

**Submission on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' National Youth Strategy**

**30<sup>th</sup> January 2015**

The Children's Mental Health Coalition (CMHC) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' National Youth Strategy. The Children's Mental Health Coalition is the national coalition promoting the realisation of every child's right to mental health and well-being.

The children's policy framework *Brighter Futures, Better Outcomes* includes a commitment under its five national priorities to ensure that children and young people in Ireland achieve mental well-being. The framework includes specific commitments to:

- **implement *A Vision for Change* as it relates to children and young people, in particular to improve access to early intervention youth mental health services**
- **coordination of service supports, with a focus on improving mental health literacy and reducing incidents of self-harm and suicide**
- **achieve effective inter-agency workings in mental health service provision, including between TUSLA and the HSE**
- **strengthen the participation of children and young people in decision-making for health and well-being at community level**
- **strengthen transitions between child and adolescent and adult services in the areas of physical and mental health services**
- **promote timely assessment and equity of access to appropriate mental health supports, including for young people aged 16 and 17 years**
- **achieve a cross-Governmental and multi- agency approach in line with the goals of Healthy Ireland, to seek to improve all aspects of health and wellbeing, and to reduce risk-taking behaviour in children, with a particular focus on promoting healthy behaviour and positive mental health**
- **support integrated mental health services at community level**
- **the training and up-skilling of professionals across formal and non-formal education settings to be in a position to identify potential mental health difficulties**
- **enable hard to reach groups to access mental health services, including a recognition of the high level of children and young people in the care and youth justice system with mental health needs**

The Children's Mental Health Coalition welcomes these commitments reflecting the importance of mental health to children and young people's overall health and well-being in the present and in the future. The Coalition recommends that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs note the mental health-specific commitments within *Brighter Futures, Better Outcomes* in its National Youth Strategy.

The Children's Mental Health Coalition further recommends that the Strategy include commitments to:

- **ensure that every young person in Ireland is provided with education on how to look after their mental health and well-being and seek help when they are experiencing mental or emotional distress** - The My World Survey confirms that mental health difficulties increase in severity and prevalence during adolescent years, with self-harm and attempted suicide also increasing throughout the adolescent phase.<sup>1</sup> The literature review conducted for the Children's Mental Health Coalition on child and adolescent mental health services and supports identified the Bamford Review – a tiered framework for effective mental health service provision. Tier 1 of the framework provides for mental health promotion to prevent or interrupt the development of mental health difficulties. The Children's Mental Health Coalition has previously recommended that SPHE has a dedicated and mainstreamed focus on mental health and well-being for students in every school year. A commitment to ensure that children in every school year are provided with positive mental health education should be progressed under the Youth Strategy as a matter of urgency.
- **improve the mental well-being of young people during the period of the National Youth Strategy** – The aforementioned literature review found that quality improvement processes are essential good practice to measure desired mental health outcomes and whether they are consistent with current evidence-based practice. The lack of documented quality guidelines for CAMHS in Ireland is not aligned with good practice as advised by the World Health Organisation and must be addressed as a matter of importance. The Youth Strategy should incorporate regular outcomes indicators for young people's mental health.
- **increase young people's access to mental health supports through primary care, including access to counselling and psychological therapies. This may be achieved in part through the expansion of the Counselling in Primary Care Service (CIPC). There should be a specific recognition of young people on low incomes who may find it particularly difficult to access such supports** - Mental Health's Reform's submission on mental health in primary care identifies that the provision of psychological support for children at risk of developing a mental health difficulty can play an important part in the provision of mental health care for children and families. There is also ample evidence that offering counselling and psychological therapy in primary care is a cost-effective measure.
- **ensure young people have access to specialist mental health supports, including in the areas of eating disorders, dual diagnosis and mental health and intellectual disability** - The Mental Health Commission's Quality Framework for Mental Health Services in Ireland states that children and young people have a right to access levels of healthcare that are appropriate to their needs. In her literature review for the Children's Mental Health Coalition, Lorna Kerin identifies that many of the recommendations of A Vision for Change

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<sup>1</sup> *My World Survey: National Study of Youth Mental Health*, UCD School of Psychology and Headstrong, 2012

concerning inpatient services, mental health intellectual disability teams, substance misuse, eating disorder and forensic services for young people are yet to be implemented.

