



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

Spending Review 2021 – Factors Affecting Agency and Overtime Expenditure in the Irish Health Service

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Spending Review 2021 – Overview, Aims & Objectives



Overview

- This paper investigates potential drivers of agency and overtime expenditure in the health sector. It looks into potential links between the trends of agency and overtime expenditure and whole-time equivalent numbers in individual service areas, and whether increased hours of work have led to greater service activity.

Aims and objectives

- To provide a thorough analysis of agency and overtime expenditure between 2012 to 2019;
- To investigate whether permanent staffing levels are linked to agency and overtime expenditure levels, and to activity levels;
- To offer a granular analysis broken down by the six service areas in the health system;
- To contribute to more informed budgeting for agency and overtime expenditure.

Spending Review 2021 – Key Findings



Key findings

- Expenditure on agency and overtime has risen more sharply than the average wages over the course of 2012 to 2019. This suggests that the amount of hours of agency and overtime has increased, pointing to a growing reliance on agency and overtime to deliver healthcare.
- While national trends show almost continuous increases from 2015 to 2019 across staffing levels and agency and overtime expenditure, trends across the six service areas vary considerably.
- Acute Services has seen larger increases in WTE over the period studied than the other service areas, increasing by 24% from 2013 to 2019. Acute Services also shows the lowest average annual percentage growth (5%) of agency expenditure when compared with other service areas. This may indicate that higher levels of staffing are helping to offset the need for agency staff in this setting, supporting the idea that growth in agency usage is driven by staff shortages.

Spending Review 2021 – Key Findings



Key findings

- Other than Acute Services, all other service areas showed low levels of staff growth and higher average growth in agency expenditure over the period studied. This relative stagnation of WTE growth in certain areas may be driving the need for agency staff.
- This research found that there is a lack of data related to activity in the community setting and conclusions on the relationship between rising agency and overtime trends and healthcare demand could not be drawn. There is a need for greater activity data to be collected in the community setting and development of activity measures linked to staffing input would greatly aid further research into this topic.