

**Opening Statement by Eilish Hardiman, Chief Executive, Children's Health Ireland
to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health**

Wednesday 18 November 2020

Introduction

Good morning.

Chair, Deputies and Senators thank you for inviting Children's Health Ireland to attend your committee. I am joined today by my colleague Dr Ciara Martin, Clinical Director and Consultant Paediatric Emergency Medicine in CHI.

I welcome the opportunity to provide this Committee with an update from CHI's perspective on the new children's hospital project as requested in your invitation. Children's Health Ireland is client to the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board for this capital project so my update to the Committee is in accordance with this remit.

Background

Children's Health Ireland (CHI) was established as a statutory entity in January 2019 to govern and manage acute paediatric services for the greater Dublin area, as well as, all national paediatric services, some of which are on an all-island basis. This saw the children's hospitals at Temple Street, Tallaght and Crumlin merge into CHI to deliver healthcare to Ireland's children, in preparation for the move into new children's hospital. In July 2019, we also opened the first of our two paediatric outpatient and urgent care centres at Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown.

Services in CHI

In 2019, 334,500 children and adolescents were treated by our 3,614 staff. Despite this level of activity, more timely and greater access to paediatric services remains our single greatest challenge as a health service provider. CHI has several infrastructure and workforce constraints contributing to our waiting list and access challenges, especially relating to Theatres, Radiology, Critical Care, Laboratory and OPD that are all addressed in the new children's hospital.

COVID-19 has hampered our ability to deliver the same or an increased level of activity in 2020. CHI has returned its activity levels to an average of 90% of 2019 month on month activity after an initial COVID-19 period of reduced activity. This was achieved through putting up some pre-fabricated spaces and from repurposing spaces like, play rooms, family lounges and other communal space in our children's hospitals into clinical spaces to accommodate the beds displaced from our multiple occupancy rooms (2-6 beds in a room) in order to meet infection prevention and control guidance of 2-meter distancing between beds. We have seen a decrease in ED presentations but an increase in mental health presentations.

This pandemic has demonstrated more than ever the need for the new children's hospital. CHI are currently assessing the impact on services for children and adolescents of any extension to the build programme.

NPHDB have advised they expect building of the second Paediatric Outpatient and Urgent Care Centre based at Tallaght to be completed by September 2021. CHI are planning an 8-week operational commissioning period before opening services in this new building by the end of 2021.

New services at Connolly, new services to come at Tallaght

Our experience of opening services in a brand new spacious and child-friendly building in CHI at Connolly has given us a taste of what is to come at Tallaght and the new hospital. It has also demonstrated how a new building can facilitate services compliant with COVID-19 guidance. Our new facility at Connolly has allowed CHI to accelerate some of our plans to integrate and reform services during COVID-19, such as, an integrated orthopaedic fracture clinic serving all patients in CHI.

The overwhelmingly positive feedback from children, adolescents and families that have availed of services in our new facility at Connolly is testament to the need for this investment and the benefits of implementing contemporary models of healthcare. We are already reaping the positive benefits of more efficient provision of care and an enhanced patient experience with 97% of patients attending urgent care being seen within 15 minutes. Since January 2020, we have treated 5,792 patients at the Urgent Care Centre and have seen 9,217 patients at the OPD.

As client for this capital project, the crisis and challenges in healthcare created by the COVID-19 pandemic has only magnified the difficulties our patients, their families and our staff experience daily in delivering acute paediatric healthcare services to Ireland's sickest children in outdated facilities in our existing hospitals with their poor digital infrastructure and old equipment. I wish to emphasise the criticality of these two new buildings, their digital infrastructure, modern equipment and enhanced workforce which are at the very core of our plans to enhance clinical outcomes and develop services provided to Ireland's sickest children and adolescents.

The new children's hospital will expand the physical capacity and type of facilities needed to increase activity and reduce waiting times in all paediatric services to help tackle current and future challenges in child health.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to our staff for their continued dedication and support over the last number of months. We look forward to walking through the doors of the new hospital and delivering care there. In the meantime, we remain committed to reforming our services and prioritising investment to support the improvement in the delivery of services and to addressing the challenges that exist within paediatric services.

My colleague Ciara and I are happy to take any questions you have.

Thank you.

Eilish Hardiman
Chief Executive
Children's Health Ireland
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