



IASW

Irish Association of Social Workers
Cumann na hÉireann um Oibríthe Sóisialta

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14th June 2018

Irish Association of Social Workers Review of the Assessment of Need Standard operating Procedure

The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) is the professional body for Social Worker's in the Republic of Ireland. A Social Worker's key focus is the needs of the people using their service with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of vulnerable and marginalised individuals and groups. The IASW is committed to advocating for the needs of service users at all levels of service provision. It is our firm belief that the new Health Service Executive Assessment of Need Standard Operating Procedure will have a negative impact on families affected by disability and request that the Health Service Executive take on board the concerns and recommendations identified by the IASW below. Like our colleagues in the Irish Association of Speech and Language Therapists (IASLT), The Association of Occupational Therapists Ireland (AOTI), the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) and the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (ISCP) we welcome the standardisation of the Assessment of Need process, and we acknowledge the challenges facing the HSE in relation to meeting legal obligations under the Disability Act. However, concerns remain about the proposed new format.

The IASW's main concern is how the new protocol will affect therapeutic intervention, particularly for Disability Network Teams in areas of high population. Without adequate staffing and resourcing the implementation of the new Standard Operating Procedure will impact negatively on intervention as network teams will take on a large volume of assessment work. All children presenting with complex needs require comprehensive diagnostic assessments, for example for ASD, Dyspraxia, ADHD, SSLI, cognitive assessments etc. In areas where there are high numbers of children requiring these, this will cause longer wait times and will have a significant impact on resources for therapeutic intervention.

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This very much goes against the aim of the new procedure to ‘ensure children and their families access appropriate services as quickly as possible’. The IASW endorses fully this objective, however there is concern about how this will work in practice for children presenting with complex needs within the system without further resources.

The new protocol being proposed could work well if there is a guarantee that after the Preliminary Team Assessment children will be channeled into the correct service and seen within an appropriate timeframe. For children presenting with less complex needs this could work as there is not necessarily a need for a specific diagnosis, and they can go straight onto Primary Care wait lists. However, this will not be possible for the significant numbers of children who require Disability Network Teams. We envisage families in certain geographic areas waiting for long periods of time after the Preliminary Team Assessment until they are able to be seen by Disability Network Teams. There is already evidence of this in North Dublin where current wait times for the Early Intervention Team (who carry out a high number of diagnostic assessments) is approximately two years. At no level is it acceptable for a family to hear at the preliminary stage that their child requires assessment (for example an ASD and cognitive assessment) and then have to wait over two years to access that. It is highly unethical and goes against all professional codes of conduct for any practitioner to recommend a diagnostic or intervention pathway for a child knowing that they will not be seen within a suitable timeframe, given the known benefits of early intervention. On hearing this news at Preliminary Team Assessment parents can be left shocked, bewildered and with little information. Without access to necessary assessment and services families become upset, angry and frustrated. Additionally, children waiting for formal diagnosis cannot access DES resources such as SNA support, July Provision, etc., placing families dealing with childhood disability under further stress. A guiding principle of Progressing Disability Services is to promote a family centered approach but considering the issues above it is difficult to see that this principle is being adhered to.

The IASW welcomes the Health Service Executive commitment to involving the professional bodies in drafting specific guidance to ensure practitioners feel safe in this practice. In relation to the impact on professionals, a major concern is that the current proposal doesn't contain enough detail or guidance for practitioners who will be completing the Preliminary Team Assessments. A secondary impact on professionals is the impact from dealing with more upset and distressed parents/service users engaging with Disability Network Teams. This will make practitioners daily work more challenging and will have a negative impact on recruitment and retention for posts in Disability Network Teams.

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Recommendations:

- The Health Service Executive to urgently review staffing levels and resources in disability services, paying particular attention to Disability Network Teams in areas of high population where there are significant numbers of children presenting with complex needs. It is incorrect for the HSE to say that this will be easier to address when it becomes clear, through Preliminary Team Assessments, as to exactly how many children require diagnostic pathway from Disability Network Teams. For over ten years Assessment of Need service statements have been going through the HSE with exact numbers of children requiring therapy with no significant increase in therapists sought to meet the increasing need. The IASW would like a commitment from the Health Service Executive to review this as a matter of urgency for the reasons listed above.
- The Health Service Executive to continue active engagement with relevant professional bodies; IASW, IASLT, PSI, AOTI and ISCP, in relation to guidance documents for Preliminary Team Assessments and other pertinent issues, both current and as they arise in the future.

Representatives from the IASW are happy to engage in further discussion and negotiation with the HSE in relation to this matter and we look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



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Chair of IASW

Claire Convery
Chair of Social Workers in Disability Special
Interest Group

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