



**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.

4<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Deputy Peadar Tóibín,  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.  
E-mail: [peadar.toibin@oireachtas.ie](mailto:peadar.toibin@oireachtas.ie)

Dear Deputy Tóibín,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following parliamentary questions, which were submitted to this department for response.

**PQ: 37959/24**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the steps being taken to reduce the lengthy waiting times for children with autism to access urgently needed therapy services, provided by the children's disability network team.*

**PQ: 37960/24**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth if a national database can be established once children are diagnosed with autism to determine and fully plan for educational and therapeutic services.*

**HSE Response**

The National Policy on Access to Services for Children & Young People with Disability & Developmental Delay ensures that children are directed to the appropriate service based on the complexity of their presenting needs i.e. Primary Care for non-complex functional difficulties and Children's Disability Network Teams for complex functional difficulties arising from their disability. Children with ASD may access supports from a Children's Disability Network Team or from Primary Care or from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) depending on the complexity of their needs.

**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.

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.

A diagnosis is not required to access CDNT or Primary Care services. CDNTs and Primary Care provide diagnostic assessments e.g. where required to inform a plan of therapeutic intervention, for educational purposes, or an Assessment of Need under the Disability Act.

The CDNTs are currently providing services and supports for over 46,000 children 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 need
- Growth in demand for Assessment of Need, diverting further resources away from interventions

## **Efforts to reduce waiting times Childrens Disability Services**

### **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, which is 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, Anne Rabbitte.

The WGs have wide membership including HSE, Section 38 and 39 front line disabilities staff and management, parent voices, staff reps, Primary Care, CAMHS and Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth. The WGs have agreed their Terms of Reference and their Project Charters for the Roadmap Actions within their scope.

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 and ensuring the delivery of 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.

## **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 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.

## **National Database**

### **Electronic Health Records (EHR)**

In the past ten years alone, there has been an extraordinary change in how digital technology affects our everyday lives. Online services have become faster and more accessible, the use of smartphones and smartphone apps has become ubiquitous, broadband and high speed connections have become far more readily available.

Digital Health is key to supporting the health service in delivering universal healthcare, in planning for the population's health needs, building integrated care models, and ensuring safety, quality and sustainability in delivering health services.

As per the recently published digital framework, *"Digital for Care: A Digital Health Framework for Ireland 2024-2030"*, which sets out a roadmap to digitally transform health services in Ireland and improve access for patients.

The delivery of Electronic Health Records (EHR) across all six health regions will see the totality of the service user's record held centrally.

Current systems in place include:

### **NASS**

The National Ability Support System (NASS) provides a record of persons in receipt of disability services, to include both existing service usage and future service need. NASS is a national planning tool run by the Health Research Board, in conjunction with the HSE and disability service providers nationally.



## Children's Disability Network Team IMS

Specifically in terms of children's disability services, the HSE has developed a Children's Disability Network Team Information Management System (CDNTIMS), which has been rolled out to all HSE run Children's Disability Network Teams. Work is underway with Section 38 and Section 39 Disability Service Providers to extend the roll out to Children's Disability Network Teams run by their organisations.

## AON

In addition, an Assessment of Need tracking system is in place to manage the process of Assessment of Need under the Disability Act 2005 from application through to assessment and the delivery of a service statement.

The Action Plan for Disability Services 2024-2026, sets out a three year programme designed to tackle the deficits highlighted in the Disability Capacity Review to 2032, which identified the demand for specialist community-based disability services arising from demographic change, and considerable levels of unmet need.

## Services for people with Autism

The Service Improvement Programme Board for the Autistic Community has been tasked with leading out on an agreed set of priorities that will have greatest impact in terms of shaping how services can be delivered to autistic people. It is also tasked with creating greater awareness of autism in terms of supporting clinicians, other staff and local communities in promoting inclusion and fostering positive attitudes.

The Assessment and Pathways Working Group was established to develop a standardised assessment approach for use in all services dealing with the assessment of Autism to ensure that every assessment is of an acceptable and agreed standard, regardless of which service is being accessed. In addition, it seeks to agree a standardised service user journey and the implementation of a consistent core service offering across those providing services to people who are Autistic. The Working Group, including people with lived experience of autism, has consulted widely with key stakeholders in the design and formulation stage of the project; which has been particularly important in the context of the implementation of a tiered approach to assessment.

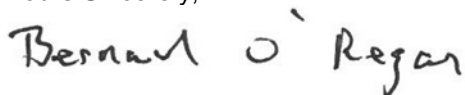
Its main work focus is

- To develop an operational model for a tiered approach to Autism Assessment through developing clear and functioning pathways to services.
- To strengthen Disability, Primary Care and Mental Health services by operating a shared Model of Service.
- An implementation plan to include training which takes cognisance of existing policies of the HSE.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> and final Phase of the Protocol piloting is now complete, and the evaluation is being independently undertaken in order that it can provide an impartial opinion on the usefulness and effectiveness of the Protocol. Following incorporation of learnings from the second phase of the piloting of the protocol, it is planned to have the final report submitted in Q4 2024 to the Service Improvement Programme Board for the Autistic Community.

We anticipate national rollout of the final version of the protocol will commence with training in each of the 6 Health Regions before the end of Q1 2025.

Yours Sincerely,



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

