



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.

25th October 2024

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan,
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.
E-mail: padraig.osullivan@oireachtas.ie

Dear Deputy O'Sullivan,

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: 40448/24

To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the cost of doubling the regional assessment hubs around the country; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

HSE Response

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 3, 2024, 10.3% 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 3, 2024, now stands at 12,722 (including 558 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 30% 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) 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 in 2023 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)

During 2023, the HSE also developed AON Administrative Hubs in Community Healthcare Areas (CHOs) 1, 4, 5, 7, 8 and established AON Assessment Hubs in CHOs 3, 6 and 9.

Information is not collated regarding how much of the funding was utilised by the Health Service Executive on the regional assessment of need hubs in 2023. In this context, it is not possible to give information on the cost of doubling the regional assessment hubs around the country.

Under the *Roadmap for Service Improvement 2023-2026, Disability Services for Children and Young People*, these AON Hubs will be amalgamated into 6 AON Assessment Hubs aligned to the 6 Regional Health Areas.

Assessments of Need under the Disability Act 2005 completed

To date in 2024, 2,888 AONs have been completed, which is a 24% increase on the same period last year. This increase is due in part to the new targeted waiting list initiative that commenced end of May 2024, where the Government 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, 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. 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.

Information received from the CHO Areas indicates that under this targeted initiative, 1,410 AONs have been commissioned from private providers/assessors during June, July, August and September at a cost of €4,655,182. This suggests that the average cost per AON is €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
September	318	€1,080,993	€3,399
Total to date	1,410	€4,655,182	€3,302

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 17,472 AONs due for completion, comprising: AONs overdue at end of Q3 2024 (12,722); AONs expected during the remainder of 2024 (2,250); 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.



Yours Sincerely,

Bernard O'Regan

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

