



Mental Health Reform

Promoting Improved Mental Health Services

Submission on the Department of Health's Statement of Strategy 2015- 2017

16th October 2014

Introduction

Mental Health Reform welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Department of Health's Statement of Strategy 2015 – 2017. As the national coalition promoting improved mental health services and implementation of the mental health policy A Vision for Change, Mental Health Reform makes this submission with particular reference to individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. Specifically, this submission is focussed on recommendations relating to

- The Healthy Ireland framework
- A recommitment to A Vision for Change
- The establishment of mental health as an independent Strategic Goal under the Department of Health's Statement of Strategy
- The review of the Mental Health Act, 2001
- The establishment of a cross-departmental approach to mental health
- Enhanced information on service delivery and outcomes

Healthy Ireland

Mental Health Reform welcomes the Healthy Ireland Framework and its commitment to promoting mental health and well-being.¹ In order to strengthen Healthy Ireland's potential to improve the mental health of the population as well as to maximise the positive impact of good mental health on other health behaviours, MHR recommends the following:

- A commitment in the Statement of Strategy to ensure the integration of a positive mental health and mental well-being message in all initiatives of the Healthy Ireland Framework, including those that cover physical health behaviours such as smoking, weight/healthy eating and alcohol use. Individuals' efforts to change their behaviours such as smoking, diet and alcohol use can be influenced by their mental health. By educating people on the value of improving their mental health and how to do so in the context of changing these behaviours, this can have a positive impact on their ability to achieve their physical health goals.
- A commitment in the Statement of Strategy to develop mental health and well-being proofing of all Government decisions so that the impact of the decision on the population's mental health and well-being would be assessed. The Independent Monitoring Group for A Vision for Change recommended that Government policies should be mental health proofed.

¹ Department of Health (2013) Healthy Ireland, A Framework for Improved Health and Well-Being

Development of a follow-on policy from a Vision for Change

Each and every person experiencing a mental health difficulty has the right to the highest attainable standard of mental health.² This is clearly reflected in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities which the Government has signed and intends to ratify.

Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department of Health's Statement of Strategy reiterate its commitment to the principles of A Vision for Change and make a commitment to develop a follow-on policy that will underpin the continued reform of primary care and specialist mental health services and related supports. The government's 2006 policy is due to expire in 2016 and there is a crucial need to maintain the commitment to the principles embedded in A Vision for Change. This provides an opportunity to focus on key issues in the policy that remain unfulfilled, including

- wider access to 24/7 mental health services in the community, nationwide
- enhanced home care supports for people with mental health difficulties
- an increase in respite and crisis services
- continued development of multidisciplinary teams
- ensuring that services respect, protect and fulfil individuals' human rights
- a deeper and wider implementation of the recovery ethos
- developing and sustaining service user and family member involvement
- increasing access to mental health services in primary care
- ensuring that people from marginalised groups including homeless people, people from ethnic minority groups, people subject to the criminal justice system, people in the LGBT community, older people, people with disabilities, people who are deaf or hearing-impaired and people with intellectual disabilities have adequate access to services
- ensuring that mental health services for children and adolescents reflect recognised good practice and are available for all children and adolescents who require them, including children in the care and youth justice systems
- developing effective links between mental health services and both employment and housing services

Mental Health Reform also recommends a recommitment by the Department to the objectives set out in its Statement of Strategy 2011 – 2014 pertaining to mental health services,³ including

- a recruitment of mental health professionals to address vacant posts
- an enhanced promotion of positive mental health and well-being, in addition to continued training of GPs and other mental health professionals
- ensuring that mental health services are covered under any universal healthcare system in a manner reflecting the principles of A Vision for Change
- development of forensic mental health units
- strengthening mental health services in primary care

Mental Health as an Independent Strategic Goal

Mental Health Reform recommends that an independent strategic goal is set out in the Statement of Strategy for the area of mental health. Since the publication of the Department's Statement of Strategy 2011- 2014, a national division on mental health has been set up within the HSE and a

² Department of Health (2006). *A Vision for Change*. Dublin: The Stationery Office

³ Department of Health (2012) Statement of Strategy 2011- 2014

National Director of Mental Health appointed to the HSE's Senior Management Team. The establishment of such structures clearly reflects the priority ascribed to mental health within the HSE, as directed by Government. In order for the Department's Statement of Strategy to reflect the level of priority already committed to by Government, there is a need for a separate Strategic Goal for mental health within the strategy statement.

The Review of the Mental Health Act, 2001

Mental Health Reform recommends that the Statement of Strategy make a commitment by the Department to the publication of legislation to reform the Mental Health Act, 2001, in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Mental Health Reform welcomed the Interim Report on the review of the Mental Health Act and looks forward to the publication of the final report of the Expert Group shortly. However, given the delay that has ensued since the start of the review process (arising from the implications of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and interplay with the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill, it is vital that legislation is brought forward as quickly as possible to rectify the current gaps in the protection of individuals' human rights.

Working through a Cross Departmental Approach to Mental Health

Mental Health Reform acknowledges the valuable involvement of officials from the Department's mental health section in the National Disability Strategy process, particularly with regard to the implementation of the Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities. Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department's Statement of Strategy make a specific commitment to continued collaboration on all aspects of the National Disability Strategy, including implementation of the Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities with regard to people with mental health disabilities in particular. The Statement of Strategy should commit to working with the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government to clarify the funding stream for tenancy sustainment support for people with mental health difficulties who need this support to be able to live in the community.

Implementation of the Comprehensive Employment Strategy will also require collaboration between the Department of Health and the Departments of Social Protection and Education and Skills. The Department of Health's Statement of Strategy should commit to working in collaboration with these two Departments, in particular, to implement the Comprehensive Employment Strategy, including implementation of the Individual Placement and Support model of supported employment for people with mental health difficulties.

Improving Information on Service Delivery and Outcomes

To date there has been no comprehensive information system for adult community-based mental health services. Under the current system it is not possible to tell how many mental health service users are waiting for psychological therapies or how many have an individual care and recovery plan. While basic activity statistics are now being reported by the HSE on a monthly basis, there is no regularly published information on any of the standard outcome indicators used to assess mental health service effectiveness such as service users' employment status, housing status and education level. Mental Health Reform recommends that the Statement of Strategy commit to implementation

of an information system that can report on the extent of service resources, provision, quality and outcomes for community mental health services across the country.

Conclusion

The recommitment of the Department of Health to the implementation of A Vision for Change is of crucial importance to enhancing service provision to individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. There are extensive issues in the current mental health system which require immediate attention, including a lack of 24/7 crisis intervention services, unfilled staffing posts and an absence of information systems to report on outcomes. There is also a new opportunity under the Healthy Ireland Framework for the Department to provide leadership in promoting mental health and well-being for the population of Ireland. The Department also has an opportunity to signal the importance of mental health as a population health issue by dedicating a separate Strategic Goal to mental health.

About Mental Health Reform

Mental Health Reform is the national coalition of 48 organisations working to promote improved mental health services and the implementation of the mental health policy A Vision for Change.

Mental Health Reform 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 for further information.