

Joint Committee on Health

OPENING STATEMENT

Bernard Gloster
Chief Executive Officer
20th March 2023



Introduction:

Good morning, Chairman and members. Thank you for the invitation to meet with the Joint Committee on Health to discuss the National Service Plan 2024. I am joined by my colleagues:

- Dr. Colm Henry, Chief Clinical Officer
- Mr. Stephen Mulvany, Chief Finance Officer
- Ms. Anne Marie Hoey, Chief People Officer
- Ms. Martina Queally, Regional Executive Officer (REO) Dublin & South East
- Ms. Kate Killeen White, REO Dublin & Midlands

I am supported by senior colleagues, Mr. Ray Mitchell and Ms. Niamh Doody.

NSP 2024 sets out a significant plan for our statutory Health & Personal Social Services in response to the needs of the public for services and also the requirement to advance many new ways of provision to ensure sustainability into the future. This is my first full year of a NSP and it is also the first in which the HSE has two line Departments following the transfer of functions in respect of Disability services to DCEDIY in March 2023. The Board and Executive have worked with both Departments led by Minister Donnelly and Minister O’Gorman to produce one NSP, reflective of the need for continued pursuit of integration as a core to service provision.

New Developments:

Within an overall allocation of €23.5bn revenue we see this is an increase of 4.6% on the opening position of 2023. €20.7bn relates to the Health Vote and €2.8bn the DCEDIY Vote.

In that context there is provision for new developments this year of €162.8m of which €64.1m relates to Disabilities. A further welcome €90m in new Health Developments is expected to be allocated shortly.

Access and Capacity will be enhanced with €56m new investment in acute beds, diagnostics, and the Waiting List Action Plan (WLAP).

Service Improvements will continue with €13.6m new investment in CAMHS, ECC and Health Promotion.

Workforce and Reform will see progress with €29.1m new investment in GP places, NCHD training, Nursing and Midwifery and HSCP focus on student practice. New surgical hubs and Digital reform will all aid improved ways of working and more convenience for the public.

Disability services will continue to develop with €64.1m new investment to support school leavers, residential care, and the ever-increasing demand for respite care.

Across Health and Disabilities, we have ELS (Existing Level of Service) support in a combined €834.7m and an additional support recognising the challenges in late 2023 with once off amount of €918.7m for 2024.

It is clear from all of the evidence that in a clearly identified challenging year we are and need to continue investing in new developments. Correspondingly we also are obliged to demonstrate the best use of what we have and the advancement of new ways of working. To this effect there is now a joint Department of Health HSE Productivity Task Force, and this will assist in guiding further efficiency over the coming two years. In simple terms the Productivity focus should allow us to generate more activity with broadly the same resources to respond to public need particularly Access. The new Consultant Contract and the new Public Sector Pay Agreement are central to this focus.

Workforce:

I am acutely aware of the challenges and concerns regarding pause on aspects of recruitment over the past number of months. It is clear that control within and best use of the staff we employ, is central to our responsibilities to the public not only on the services we provide but also the management of the allocation we receive from Government.

It was clear in the latter part of 2023 that recruitment was running at a rate that was and is not sustainable. The highest ever nett growth in the Health Service occurred in 2023 at + 8,239 to 145,985 WTE across the HSE and its S38 agencies. The growth is in contrast with an average increase of 4,690 in the previous five years and well exceeds even the highest most recent year driven by Covid-19 of 6,361 in 2020.

In December 2023 even at the height of the pause employment numbers grew by 933 and we have again seen continued, albeit less nett growth in January, particularly in nursing.

Turnover has improved in that it decreased in 2023 by 1.3%, very significant in both the size of our workforce and also the upward trend of the preceding years.

Despite the need to get to grips with our affordable numbers and the challenges in this process, we have now the highest workforce in the history of the Irish Health Service increasing by 21.8% alone since the end of 2019.

Notwithstanding control measures and affordability actions we will this year see recruitment of new development posts at a minimum of 2,268 in our Health portfolio and 683 in Disability services.

Supported by the Board of the HSE, I am determined to ensure that our management of approved workforce levels brings us to a point where arbitrary measures at national level such as pause will not be necessary, and the best productivity possible in the public interest is achieved through our most valued asset, our workforce.

New Regions New Centre:

When I took up this post one year ago this month, I committed to expediting the introduction not only of new Regions as set out in the Programme for Government (PfG) and the Sláintecare policy platform, but also to fundamentally re-organise the Centre of the HSE in its role, purpose, function, and performance.

I am pleased to report to the Committee that as of March 11th last five of the six new Regional Executive Officers are now in place with the remaining Regional Executive Officer due to start on April 15th. Reporting directly to me this represents a significant move towards integration of services and layering of decision-making processes in the HSE. I welcome the new executives who together with redefined roles for people at the Centre, will be the mechanism and structure through which we will deliver this service plan, one which aims to improve services for the people we serve, to continue to reduce waiting times in all forms and to increase the quality of outcome at every point in which the public engage with us.

I am conscious that many people remain challenged in their confidence in us as an organisation. This is in part because there are times, we 'come up short' for them. While the evidence shows a lot of improvement it is clear there is a significant way to go and this NSP 2024 facilitates further that journey.

That concludes my opening remarks.