



**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.

10<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Deputy David Cullinane,  
Dail Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.-  
E-mail: [david.cullinane@oireachtas.ie](mailto: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 questions, which were submitted to this department for response.

**PQ: 37981/24**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of assessment of need applications in each of the years since 2007; the number completed and not completed; the number outsourced privately; and the total cost of these, in tabular form.*

**PQ: 37982/24**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the number of assessments of need which have been outsourced, by provider, in each of the years 2019 to date in 2024, in tabular form.*

**PQ: 37983/24**

*To ask the Minister for Children; Equality; Disability; Integration and Youth the total cost of outsourcing of assessments of need for the period 2019-2023 and to date in 2024, in tabular form*

**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.

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.

### Data regarding Assessment of Need

Please see the Table 1 below which gives data on the numbers of Applications received and completed per year since 2007. The numbers overdue at the end of each year is also given

Please note that this information is extracted from the Assessment Officer System Database which does not distinguish between Assessments of Need which were outsourced or which were completed by the HSE.

**Table 1**

Year	Number of AON applications	Number of AONs completed	Number of overdue
2007	1,138	72	
2008	2,535	1,532	627
2009	2,525	1,937	884
2010	3,100	2,073	874
2011	3,349	3,043	699
2012	3,505	2,729	785
2013	4,261	2,883	1,146
2014	4,908	3,251	1,666
2015	5,818	3,318	2,528
2016	5,727	3,108	3,960
2017	5,839	3,614	4,312
2018	5,060	4,237	3,709
2019	6,596	3,312	4,644
2020	4,674	3,911	5,078
2021*	5,899	8,353	1,986
2022	6,755	3,071	4,613
2023	8,472	3,205	8,893
2024	Q1 2,603 Q2 2,742	Q1 849 Q2 992	Q1 9,924 Q2 11,131



From the 1st June 2007 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 a total of 87,590 completed applications have been received by the HSE.

\* Activity for 2021 indicates that 5,899 applications for AON were received and 8,353 AONs were completed. This was the highest number of completed assessments since Part 2 of the Act was commenced in June 2007. Furthermore, 4,220 service statements were provided during 2021. This led to a significant reduction in the total number of applications 'overdue for completion', which stood at 1,793 (excluding those 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) at the end of 2021.

The increase in activity in 2021 can be attributed to the additional €7.8 million in funding that was allocated to the AON process in August 2020 via Slaintecare. This was utilised to provide additional assessments through a range of options including overtime for existing staff and private procurement. The total number of overdue AONs reduced by 63% after this additional funding was allocated.

Also in 2021, the HSE had implemented a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the Assessment of Need process with the aim of ensuring that children with disabilities and their families accessed appropriate assessment and intervention as quickly as possible and to ensure that the approach to Assessment of Need is consistent across all areas. However, as outlined on the previous page, the Ms Justice S Phelan judgment in March 2022, found that the Preliminary Team Assessment approach described in the HSE's Standard Operating Procedure for Assessment of Need did not meet the requirements of the Disability Act.

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

The HSE's National Clinical Programme for People with Disability (NCPD) 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.

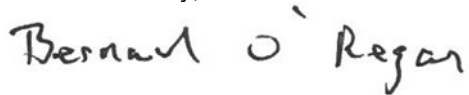
Please see Table 2 below which gives information on the numbers of outsourced under this initiative AONs completed for June, July and August 2024.



Table 2

2024	Number of AONs completed under new initiative	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
<b>Total to date</b>	<b>1,092</b>	<b>€3,574,189</b>	<b>€3,273</b>

Yours Sincerely,



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

