is a reflection that the AON process is an accumulative process in terms of numbers of children and young people seeking access.

Please see the table on the next page which gives the number of AON applications overdue at the end of each quarter for 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and Q2, 2024 as extracted from the AOS (AON information management system).



Table 2: Applications overdue for completion end of each Quarter 2019 to end Q2, 2024

Year	End of Quarter	Overdue	<1 month	1 - 3 Months	>3 Months
2019	Q1	3,686	329	527	2,830
	Q2	3,768	381	659	2,728
	Q3	4,100	524	743	2,833
	Q4	4,644	525	863	3,256
2020	Q1	5,083	577	824	3,682
	Q2	5,533	498	1,007	4,028
	Q3	6,058	348	921	4,789
	Q4	5,078	210	272	4,596
2021	Q1	3,503	282	306	2,915
	Q2	3,609	439	678	2,492
	Q3	2,907	460	462	1,985
	Q4	1,986	355	473	1,157
2022	Q1	1,718	267	338	1,113
	Q2	2,531	365	717	1,449
	Q3	3,494	469	832	2,193
	Q4	4,613	604	854	3,155
2023	Q1	5,484	503	775	4,206
	Q2	6,495	448	1,075	4,972
	Q3	7,608	697	1,035	5,876
	Q4	8,893	756	1,174	6,963
2024	Q1	9,924	664	1,119	8,141
	Q2	11,131	618	1,478	9,035

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 was allocated. This funding was utilised to procure diagnostic ASD assessments from the private sector. The HSE at local level 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 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 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.

In the first half of 2024, 1,841 AONs have been completed, which is a 28% increase on the same period last year. This increase is due in part to this new targeted waiting list initiative that commenced end of May 2024.

Information received from the CHO Areas indicates that under this targeted initiative, 1,092 AONs have been commissioned from private providers/assessors during June, July and August at a cost of €3,574,189. This suggests that the average cost per AON is roughly €3,300.

	Number of AONs	Cost	Average Cost per AON
June	379	€1,245,455	€3,300
July	342	€1,155,703	€3,379
August	371	€1,173,031	€3,162
Total to date	1,092	€3,574,189	€3,273

However, despite this increased activity in relation to AON, waiting lists are growing as demand outstrips system capacity. In this regard, we anticipate that, by the end of 2024, there will be over 18,981 AONs due for completion, comprising: AONs overdue at end of Q2 2024 (11,131); AONs expected during the remainder of 2024 (5,350); as well as 2,500 Preliminary Team Assessments carried out under the previous Standard Operating Procedure (SOP), an approach found by the High Court not to have met the requirements of the Disability Act.

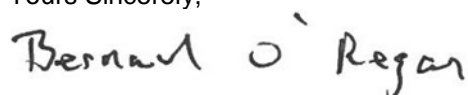
The increased numbers of applications for Assessment of Need, which is a legal entitlement under the Disability Act 2005, is a reflection of the increase in population and of families exploring all options for accessing services for their child.

However, an AON is not required to access Primary Care, Children's Disability Services or Mental Health Services providing services including assessment, goals setting, intervention and follow up services. This direct access ensures more efficient and timely access for many families.

The situation in relation to AON is not the same in every area. The numbers of applications in some areas have historically been significantly lower than other areas. This reflects a service model used in those areas to engage with families as soon as practicable and support them to access services without them having to resort to the Assessment of Need legal route.

This will be explored by the HSE in the context of the Roadmap for Service Improvement actions relating to Services Access and Improvement, with the objective to spread this good practice across all teams nationally, and rebalancing the demand for AON with CDNT Service Provision, including workshops with families and with staff on how this can be achieved.

Yours Sincerely,



Bernard O'Regan
Assistant National Director
National Disability Team