- **develop and deliver local employment initiatives for young people with a mental health difficulty who are on job seeker's or otherwise unemployed. Unemployment is likely to have a significant impact on young people's mental health. Such initiatives should be rolled out across the country** – The SeeChange survey carried out in 2012 found that people under economic strain were more likely to report both having a mental health difficulty themselves and knowing someone who has a mental health difficulty. With a youth unemployment rate of 21.8% in Ireland, according to Eurostat, it is more likely that young people will develop a mental health difficulty. The Social Care Institute for Excellence in the UK has collected evidence around good practice in moving from child to adult mental health care. It found that good practice needs to take account of the wider context of young people's lives, including education, employment, housing and overall health needs.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, findings from the first report of the Psychiatric Epidemiology Research across the Lifespan (PERL) Group Dublin at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland reports that the experience of mental health difficulties during adolescence is associated with an increased risk of unemployment during early adult years.<sup>3</sup>
- **achieve inter-departmental collaboration to ensure the effective implementation of aftercare plans and supports for children and young people in care** – The Someone to Care report, 2013 highlighted the unmet mental health needs of young people in the care and youth justice system. One of its key recommendations was to establish mandatory protocols for inter- agency work in order to achieve child centred mental health care. The proposed General Scheme and Aftercare Bill 2014 intends to strengthen legislative provisions for aftercare by amending the Child Care Act 1991 so that all eligible young people leaving care have a statutory right to an aftercare plan. Despite the fact that the draft legislation is welcomed, provision needs to be made to ensure that supports and resources are available to meet any identified needs (including emotional and mental health needs).
- **expand the Assessment, Consultation and Therapy service (ACTS) to address the unmet mental health needs of young people in the youth justice system** – In 2014 ACTS rolled out its clinical services to children in detention. It delivers clinical services, addiction counselling, social work, social care and speech and language therapy in the Oberstown facility.<sup>4</sup> Despite this positive development, ACTS remains under resourced. In mid-October 2014 there were 21 clinicians in post out of a target of approximately 30.<sup>5</sup> There is a requirement for further clinical resources.
- **Ensure that all young people in detention are in appropriate, good quality facilities** - The Coalition is also concerned that the 17 year old males detained in St. Patrick's Institution and Wheatfield prison, due to transfer to Oberstown last year have yet to be transferred. Their transfer should be progressed as a priority.

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<sup>2</sup> Sainsbury, M & Goldman, R (2011). *Mental Health Service Transitions for Young People: Children's and Familie's Guide*. Social Care Institute for Excellence, London.

<sup>3</sup> Cannon M, Coughlan H, Clarke M, Harley M & Kelleher I (2013). *The Mental Health of Young People in Ireland: a report of the Psychiatric Epidemiology Research across the Lifespan (PERL)*. Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, Dublin.

<sup>4</sup> Information retrieved from the ACTS Service

<sup>5</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Wednesday 20 November 2013) *Written Answers*. Retrieved from [www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2013-11-20a.493](http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2013-11-20a.493).

## **About the Children's Mental Health Coalition**

The Children's Mental Health Coalition is chaired by Mental Health Reform and has over 60 member organisations from a range of backgrounds and sectors, including children's rights, human rights, education and mental health services. Our vision is that Ireland should be one of the best places in the world to be a child, where every child's right to mental health is realised.

The Children's Mental Health Coalition is available to discuss the above recommendations. Please contact Kate Mitchell, Policy & Research Officer, at 01 874 9468 or via email at [kmitchell@mentalhealthreform.ie](mailto:kmitchell@mentalhealthreform.ie) for further information.