



Irish Mental Health Coalition

Campaigning for improved mental health services



From Neglect to Respect

**A 10-point Agenda for Action
by the new
Irish Government
on Mental Health**

June 2007



“Mental health is central to the human, social and economic capital of nations and should therefore be considered as an integral and essential part of other public policy areas such as human rights, social care, education and employment.

Therefore we, ministers responsible for health, commit ourselves ... to recognising the need for comprehensive evidence-based mental health policies and to considering ways and means of developing, implementing and reinforcing such policies in our countries.”

Mental Health Declaration for Europe: Facing the Challenges,
Building Solutions
World Health Organization European Region
January 2005

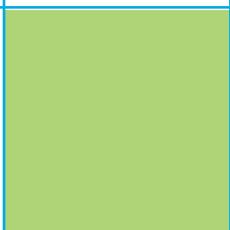
The Irish Mental Health Coalition comprises a Core Group of five organisations that have combined forces and energies to advocate for people’s rights to the highest attainable standard of mental health and mental healthcare.

We demand that the new Irish Government makes mental health a priority.



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Mental health is a human right



Mental health is a human right, yet successive Irish governments have neglected mental health and related services. For example, children and adolescents continue to wait years for assessment, and they are placed in adult psychiatric hospitals in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child because children's facilities are unavailable. There is widespread unavailability of alternatives to medication, principally psychological and social interventions, in breach of the right to the most appropriate and the least restrictive or intrusive treatment. Ireland still has a high rate of hospitalisation for mental health problems, due to limited community-based services, conflicting with the right to treatment in the least restrictive environment. People with mental health problems can have difficulty accessing or staying in employment (the right to work is a basic human right), or in education (also a basic human right).

At the extreme end, mental ill health can result in suicide or self-harm. For others, particularly those with little support structures, they may become homeless, or their behaviour may bring them into contact with the criminal justice system, and many are misdirected towards prison rather than appropriate mental healthcare or support services. The vast majority of people with mental health problems continue about their lives without encountering these experiences, and for them, it is vital that, when they need and want it, the

right help is available. If the new Irish Government is committed to the object and principle of human rights, it must make mental health a priority.

If the new national mental health policy framework published by the Department of Health and Children in January 2006, *A Vision for Change*, were implemented in full, it could reverse many of the above human rights concerns. It proposes significant changes and improvements in mental health services, and aims for a true movement of services – the right services - into the community and people's homes. It points to the importance of empowerment, advocacy, peer support, offering a range of therapies, supporting carers, and, perhaps most importantly, recovery. It also recognises the crucial importance of having service users centrally involved in all planning and decision-making, from official processes to their individual cases, which is a fundamental human right. It is not just a mental health services policy – it addresses a wide range of Government Departments and agencies, which must take responsibility for their role. We need to see this policy translate into reality. Now is a critical time for action and commitment from the new Irish Government.

We demand that the new Irish Government, which will span almost the entire lifetime of A Vision for Change, commits to the following actions at a minimum:

1. Full and Timely Implementation of A Vision for Change

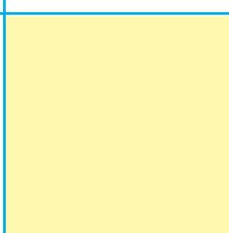
Since the launch of A Vision for Change, there has been little visible action, with the exception of the formation of an Implementation Group, Independent Monitoring Group, and Interim National Service User Executive. Given the wide engagement by voluntary organisations and civil society in the consultation undertaken in the development of A Vision for Change, it is especially disappointing that so little information on its implementation is available in the public domain. The new Government must commit that it will deliver and implement A Vision for Change, as a complete plan by all Departments and agencies - in full, on time, and with transparency.

2. A Comprehensive Implementation Plan for A Vision for Change

According to the World Health Organization, mental health policies can only be implemented through effective plans and programmes. If it is not to remain aspirational, a detailed implementation plan must be produced at the earliest opportunity, setting out the major activities to implement A Vision for Change, with explicit annualised performance targets and indicators, timelines, and specific resource commitments, across all relevant Government Departments.

3. Implementing recommendations set out in progress reports on implementation of A Vision for Change

The new Government must not only commit to producing full and detailed annual progress reports, spanning all relevant Departments and agencies, but also to implement swiftly the recommendations set out in the reports. In May, the first progress report was published by the Independent Monitoring Group established by the Department of Health and Children to overseeing implementation. It too pointed out the central importance of an implementation plan, clarifying divisions of responsibility, and ensuring that a recovery orientation informs every aspect of service delivery.



It points to the many areas where implementation has been slow, including in closing, and redeploying resources from, large psychiatric hospitals, and providing Child and Adolescent services and inpatient facilities. Its recommendations must be implemented.

