



Mental Health Reform

Promoting Improved Mental Health Services

Snapshot Analysis of Budget 2015

15th October 2014

The Government has allocated €35 million in Budget 2015 to strengthening community-based mental health services. Mental Health Reform has expressed its disappointment that the shortfall of €15 million to mental health services in Budget 2014 has not been made up in Budget 2015 despite a commitment by Minister Kathleen Lynch. This objective by Minister Lynch was not fulfilled by Government. Despite this, the Government's continued investment in mental health can make a difference to enhancing mental health service provision. There are a number of existing gaps in adult and child and adolescent mental health services which will need to be addressed to meet the demand from people in severe mental distress. Such measures include the provision of good quality crisis intervention supports available at a local level across the country and the provision of holistic supports from multidisciplinary teams in mental health services. There are no details yet of where the €35 million in Budget 2015 will be spent.

The Minister has indicated a commitment in Budget 2015 to enhance suicide prevention measures. This is vitally important in supporting local communities to raise awareness about how to look after one's mental health. Investment in community mental well-being initiatives can play a valuable role in improving the mental health of people in Ireland.

Mental Health Reform welcomes the Government's intention to invest in mental health services in primary care, including increasing access to counselling services. In his budget speech, Minister for Public Expenditure, Brendan Howlin stated 'we will provide additional staff so that patients can access mental health services such as psychologists and counsellors in the primary care setting'. Mental Health Reform had recommended that the Counselling in Primary Care Service be extended to people on low incomes. Already there are reports of lengthy waiting times for this service in its first full year of operation, so further funding is needed for this important early intervention programme.

There are a number of measures outlined in Budget 2015 which will have a fundamental impact on people with mental health difficulties relating to housing, social welfare and education.

Housing

The 2015 budget has made provision for an allocation of €2.2 billion in social housing over the next 3 years, in addition to an allocation of €55.5 million to address homelessness through accommodation and relevant services. In the medium term such measures could help to alleviate the difficulties individuals with mental health disabilities have in finding housing. Following the announcement of the budget, Ministers Kelly and Coffey stated that 'in 2015, 400 new housing units will be provided for people with specific needs and up to 150 new homes in the community will be provided for people with disabilities leaving institutional care'. It is not clear yet whether some of these units will be allocated to people with mental health difficulties. There is no indication within the budget of a dedicated funding stream for tenancy sustainment support to allow for the effective transition of individuals from mental service accommodation into mainstream housing in the community. It is crucial that such measures are put in place for individuals with mental health difficulties so that the Government's policy of deinstitutionalisation is not hindered by a gap in housing support in the community.

Social Welfare

The Government has not cut social welfare rates in Budget 2015 and has introduced a small Christmas bonus for social welfare recipients. In her statement on Budget 2015, the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton TD made a commitment that the budget will 'further protect vulnerable groups such as ...people with disabilities living alone' and will recognise the additional pressures on... people with disabilities living alone'. The Minister also made a commitment to 'helping vulnerable households to meet the costs associated with water charges' through the introduction of a water support payment of €100 to recipients of the Household Benefit Package and Fuel Allowance. Mental Health Reform is concerned that such measures will not adequately protect individuals with mental health disabilities. Budget 2015 does not recognise the specific pressures, including financial pressures which are experienced by individuals with mental health difficulties, nor does it acknowledge that such pressures will most likely be compounded by the introduction of the water charges. People with mental health disabilities are also being negatively impacted by rent increases; this was not addressed in the budget.

Education

Budget 2015 allocates funding for the introduction of more than 1,700 additional new full time posts in 2015. This is comprised of 920 mainstream teachers, 480 resource teachers and 365 special needs assistants. This will address the needs of some children and young people experiencing behavioural and mental health difficulties in terms of increased support available, including one to one supports.