



Mental Health Reform

Promoting Improved Mental Health Services

OPENING STATEMENT TO THE OIREACHTAS COMMITTEE ON BUDGETARY OVERSIGHT

TUESDAY 24TH APRIL 2018

Introduction

Thank you Chairman and thank you to the Committee for inviting Mental Health Reform to appear before you this afternoon.

Mental Health Reform is the national coalition on mental health in Ireland, made up of 64 member organisations, promoting improved mental health services and the social inclusion of people with mental health difficulties.

We very much welcome the opportunity provided today to discuss the national mental health budget, in addition to issues of transparency and accountability in mental health funding and expenditure.

There are four key issues that I would like to touch on in my opening statement –

1. The potential impact of the recent HSE restructuring on the mental health budget
2. The continued under-resourcing of mental health services in annual budgets
3. The absence of a national mental health information system and consequently, a lack of reporting on mental health expenditure and
4. The requirement for ‘mental health proofing’ of budgets

Structure in the HSE

Since publication of *A Vision for Change*, there has been a substantial re-organisation of the management system for mental health services in Ireland, including the appointment of a National Director for Mental Health in 2013 with overall responsibility for a dedicated mental health budget and delivery of mental health services.

Further restructuring of governance and accountability structures within the HSE this year will provide for a Head of Community Service Operations with responsibility for oversight of the mental health budget. This is supported by the appointment of a dedicated operational lead and strategic planner for mental health.

Recommendation: It is vital, however, that coherent leadership in mental health at the national level is not lost in the new HSE structure and that there is clear authority and accountability for a dedicated, national, annual mental health budget.

Lack of funding in mental health

The total budget for mental health in 2018 is €912 million. If fully realised, this level of expenditure will equate to just 6% of the overall health budget. This proportion represents a decrease on previous years and is not compliant with either national or international standards.

As far back as 2006, *A Vision for Change* recommended that Government ensure that the proportion of the total health budget allocated to mental health was progressively increased to 8.24%. This has not been achieved. Internationally, the percentage of mental health funding as a proportion of the overall health budget is significantly higher at 13% in both Britain and Canada and 11% in New Zealand.

Recommendation: It is imperative that mental health is recognised and afforded appropriate priority (parity of esteem) within the wider health agenda to reflect its significance in contributing to the burden of disease in Ireland. For the purposes of Budget 2019, it will be necessary to increase mental health funding to both sustain existing levels of service, in addition to the development of new mental health services, which have received little to no attention to date.

Absence of an information system

In addition to the continued under-resourcing of our mental health services, there is no national mental health information system to report on the full extent of service resources, provision, quality and outcomes for community-based mental health service delivery. Mental Health Reform has been calling for an ICT-based national mental health information system in budget submissions since 2013. Yet 5 years later, the specification for a system has yet to be developed. It is not acceptable that more than 12 years after publication of *A Vision for Change*, there is no information system to account for the more than €800-900M in public expenditure on mental health care each year.

Recommendation: In 2019, mental health funding should be allocated to implement a national, electronic mental health information system.

Value of investing in mental health

Aside from the moral and social implications, there is a strong economic basis for investment in mental health services with evidence suggesting that the individual and social returns likely to be “high and sustained”.

The Healthy Ireland framework reports that the economic cost of mental health problems in Ireland is €11 billion per year, much of which is related to loss of productivity.

The WHO recognises that mental health influences a wide range of outcomes for individuals and communities. It is both a cause and a consequence of social and economic status. The WHO further identifies that in order to improve the mental

health outcomes of the population, Government must focus on facilitating a Mental Health in All Policies approach in which “policy makers across all sectors think in terms of mental health impact”. Such an approach should also be applied in the context of ‘mental health proofing’ of budgets. Ultimately, this means taking account of the mental health impact of budgetary decisions on the population (including individuals with existing mental health difficulties) across a multitude of areas, such as social protection, housing, employment and so on.