



Oifig na Príomhoifigeach agus Bainisteoir
Limistéar Sláinte Comhtháite Chiarraí

FSS Iardheiscirt, Ráth Teas, Tra Lí, Contae
Chiarraí, V92 YA25

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5th February 2025

Mr. Michael Cahill,
Dáil Éireann,
Dublin 2

PQ ref 46639/24

"To ask the Minister for Health to consider the urgent need for additional nursing staff/home carers to cater for our elderly loved ones, as there is a huge shortfall of required caring staff in Kerry, with Dingle, the Iveragh Peninsula, South, East & West Kerry being particularly badly affected; if he will provide additional nurses/carers to visit them regularly because if the present staff shortage is not dealt with people will need to return to a hospital setting, with all associated additional costs; and if he will make a statement on the matter."

Dear Deputy Cahill,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The home support service in this area comes under the remit of Services for Older Persons, HSE South West and is an essential service for thousands of people each day across the region. The service is highly valued by people who need it, and their families, because it enables older people to live independently and with dignity in their own homes for longer.

Despite a significant level of service provision in Cork and Kerry, the demand for home support continues to grow as the population aged over 65 years increases. Challenges in the home support sector are ongoing and well-documented nationally in relation to recruitment and retention of staff with certain areas experiencing increased pressures, particularly in our more rural locations. Approved private providers, who work with the HSE in fulfilling Home Support service requests, are experiencing similar staffing issues. Higher density urban areas have access to a wider pool of prospective staff when recruiting and private providers are also more plentiful in urban locations.

We continue to recruit staff to approved Health Care Assistant (HCA) Home Support posts to increase our workforce and meet service needs in the Kerry region. In 2024, 25 HCA staff were recruited in Kerry. Successful applicants have been deployed as a priority to the areas where they are most needed. The Home Support staff recruited in 2024 were allocated to a number of areas in Kerry to increase service provision including Listowel, Tralee, Gneeveguilla, Castleisland, Camp, Dingle, Kenmare, Ballylongford, Milltown, Ballyheigue, Killarney, Ardfert and Killorglin.

There are 6 newly-recruited HCA Home Support staff scheduled to commence working in Kerry during January 2025, of whom 3 have already started. We are currently running a further HCA Home Support recruitment campaign - this campaign is now live on the HSE website as well as across social media platforms with a closing date of 31st January 2025.

Home support works at its best when it is supplemented by other services. The triangle of home care, day care and meals on wheels supports is a key factor in supporting older people to age well in their own homes. Day Centres are a crucial part of social care provision in our communities, providing invaluable support for people who may, for any number of reasons, be



experiencing isolation and loneliness. Rehabilitative home support (or Reablement) also enables many older people in Kerry to return home following acute hospital admission, avoiding delays for the hospital system and avoiding admittance to long-term residential care. Reablement provides personalised, therapy-led home support, seeking to empower clients to regain their functional and social independence after a period of deconditioning, or illness. The service lasts for 4-6 weeks, with 80% maintaining or negating their need for home support.

As with our home support services, the Kerry area has also experienced staffing challenges in the recruitment of nursing staff to our Primary Care services. This was compounded by the recruitment pause in 2024. I am pleased to inform you that since the recruitment pause was lifted towards the latter end of 2024, the Kerry Primary Care Nursing Department has received approvals to backfill several posts which had fallen vacant. The recruitment process for these posts is well underway.

The HSE is committed to continuously reviewing our services in line with population health planning and Sláintecare principles and to maximising all available supports, including home support provision, for older persons in the Kerry region. HSE South West is committed to enabling people to continue to live in their own homes with confidence, security and dignity.

If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie O'Neill". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie O'Neill
Chief Officer
Cork Kerry Community Healthcare