4. Interdepartmental Coordination on Mental Health

The Department of Health and Children is responsible for communication with relevant Departments and agencies outside the health sector, but there is no concrete interdepartmental working arrangement in evidence to ensure cohesive and coordinated interagency action on the recommendations made in A Vision for Change. There must be targeted and specific interdepartmental coordination at government level to ensure the full implementation of A Vision for Change. This is also a recommendation from the Independent Monitoring Group, who have advised that Government Departments should report through the interdepartmental group on a three monthly basis in relation to progress with the implementation of the recommendations for which they are responsible. Many actions reported by Departments to the Independent Monitoring Group were already in train before A Vision for Change, or are part of their existing commitments to people with disabilities and do not make clear how people with mental health problems will benefit specifically.

5. Prioritised Mental Health Expenditure

The government needs to ensure that mental health is given an adequate and equitable share in Budget 2008. If mental health is to achieve parity with other areas of health, financial resources for mental health services should progressively reach a minimum of 12% of revenue health spend, from the present 7.7%.

6. Equitable Distribution of Financial Resources

There is an urgent need for redistribution of financial

allocations across mental health catchment areas on the basis of equity. At present, there is a four-fold difference in resources available between services, with the least resourced having higher levels of socioeconomic deprivation. Considerations such as the density of population, the socioeconomic status of population and the existence of special needs such as homelessness must be taken into account when deciding on mental health budgets. Proposals in A Vision for Change for new or expanded services for vulnerable groups – e.g. children, people with intellectual disabilities, people with eating disorders, forensic services – must be equitably resourced.

7. Restructuring of Mental Health Services

Present government policy as outlined in A Vision for Change demands that all mental health services are restructured to ensure that they are person centred, user friendly, responsive to need and recovery orientated. This demands changed working practices by all professional staff; however, 17 months on, the essential framework for implementing A Vision for Change is not yet in place.

8. Adequate Resourcing of Suicide Prevention Strategies

Present government funding of Suicide Prevention Strategies is inadequate. Significant increases are required in the resources allocated to the National Office for Suicide Prevention, Health Service Executive and voluntary agencies engaged in suicide prevention. A minimum of €10 million base budget per annum should be allocated to Suicide Prevention Strategies.

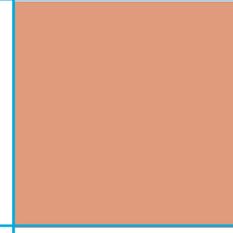
9. Relocation of the Central Mental Hospital (CMH) from proposed Thornton Hall site

The last Government's decision to move this hospital to a site adjacent to the new prison site at Thornton Hall, North Dublin, must be reversed in favour of one that respects the human rights of people with mental illness. To locate a therapeutic facility for people with mental illness - many of

whom who have not committed a crime - beside a prison is stigmatising and discriminatory. Not alone has this proposal been roundly rejected – by the families and carers of current CMH residents, voluntary organisations, the Mental Health Commission, the Clinical Director of the CMH, and the Human Rights Commission – but it also flies in the face of the core values and principles enshrined in A Vision for Change.

10. Placing Ireland as a Leading Country in International Action on Mental Health

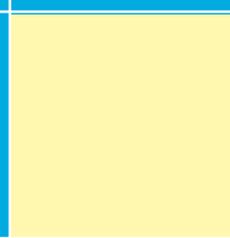
There is growing international attention to mental health as an issue that urgently needs to be addressed. At the 54th World Health Assembly in Geneva in 2001, the world's health ministers conceded that mental healthcare has not received "the level of visibility, commitment and resources that is warranted by the magnitude of the mental health burden". In January 2005, the 52 Ministers of Health in the WHO European Region, including Ireland, endorsed the Helsinki Mental Health Declaration and Action Plan for Europe. The Action Plan will serve to drive policy on mental health promotion, prevention and treatment in the WHO European Region until at least 2010, and sets out five priorities and 12 areas for national action. The new Irish Government should resolve to be at the fore of this charge, not trailing behind. Ireland will appear before the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights within the next two years, and it should be with a record of achievement on the right to mental health of which the Irish people can be proud.



Final word

Almost every person in the country is affected in some way by government inattention to mental health, whether directly or through the experience of family or friends. While many people with mental health problems will never need mental health services or supports, for those who do, the consequences of timely and appropriate services not being available can be devastating. Action by the new Irish Government on mental health promotion, prevention and treatment could dramatically reduce mental health problems. The economic and social benefit of action now will flow not just to this generation, but to future generations – while the cost of inaction will be enormous.

Make mental health a priority.



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We call on the new Irish Government to commit to:

1. Full and Timely Implementation of A Vision for Change
2. A Comprehensive Implementation Plan for A Vision for Change
3. Annual detailed progress reports on implementation of A Vision for Change
4. Interdepartmental Coordination on Mental Health
5. Prioritised Mental Health Expenditure
6. Equitable Distribution of Financial Resources
7. Restructuring of Mental Health Services
8. Adequate Resourcing of Suicide Prevention Strategies
9. Relocation of the Central Mental Hospital from proposed Thornton Hall site
10. Placing Ireland as a Leading Country in International Action on Mental Health

IMHC Core Group Member Organisations:

- Amnesty International (Irish Section)
- Bodywhys – The Eating Disorders
- Association of Ireland
- GROW in Ireland
- Irish Advocacy Network
- Schizophrenia Ireland



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