



**An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais  
agus Comhionannais**  
Department of Children,  
Disability and Equality

## ***Autism Assessment and Intervention Pathway Protocol FAQ***

### ***What is the Autism Assessment and Intervention Pathway Protocol?***

For the first ever time, there will be a standardised approach to undertaking Autism assessments throughout HSE and HSE-funded services.

It will allow children to get an autism assessment across primary care, mental health and disability services.

It is also the first time that adults can get access to an autism assessment, which is in line with the commitment in the Programme for Government to fill service gaps for autistic people.

The Autism Protocol represents a significant step forward in how we support Autistic people in Ireland.

It was launched 27 May 2026, by Minister for Children, Disability and Equality Norma Foley, Minister for Health Jennifer Carroll MacNeill, HSE chief executive Anne O'Connor and Minister of State for Disability Emer Higgins.

### ***How will it work?***

The Autism Protocol helps practitioners assess individuals who may be Autistic. It outlines three tiers of assessment. It guides practitioners to identify the most appropriate approach based on the person's needs.

In general, Tier One Assessments are for those with a clear presentation of autism and Tier Two Assessments and Tier Three Assessments for more complex presentations.

The intention is to provide children with easier, more convenient and faster access to an autism assessment when they need it. As a result, many families may not feel the need to apply for an Assessment of Need.

### ***How long will each assessment take?***

Tier 1 Autism Assessment is the default assessment for relatively clear presentations of autism. Typically completed in less than 10 hours total clinical time; including assessment, report and feedback time; however, on occasions it may take longer.

Tier 2 Autism Extended Assessment is where the presentation of Autism is less clear and may be related to other types of disability and /or mental health difficulties. It will include other relevant developmental assessments and information as well as sensory and language assessments. It will usually involve several disciplines and is likely to be completed within 20 hours including clinical contact, report-writing and feedback time (also including Tier 1 assessment time. Again, on occasions, it may take longer.

Tier 3 Autism Continuing Assessment is for the most complex and unclear presentations which have already come through Tier 1 and/or Tier 2. It will often include neuropsychological assessment of brain functioning. Also, cognitive assessment or other assessments will potentially be carried out by disciplines that are not routinely members of the assessment team.

### ***What consultation has been carried out?***

The assessment and intervention process has been developed over five years with the assistance of autistic people, clinicians from all relevant disciplines and service provision managers.

Former Minister for Health Simon Harris published a review of Irish health services for Autistic individuals in 2017, which made 36 recommendations.

A key recommendation was to give children and adults faster access to assessment by shifting away from highly intensive autism assessments towards a tiered approach.

The HSE set up an Assessment and Pathways Working Group which delivered a report of over 250 pages on how to set up this new assessment process.

### ***Why is this needed now?***

The demand for autism assessment is soaring with most OECD nations experiencing consistent 6-10% year-over-year increases in child and adolescent autism diagnoses.

- In 2025, 2,630 completed Assessment of Need reports identified autism as the category of disability. This accounted for 44% of all completed reports.
- Back in 2013, autism was identified as the category of disability in just 18% of completed Assessment of Need reports.

### ***When will the training begin?***

The HSE Chief Clinical Officer Clinical Forum has approved the clinical design of the protocol, and implementation planning will commence in Quarter 3 2026, to include briefing and training within the six Health Regions. Teams using the protocol should be able to assess more people in a shorter time, which will reduce the impact of long waiting times for autism assessment for children and adults.

### ***How will a parent get an autism assessment for their child?***

If a parent believes their child will benefit from an autism assessment, they can speak to any healthcare provider that they are currently linked to.

This may include:

- The local GP

- The local public health nurse (PHN)
- Another health professional that a child sees, such as a doctor or therapist
- The local Primary Care team or Children's Disability Network Team

***Where will the HSE staff get expert advice?***

The HSE are going to set up 11 expert teams this year and a further 9 next year. The teams will comprise 4 experienced staff on each including a psychologist, a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist and an administrator. These teams will support community teams using the new autism protocol across primary care, mental health and disability services.

It is expected that recruitment for these In-Reach teams will commence in the near future.

Each of the 20 Integrated Health Areas will have one established team by the end of next year (2027).

***What difference will this make to the AON waiting times?***

It is anticipated that the successful implementation of a more direct and clear path to autism assessment will help to reduce demand for Assessments of Need. However, it is not possible to accurately predict the expected reduction in demand for Assessments of Need at this point in time, as the Autism Protocol and Assessment of Need are two separate processes.

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