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Deputy Paul Murphy.
Dail Eireann,
Leinster House,
Kildare Street,
Dublin 2.

04th February 2025

PQ Number: 46677/24

PQ Question: To ask the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the cost barriers that exist for those who are looking for help with an eating disorder; if he will ensure that support is made easily accessible for all those who need it, not just those who can afford it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. -Paul Murphy

Dear Deputy Murphy,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in response to the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

The HSE has prioritised eating disorder (ED) services as part of its National Clinical Programmes (NCP) which aim to develop high-quality, person-centred, integrated care through a clinician-led, evidence-based approach to service reform.

While a small number of people benefit from more intensive treatment through day programmes or inpatient care, the most effective treatment setting is in the community. Adults and children who may be experiencing an eating disorder can be referred to their local HSE Community Mental Health Team which is publically funded. There are 112 adult Community teams and 77 Child and Adolescent Mental Health teams nationwide. Dedicated community-based eating disorder services, where multidisciplinary teams have specialist training, can provide evidence-based care and treatment.

National Clinical Programmes for Eating Disorders

In January 2018, the HSE published a National Model of Care for Eating Disorders (MOC) in partnership with College of Psychiatrists' of Ireland and Bodywhys.

Key recommendations include:

- the development of a national network of dedicated eating disorder teams embedded within the mental health service
- a stepped model of outpatient, day patient and inpatient care provision based on clinical need
- the development of a skilled, trained workforce

The NCPED aims to establish an ED network (8 adult teams and 8 CAMHS teams) in accordance with the agreed Model of Care 2018. These multidisciplinary teams provide specialist eating disorder



assessment and treatment in the community and are the foundations of delivering quality eating disorder care across the stepped model of care. As of January 2025, there are 11 NCPED specialist (5 CAMHS teams and 6 Adult ED) teams at various stages of development across the HSE, with an adult team in recruitment in Community Healthcare Organisation 7. As part of Budget 2025, funding has been approved for both a new CAMHS team and a new adult team.

Access to Eating Disorder Services

Access to specialist eating disorders teams varies depending on stage of team development, resources and service delivery. A number of teams accept direct GP referrals and other teams accept referrals via community teams. In 2023, the data from specialist eating disorder teams show that 77% of service users are accessing an assessment within 8 weeks of referral and 68% start treatment within two weeks.

Outside of the specialist eating disorder teams, people with eating disorders present to health services at primary care level to their GP and local mental health teams. Average wait time data for eating disorder services is not available on a county level in the absence of comprehensive data collection systems. The average wait time depends on the severity of the presentation. Urgent presentations are prioritised to be seen and this is generally within 2 to 8 weeks.

Established CAMHS and Adult ED teams have active wait list support initiatives through the provision of psychoeducation resources, signposting to Bodywhys and liaising with primary care.

Inpatient Services

Children and Adolescents

Children and adolescents with an eating disorder diagnosis who require inpatient treatment can be referred to one of four publically funded CAMHS inpatient approved centres. These are: Linn Dara Approved Centre, Dublin, St Josephs Approved Centre in Dublin, Eist Linn Approved Centre in Cork and Merlin Park Approved Centre in Galway. Referrals are reviewed individually to determine the likely clinical benefits of admission as well as possible other treatment alternatives. Specialist eating disorder beds are available in Merlin Park Galway and Linn Dara. Staff in two CAMHS in-patient units can manage NG (nasogastric) feeding as a treatment option if required.

There are currently 16 dedicated eating disorder beds across the four CAMHS units. Of the 16 ED beds nationally, Linn Dara and Merlin Park have 12 Specialist Eating Disorder beds (SEDBs). A SEDB differs somewhat from a 'standard' ED bed in that a Specialist ED bed is one whereby the unit has specially trained staff who can manage NG feeding programmes within the unit.

The division of the beds is as follows:

- Linn Dara: 6 SEDBs
- Merlin Park: 6 SEDBs
- Eist Linn: 2 ED beds
- St Vincent's Fairview: 2 ED beds

As part of the new CHI hospital development, there will be an additional 8 Specialist Eating Disorder beds as part of a new 20 bedded CAMHS inpatient approved centre which will be collocated within the new children's hospital.

Adults

Adults who have an eating disorder diagnosis and require inpatient care can be referred to any of the HSE's acute inpatient mental health-approved centers around the country. CHO6 St. Vincent's University Hospital has 3 specialist inpatient beds. It is important to note that adults presenting with



an eating disorder can be treated in any acute hospital in the country if their physical health needs require this.

Additional Eating Disorder and Family Supports

Family Supports: Each team offers family supports and education, some teams have dedicated group programmes in place. First line evidence based intervention for children is Family Based Therapy (FBT). This is provided by all ED CAMHS Teams. All families are provided with information and resources and are signposted to use HSE Self Care App. All families are signed posted to completed PiLAR online family education programme with Bodywhys.

Bodywhys: The HSE provides funding annually to Bodywhys, the national advocacy agency for people with eating disorders and their families. Bodywhys provide a range of services (support groups, online groups, email and family programmes) for adults and young people with eating disorders, and their families.

The HSE also supports Bodywhys to run the PiLaR (Peer Led Resilience) Programme, a 4-week online modular based programme for parents, friends and carers of a person with an eating disorder to build resilience and gain support in their role as a supporter/friend. In 2022 926 families attended the programme.

The NCPED is currently working with Bodywhys to establish a national reference group of carer and service users.

HSE Eating Disorder Self Care App

In March 2019, the HSE launched the first [Self Care App](#) which provides valuable information for those:

- with an eating disorder caring for someone with an eating disorder
- worried about developing an eating disorder
- diagnosed or are recovering from an eating disorder

Further information on Eating Disorders can be found here:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/cspd/ncps/mental-health/eating-disorders/>

Further information about the Self Help App is available here: [HSE Eating Disorder Self Help App](#)

I trust this information is of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Mc Cusker

General Manager

Access and Integration: HSE Mental Health Services