



STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION

MICHAEL PETERSSON MLA (CHAIR), JOHNATHAN DAVIS MLA (DEPUTY CHAIR), PETER CAIN MLA

Inquiry into referred 2019–20 Annual and Financial Reports and Budget Estimates 2020-21
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Asked by Elizabeth Kikkert MLA:

In relation to: Reduced Service for the Child Development Service

1. The Budget Statement notes that the Child Development Service last year provided 18 per cent fewer hours of service to clients than had been targeted, for two reasons: pandemic-related restrictions and 'staff vacancies' (p. 22). How many staff vacancies did the service experience, and approximately what percentage of the lower than targeted results can be attributed to these vacancies?
 - a. Have these vacancies been filled now? If not, why not, and what are you doing to make sure they are filled?
 - b. In the past, there have been waits for at least some of the services provided by the CDS. What has been the impact of staff vacancies and the pandemic on current waiting lists and times?
 - c. Can the minister provide the current waiting times by specific service?
 - d. What is currently being done to improve waiting times with the Child Development Service?

Yvette Berry MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:–

1. As at October 2020, a midpoint in the reporting period referred to in the budget papers, there were approximately eight fulltime equivalent (FTE) frontline allied health positions vacant across the Child Development Service (CDS).
 - a) Since that time six of the FTE positions identified above have been filled, and recruitment is underway for the remaining two.
 - b) Throughout 2019-20 CDS continued to offer COVID adapted parent information workshops, drop-in clinics and provision of information and supports to families who were already engaged with the service. However staffing and the pandemic impacted on the capacity to provide comprehensive assessments to new clients, resulting in an increase in waiting lists and times from those outlined in question 1c) for this aspect of CDS services. Family preference also contributed to this increase, as some families when offered telehealth health



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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QON No. 5

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supports opted to defer service access and await reinstatement of face to face service offering.

Since that time positions have been recruited to, services have returned to face to face delivery and there has been a focus on addressing waiting list issues as outlined in answer 1d) below. This has resulted in current waiting times decreasing and returning to pre pandemic normal waiting times. Work continues on improving waiting times.

- c) Families can generally access a consultation with an Occupational Therapist, Speech Pathologist, or Occupational Therapist within one week, by attending a CDS drop-in clinic.

If it is recommended that a child and family require further assessment or information following attendance at a drop-in clinic or referral through the CDS Intake Service, then average wait times are:

- up to six months for Occupational Therapy
- three to five months for Speech Pathology
- one to three months for Physiotherapy
- wait time for an offer of an Autism assessment is currently eight to ten months.

It is important to note that CDS prioritises access to services based on several criteria which allows some families to be contacted immediately upon referral.

- d) CDS has been addressing the increase in wait times through a variety of approaches:
- prioritising assessment functions of the service to support timely access
 - increasing the availability of Occupational Therapy clinics to include drop-in clinics across the three Child and family Centre sites
 - employing two staff through the *Jobs for Canberrans* initiative to respond to the higher administrative burden that eventuated in implementing COVID safe practice across our service; this allowed clinicians to focus on clinical functions rather than administrative tasks and
 - successfully onboarding newly recruited allied health staff.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Community Inclusion

Signature:

Date: 14/04/21

By the Minister for Early Childhood Development, Yvette Berry MLA