



Deputy Louis O'Hara,
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16th April 2026,

Dear Deputy,

I refer to PQs 9015/26 and 9016/26 below for answer on 5th of February.

PQ9015/26

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the number of children, as of 29 January 2026, or latest date available, that were awaiting a first assessment of need from the HSE under the Disability Act 2005, for the CHO2 area; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

PQ 9016/26

To ask the Minister for Children; Disability and Equality the number of people under 18 years-of-age who are on an assessment of need waiting list in county Galway as of 29 January 2026; the length of time they have been on this waiting list, in tabular form; and if she will make a statement on the matter.

The delivery of an effective, efficient Assessment of Need system is a priority for the Government. There has been intensive work by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality and the HSE to address delays in the provision of Assessments of Need. Under the Disability Act, an Assessment of Need is an assessment process carried out by the HSE where a person is of the opinion that he/she may have a disability, for anyone born after 1st June 2002. It first establishes whether the person has a disability (as defined within the Act). It then identifies the health and education needs of the person with a disability and the services required to meet those needs.

It is important to note that children do not require an Assessment of Need to access health services, including HSE Primary Care, Children's Disability Network Teams or Mental Health Services. However, demand for Assessments of Need has increased significantly in recent years, reflecting both the increase in population and the number of families exploring all options to access services for their child.



The impact of this increased demand has contributed to there being just over 20,200 applications overdue for completion nationwide at the end of 2025, according to the most recently available HSE data.

More positively, there has been continued improvement in the number of completed Assessment of Need reports. Over 5,900 reports were completed in 2025 – a 43% increase compared to 2024.

The HSE provides Assessment of Need data on a quarterly basis. This data is not available on a county-level and the HSE no longer uses the CHO structure, but data is provided at Regional Health Area (RHA) and Local Health Office (LHO) level. While data is not gathered on the number of children awaiting a first Assessment of Need, data is collated on the number of Assessment of Need reports that are not completed within 6 months of receipt of an application.

The most recent available data shows that, in Galway LHO, 488 Assessment of Need applications were overdue for completion at the end of December 2025. This number includes all assessment reports that were not completed within 6 months of receipt of an application. These numbers may reflect the notable increase in applications for Assessment of Need in Galway LHO with 447 applications received in 2025 compared to 113 applications in 2024.

Data on the age of applicants is currently only available at a national level. Data provided by the HSE for 2025 show that 98% of applications received nationally were for children who were between 0 and 17 years of age at date of application.

In December 2025, Government announced a series of changes to the Assessment of Need process which will make it more effective and efficient for children and families. Over time, this should lead to a reduction in the waiting time to receive an Assessment of Need report.

These changes include updates to Part 2 of *the Disability Act 2005*, which provides for Assessments of Need. The General Scheme of the *Disability (Amendment) Bill 2025* which outlines these proposed changes was approved by Government on 9 December 2025 and has been published [on the Department's website](#) along with an FAQ document on the AON process.

Any proposed legislative changes will not remove any rights for parents to apply for an Assessment of Need for their child, nor will they alter the statutory six-month timeline set out in the Disability Act.



Other aspects of the reform include:

- The development of statutory guidelines to ensure that Assessments of Need focus on identifying a child's needs, engaging in more intensive assessments only where required to identify need. This should help reduce delays and allow therapists to spend more time delivering services.
- The establishment by the HSE of eleven new teams, initially, to support HSE assessment processes, including Assessments of Need. Each team will include a psychologist, a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist, and an administrator, providing clinical guidance throughout the process.

The provision of an effective and efficient Assessment of Need system continues to be a priority for the Government.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read 'Norma Foley'. The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Norma Foley TD.

Minister for Department of Children, Disability and Equality