

2025.09.08

3.12 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson of St. Mary, St. Ouen and St. Peter of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding IVF treatment (OQ.190/2025):

Further to the response to Written Question 308/2025, which showed that by the beginning of July only 10 per cent of the budget allocated for I.V.F. (in-vitro fertilisation) treatment this year had been spent, will the Minister set out what plans he has to review the criteria to allow more people to access treatment, particularly those currently not eligible for funded treatment for non-clinical reasons; and if he has no such plans, why not?

Deputy T.J.A. Binet (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

Could I ask if the Deputy would be minded to allow Deputy Howell, Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services, with responsibility for this to answer?

Deputy A. Howell of St. John, St. Lawrence and Trinity (Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services - rapporteur):

I thank the Deputy for her question. We are currently underspent on budget. This was anticipated given that we knew it would take some time for eligible couples to start the I.V.F. process. This includes couples who were waiting for treatment at the Lister Clinic, with which Healthcare Jersey has only recently signed a contract. We have taken a cautious approach as it is not possible to accurately predict demand, and we have to remain within the budget this year and in future years. That said, we recognise that the existing I.V.F. criteria may be too restrictive and, as the Deputy is aware, we have committed to review them once we have more financial data on which to base our decisions, which we are currently doing. We will discuss any recommendations with stakeholders and I will update the Deputy and the Assembly on any changes that may be brought forward, but this will not be until after the end of October.

3.12.1 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

I appreciate the Assistant Minister's response to the question. If possible, could she explain why it is taking so long for that process to happen, recognising that for some fertility patients every month really does matter for them?

Deputy A. Howell:

I acknowledge that every month does matter, Deputy. The officers are working on it and we absolutely have to know the financial situation before we open up the criteria, and if indeed we are able to do that. We have to have 9 months' financial data to be able to work on.

3.12.2 Deputy J. Renouf:

Will the Minister commit that, if there is an underspend, it will not be clawed back and used to fund other services but will be used to expand the criteria as outlined by Deputy Stephenson?

[15:30]

Deputy A. Howell:

I can make no commitment until we have the data, but I will do my very best to make sure that this is ring-fenced for the I.V.F. service.

3.12.3 Deputy J. Renouf:

I am merely asking that the money should be kept for the purposes for which it is already allocated. Will she not confirm that that will indeed be the case?

Deputy A. Howell:

We will do our very best.

3.12.4 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

The Children and Civil Status Law, which will be in force hopefully by the end of this year, means that same-sex couples need to use assisted reproduction to access their parental rights. The Minister has previously agreed to address this, to erase that inequality. Could she advise of the progress on this please?

Deputy A. Howell:

This is certainly one of the criteria that we are looking at. We are exploring all avenues and it is to be fair to everyone.

3.12.5 Deputy L.M.C. Doublet:

Would the Minister commit to addressing this by the time the Children and Civil Status Law comes into force, please?

Deputy A. Howell:

The team are working very hard, but I cannot commit to what we are able to do until we have done the review.

3.12.6 Deputy L.K.F. Stephenson:

Will the Assistant Minister set out the policy priorities that she and her team will be working to, should it be possible to widen the criteria following that review? What is the team aiming to achieve with the funding that is available? If possible, is it also possible to commit that there will not be a reduction in the budget for next year on the argument that this year has been underspent?

Deputy A. Howell:

The team are working on this and they are reviewing all aspects. When they have an answer, I will report back to the Deputy.