

Joint Committee on Children, Equality, Disability & Integration
Joint Committee on Disability Matters

OPENING STATEMENT

Mr Paul Reid
Chief Executive Officer

2nd June 2022



Good morning Chairpersons and members of the Committees. Thank you for the invitation to attend the Committee meeting to discuss Progressing Children's Disability Services.

I am joined today by my colleagues:

- Ms Yvonne O'Neill, National Director, Community Operations
- Mr Bernard O'Regan, Head of Operations – Disability Services
- Ms Breda Crehan-Roche, Chief Officer Community Healthcare West
- Professor Malcolm MacLachlan, Clinical Lead for National Clinical Programme for People with Disability
- Ms Angela O' Neill, National Disability Specialist, Community Operations

Children with disabilities or developmental delays access health and social services in a variety of ways. Most children access services such as occupational therapy, psychology or speech & language therapy through primary care services. Children with complex needs access specialist disability services from HSE and S38/39 providers. Children's disability services in Ireland developed in an ad hoc manner whereby some children received an excellent service and others may have little or received none. The provision of services was inequitable; and varied depending on a child's disability, their age, where they went to school or where they lived. Establishing Children's Disability Network Teams (CDNTs) is an integral part of Sláintecare health reforms and is a key policy commitment in the Programme for Government.

CDNTs will;

- *Provide a clear pathway and fairer access to services for all children with a disability based on their needs;*
- *Make the best use of and fairly distribute available resources for the benefit of all children and their families; and,*

- *Ensure effective clinical teams are working in partnership with families and with education staff to support children with a disability to reach their full potential.*

The HSE is committed to providing high quality and safe health and social care services to all service users, including those with disabilities and their families. The HSE fully accept that there are very significant challenges in terms of current service provision, the level of unmet need and engagement and communications with service users and families. In this regard, the HSE is committed to working with Minister Rabbitte and all relevant stakeholders to ensure that we provide appropriate supports for children with disabilities and their families.

At a recent meeting with Minister O’Gorman and Minister Rabbitte, the principles of the Progressing Disability Services policy and service model were restated and agreed as the continued implementation imperative while also acknowledging that the transition to policy based CDNTs has been challenging for many families and staff.

The HSE, in collaboration with Department officials are working to develop an overarching road map to support all stakeholders to support children with disabilities and will be completed in the coming weeks. The document will broadly address the following key areas:-

- Communications and engagement with families/service users, government departments and relevant Ministers.
- Reporting on CDNT activity.
- Workforce Planning.
- Family Centred Practice.
- Education sector engagement.
- Process for ongoing review of the implementation of the PDS model.
- Assessment of Need under the Disability Act (2005).

Minister Rabbitte and I also attended a recent workshop involving clinicians, managers, service providers, family representatives.

This workshop is informing the development of clinical guidance to guide practitioners conducting Assessment of Need to take account of the recent High Court decision.

The HSE is also committed to an initiative to address the assessments required as a result of this judgement, in addition to a commitment put in place earlier this year to provide 1000 assessments for autistic children, and expects to finalise the plan for this shortly.

HSE Children's Disability services have been reorganised under PDS. The aim at the heart of PDS is to achieve fair access to services, for all children with disabilities, based on need. Before this policy, children in different parts of the country with the same needs could be given much more, or much less service, based on geography rather than need. This was unfair, inequitable and needed to change. Making that happen is one of the most complex change programmes undertaken within our health service, and while we have made good progress, we have a lot more to do before it is complete.

The HSE is facing some specific challenges in CDNTs including:

- A high level of staff vacancies and a limited employment market
- Large caseloads and long waiting lists
- The legislative focus on assessment rather than intervention

Recruitment is a major challenge across the health system including in disability services. The HSE is progressing all available options to secure the necessary staff and we can further elaborate on actions we are taking to recruit staff.

We recognise that difficulties accessing services create additional stress for families. Our programme of reform is intended to ensure that children have timely access to services based on their needs. The HSE regrets the negative experience of families where the current service may fall short of what is required to meet the needs of their children.

This concludes my opening statement and together with my colleagues, we will endeavour to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.