

PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT: MENTAL HEALTH RECOMMENDATIONS

JUNE 2020

1. A commitment to providing leadership:

- **A Super Junior Minister for Mental Health**
- **A senior mental health decision maker within the HSE reporting directly to the CEO**

Effective leadership will be key to drive reform of mental health services and ensure full implementation of the revised national mental health policy due to be published on the 12th June 2020. Despite structural changes within the HSE, it is imperative that there is coherent leadership in mental health at the national level and that there is clear authority and responsibility for a distinct, national, annual mental health budget. While it is yet to be seen how this new HSE structure will be implemented in practice – it is imperative that appropriate mechanisms to ensure clear oversight for mental health funding, expenditure and operations are implemented to ensure mental health does not further slip back into the Cinderella of the Irish health system.

In addition, under Programme for Government, a super junior Minister for Mental Health who is able to sit at Cabinet meetings should be appointed. This measure will assist in ensuring that mental health is afforded political priority in order to address the ongoing and significant deficits in mental health service provision in Ireland.

Overall, it is imperative that mental health is a priority for the new government to ensure direct access to appropriate mental health services and supports across the country. This is particularly relevant in the context of government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the months and years to come. It is essential that Ireland's mental health services have the capacity to cope with the additional strain they are now under and will continue to be under into the future. The unprecedented impact the pandemic is having on mental health requires a proportionate and unprecedented response from government, in order to deliver essential services and to protect people's lives.

2. A commitment to investing:

The government, to begin, must commit initially to ring-fencing an additional €50M in 2021, beyond existing levels of service, exclusively for the development of new mental health services.

In parallel, a fully costed implementation plan for 'Sharing the Vision,' the new national mental health policy, should be developed in 2020 and delivered in full throughout the life of the government, to ensure this 10 year plan is resourced and implemented consistently year on year from the beginning to its conclusion.

In the last Programme for Government there was no specific details in relation to mental health funding. It is imperative that this fundamental shortfall is rectified by the next government, considering the ongoing gaps in mental health service delivery and the increasing demand on such services.

In the first year, government should ring-fence additional revenue funding of €50M for the development of new mental health services. Of the 50M development funding, 10M should be allocated to resourcing the short-term recommendations of Ireland's new mental health policy. This includes enhancing the capacity of community mental health services, such as community day hospitals and outreach services, in addition to the development of crisis supports. This 10M should

be revised during the estimates process as additional ring-fenced funding may be required to implement the short-term recommendations of the new policy.

Specific funding must be ring-fenced for the medium and long-term costings of the revised national mental health policy. Such costings must be incorporated into annual mental health budgets.

3. A commitment to reforming our legislation:

The Government must publish, in 2020, legislation to reform the Mental Health Act, 2001 in full. The legislation should be introduced in the Houses of the Oireachtas by the end of 2020 with a view to the updated legislation being enacted by the end of 2021.

It is essential that Ireland's Mental Health Act, 2001 is updated as a matter of priority so that people in hospital for mental healthcare have their rights adequately protected and they can feel safe accessing the mental health services they need.

It has been over 5 years since the Government committed to publishing the draft legislation to reform the Mental Health Act, 2001 and today, we are still waiting. While we wait –

- HSE community residences for people with mental health difficulties remain unregulated.
- Voluntary patients do not have basic rights to information.
- Voluntary and involuntary patients do not have a right to advocacy.
- Involuntary patients do not have the right to have their advance wishes about treatment respected.
- 16 and 17 year olds have no legal right to consent or refuse admission or mental health treatment.
- There is no independent review of people in hospital who lack capacity to consent to their admission or mental health treatment.
- The Mental Health Commission have found that some service users feel coerced, disempowered and unsupported when being admitted to a psychiatric inpatient unit and that this had a long-term negative impact on their recovery.

The Mental Health Act, 2001 does not comply with international human rights standards set out in the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

About us

Mental Health Reform is Ireland's leading national coalition on mental health. With over 75 member organisations, we work together to drive progressive reform of mental health services and supports in Ireland.

Mental Health Reform is available to discuss the above content. Please contact Kate Mitchell, Senior Policy & Research Officer at 086 024 5409 or via email at kmitchell@mentalhealthreform.ie for further information.

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