



Mental Health Reform

Promoting Improved Mental Health Services

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

13th October 2014

Introduction

Mental Health Reform (MHR) welcomes this opportunity to contribute to the Department of Social Protection'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. It focuses on three key areas in its recommendations, including:

- A commitment to the implementation of A Vision for Change in so far as appropriate to the Department's remit
- Enhanced income supports for people with mental health disabilities and
- Activation supports in line with international good practice

A Commitment to the Implementation of a Vision for Change

Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department's Statement of Strategy contain a specific commitment to the implementation of the government's 2006 policy A Vision for Change in so far as this fits within the Department's remit, and in particular to implementing Recommendation 4.4 of the policy.¹ The Department of Social Protection has a key role to play in providing adequate income and activation supports to individuals with mental health difficulties in order to enhance their recovery process and ultimately promote social inclusion through each individual's strengthened role within society. The Department has the lead role in implementing Recommendation No.4:4 of A Vision for Change which states that: "Measures to protect the income of individuals with mental health problems should be put in place. Health care access schemes should also be reviewed for this group."² The policy states that: "specific actions can be taken to inform people with mental health problems about the benefits they are entitled to. Assistance and advice need to be provided to ensure such individuals are supported by the social welfare system."³ A Vision for Change goes on to state that: "Measures to ensure income maintenance for people with mental health problems should also be put in place, for example flexible provision of social welfare payments."⁴ The Department's Statement of Strategy should commit to implementing Recommendation 4.4.

¹ Department of Health (2006). *A Vision for Change*. Dublin: The Stationery Office

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

Furthermore, MHR recommends that the Department refer to the principles of Recovery and Coordination, embedded in A Vision for Change, and to adopt such values in line with its own guiding principles.

- The Coordination principle outlines that ‘services must be coordinated to meet the full range of social, psychological and physical care needs of individuals with mental health problems. The structure and organisation of mental health services should facilitate and encourage the continuity of care...’⁵
- A Vision for Change conceptualises the Recovery approach as ‘informing every level of service provision so service users learn to understand and cope with their mental health difficulties and build on their inherent strengths and resourcefulness.’ The policy also defines ‘recovery’ in terms of its strong social inclusion component.⁶ This approach has since been further endorsed by the Mental Health Commission which emphasises the ‘person’s rights to meaningful participation in community life.... and removing barriers to social integration and inclusion, such as stigma and lack of access to suitable housing, education, work and friendships.’

Income Supports for Individuals with Mental Health Disabilities

Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department’s Statement of Strategy make commitments to the provision of income supports for people with mental health disabilities that will support their recovery process. Specifically the Department should commit to implementing initiatives which

- Ensure that rent supplement enables individuals with mental health disabilities to find adequate housing, and
- Ensure that any reform of the benefits system supports individuals with mental health difficulties’ recovery and social inclusion

The Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission found that: ‘One of the biggest obstacles in the lives of people with mental illness is the absence of adequate, affordable and secure accommodation’.⁷ Despite the importance placed on the provision of adequate housing support it is evident that people residing in Ireland with long-term mental health difficulties, who are on disability or illness benefits are under severe economic strain due to social welfare and related cuts.⁸ This is further compounded by the inadequacy of rent supplement compared to escalating rents. Furthermore people with mental health difficulties are also at a significantly higher risk of becoming homeless.

It is therefore vital that the Department’s rent supplement scheme enables individuals recovering from a mental health difficulty or at risk of developing a severe mental health difficulty to source and maintain their housing security.

⁵ Ibid, p. 15

⁶ Ibid, p. 15

⁷ Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission (1993) Human Rights and Mental Illness: Report of the National Inquiry into the Human Rights of People with Mental Illness, Canberra: Australian Government, cited in Department of Environment, Community and Local Government (2011) National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016, Dublin: DECG, p.99.

⁸ Mental Health Reform, (2013) Pre-Budget Submission, p. 7

A Vision for Change makes clear that income security is an important part of an individuals' recovery from mental and emotional distress. As the Department considers how to modernise Ireland's disability benefits system, it is important that any reforms are in line with the principles of A Vision for Change and support individuals' recovery from mental health difficulties. The Department should make a commitment in its Statement of Strategy to ensuring that any review of disability benefits will be in line with the principles of A Vision for Change.

Activation supports for people with a mental health disability

Mental Health Reform welcomes the Departments' commitment under the draft Comprehensive Employment Strategy to the provision of coordinated supports through the appointment of job coaches and effective liaison with community mental health teams.⁹ This commitment provides a starting point for implementing the internationally-recognised Individual Placement and Support model of supported employment for people with mental health difficulties. Mental Health Reform recommends that the Department's Statement of Strategy affirm its commitment to the integration of supported employment services with community mental health teams in line with internationally-evidenced good practice.

Conclusion

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 and Research Officer at 01 874 9468 or via email at kmitchell@mentalhealthreform.ie for further information.

⁹ Draft Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (unpublished, 2014)