2021-2022 Strategy statement and key strategic priorities

Introduction

MHR's strategic plan comes to an end at a time where the world continues to address the global COVID-19 pandemic. The long-term impact that the COVID-19 pandemic will have on society is still uncertain. It is in this context that the board of Mental Health Reform has taken the decision to develop a two-year plan setting out the organisation's key priorities. This document complements the 2018-2020 strategic plans and is accompanied by an operational plan.

Current operational context

2020 brought significant changes to the environment in which the coalition works. The global COVID19 pandemic being the most significant however also of relevance is the new FF/FG/GP government and the publication of a new Mental Health Policy. As part of the development of this document a detailed PESTLE analysis was completed and from that we are able to draw out some of the key issues the coalition needs to be cognisant of in 2021 and 2022.

- *The mental health impacts of COVID19*

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a physical health emergency, there is broad recognition of the significant mental health impact of the pandemic. The United Nations (UN) has warned that the COVID-19 pandemic

"risks sparking a major global mental health crisis", while the World Health Organisation (WHO) has identified that "the isolation, fear, uncertainty, and the economic turmoil [of the current pandemic] could cause psychological distress, and we could expect to see an upsurge in the severity of mental illness, including among children, young people and healthcare workers".

Indeed, research has found that decreased psychological well-being and stress are common psychological reactions to the COVID -19 pandemic. Similarly, research examining the impact of the pandemic on Irish society showed that one third of people in the population are experiencing serious mental health difficulties and that stress and anxiety are common psychological reactions to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- *Mental Health in the spotlight*

Never in the history of the Irish state has the mental health aspects of a public health crisis been so prominent. Besides the launch of the new mental health policy, more commitment to invest in mental health budget in 2021, we have the current reality whereby mental health is a prominent element in current national policy discourse.   Given this increased profile of mental health there is now an opportunity to use this momentum to address the current shortcomings in our system. Mental Health Reform is ideally placed to contribute its expertise, knowledge and via its members, the critical insights of both service users and providers, to the urgent work of building a mental health system which is coherent, integrated, agile and responsive to users' needs. Mental Health Reform is perfectly located to work with other stakeholders to build a system that gives parity to mental health and operates in a coherent and integrated way.

- *Supporting a responsive agile sector*

The manner in which MHR members have responded to the new demands and unprecedented challenges associated with Covid-19 has reaffirmed their critical role of ensuring access to mental health supports and services for those who need it. During the initial phase of the lock down in Q2 2020, many organisations rapidly moved to the remote provision of services and supports for services users and their families/carers. Through MHR's work as an umbrella organisation and through some specific support projects around eMental health we have been continuously learning about the impacts of COVID-19 on the sector. We have been capturing how organisations have to the fast changing context. We have seen how these organisations adapt and respond to new and emerging need in effective and sustainable ways. The final ramifications of the COVID -19 pandemic are unlikely to be known for a number of years. But it is undeniable that the landscape both in terms of service delivery and service demand has changed significantly. MHR is uniquely placed to offer real time intelligence, insights and observations on the ratifications and impact of the pandemic on service users and

service providers to the State and to inform the public discourse. We are a critical partner for both policy makers and service implementers.

2021 Strategy

Our vision: An Ireland where everyone can access the support they need in their community to achieve their best possible mental health.

Our Mission: To be the unifying voice that drives progressive reform of mental health services and supports in Ireland.

We will continue to operate from our values:

- Best international standards and human rights norms
- Equitable access to high quality mental health services
- Empowerment of individuals and mobilisation of local communities
- Independence and integrity
- Focus on value-added activity
- Financial stewardship
- Accountability
- Authoritative
- Principled pragmatism

1. Secure changes in legislation and policy

2. Improve access to services

3. Understand and respond to the impact of COVID19

4. Strengthen the capacity, outreach and sustainability of MHR

1. Advocate and secure changes in legislation and policy to give meaningful effect to a human rights-based and recovery-centered approach to mental health

MHR will continue its leadership role in calling Government to account on its responsibility to adhere to delivery of its commitments under international covenants and to enshrine best practice in recovery centred mental health policy and services. In this period MHR will continue to advocate for fit for purpose mental health act which protects the rights of all citizens with mental with mental health difficulties.

Specifically, Over the next 2 years MHR will work towards ensuring;

1. Ireland's MH legislation reflects state obligations under international human rights standards
2. Government held to account on UNCRPD
3. A recovery approach embedded within our mental health services
4. MH taken into account in key governmental policies identified as needing intervention by MHR including Health, Justice and housing
5. Strengthened public support for MHR's agenda

2. Improve access to services through the implementation of Sharing the Vision

It is well acknowledged that effective implementation of human rights for mental health services users and improved access to services cannot be achieved through law and policy reform alone. Service delivery including how services are designed and delivered in the various settings is the critical enabler of better mental health outcomes for service users. MHR, in particular through our research projects, will work to contribute its knowledge of best practice in how mental health services can be best configured and designed to meet service user needs. We will ensure that through all our processes we capture the lived experiences of mental health service users.

Specifically, Over the next 2 years MHR will work towards ensuring;

- Increased investment for mental health and related support services
- MH services and supports are inclusive to the needs of marginalised groups
- People experiencing mental health difficulties are key actors in formation, review and rollout of policy
- MHR represents members' voice in key policy implementation spaces
- Promote and support implementation of E-mental health

3. To understand and respond to the effect of COVID-19 on mental health and mental health services

As outlined above the current pandemic will change the context in which MHR and our members work. As the nationally coalition MHR is ideally placed to capture the impact of COVID-19 on MH, the dynamic innovation and flexibility of member organisations providing mental health services provide a space to explore what the future will look like and support members in adapting Our credible relationships with academics, service providers and other key stakeholders provides us with access to spaces where we can add value by communicating ever-changing contexts and enhance communication sharing between various actors.

Specifically, MHR will work towards ensuring;

- Analyse and publicly communicate research on the impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health
- MHR member organisations supported to adapt and innovate to COVID-19 and changing operational context

4. To strengthen the capacity, outreach and sustainability of MHR (internal objective)

In order for MHR to deliver these changes, we need to continue to build a strong membership and ensure that it has the people, systems, structures, procedures and resources in place. In this period MHR will continue to diversify the funding base of our organisation, strengthen our membership engagement, ensure the highest standards in governance and accountability and invest in developing the capacity of our staff and board.

Specifically, Over the next 2 years MHR will work towards ensuring;

- MHR has a diverse engaged membership
- MHR ensures the highest standard of governance
- MHR has the right people, process and systems to deliver on this plan
- Diversify funding to achieve sustainability

Our Approach

Across each of our 4 strategic priority areas MHR we will engage in the following activities:

- Influencing policy makers and key stakeholders

- Gather and coordinate the views of our member organisations.

- Produce evidence that draws upon on the expertise and experience of our member organisations

- Engaging and consulting with people with lived experience, family members and carers

- Conduct research to identify unmet needs and good practice solutions

- Working in partnership & alliances with other organisations & networks

- Regularly communicating with: our members, people with lived experience, civil society, policy makers, decision-makers and politicians.

- Continuously evaluate & adjust our work