

I would like to thank Senator Joan Freeman and the members of the committee for inviting me here today.

I would like to begin by recognising the work that has so far been completed by the Joint Oireachtas Future of Mental Health Care Committee. I and indeed all of the Oversight Group members have read with interest the two reports released by the Committee.

As I mentioned at my previous appearance, the work of the Joint Committee on the Future of Mental Healthcare and the Oversight Group share many of the same concerns.

The work of the Oversight Group, has in the first instance concentrated on assessing ‘A Vision for Change’, our national mental health policy to determine what changes are needed to this foundation in order to refresh it to today’s context. While the term of this policy came to an end last year, many of its recommendations helped to shape our current mental health system, and remain at the heart of effective and appropriate mental health services. With this in mind, it was important to take a considered and staged approach to this work. In line with the Oversight Group work plan consultation is taking place now and in the coming weeks and feedback will be incorporated into the final report. This approach is similar to that taken by the Joint Committee, which has heard from different stakeholders over the course of its work. It is with interest that the Group have observed the insights provided by the Committee meetings. The Oversight Group will consider the Joint Oireachtas stakeholder feedback in our discussions as we deliberate on how best to proceed.

My purpose this evening is to share with the Committee the work of the Oversight Group of which I am Chair. While I am sure that the Committee members are familiar with the context within which the Oversight Group was created, I will begin at the initial stages of the Group.

A Vision for Change, published in 2006, set out a 10-year policy framework for Ireland’s mental health services. It recommended that interventions should be aimed at maximising recovery from mental illness, building on service user and social network resources to achieve meaningful integration and participation in community life. It was welcomed as a progressive, evidence-based policy which guided the development of our mental health services towards a new model of service delivery; one which would be service user centred, flexible and community-based.

A Vision for Change highlighted many areas which were in need of increased attention in the shift from a service with an institutional focus to a community-based service, and many of the recommendations are still valid today. However, as ‘A Vision for Change’ came to the end of its 10-year term in 2016, preparations for a review and updating of policy were underway since early 2016.

The initial step was the commissioning of an evidence-based Expert Review in September 2016. This looked at the implementation of A Vision for Change and looked at how future policy and services might be improved.

This review provides evidence to inform the policy direction for a revision of *A Vision for Change*, both in terms of international best practice and the experience obtained since the adoption of the policy. It presents a broad overview and mapping of evidence and developments in the mental health area that is helpful in guiding policy development and

practice in Ireland. Co-incidentally, this report was published on the same day as the Joint Committee was established, in July 2017.

In October 2017 the Minister for Health established the Oversight Group which was tasked with producing a high-level policy framework which sets out future service priorities. I was honoured to be appointed by the Minister as Chair of the Group. In considering the appropriate membership of the Group it was decided to keep the group small, efficient and inclusive of leaders in the area in order to ensure a clear focus on the task of producing a refreshed policy in a timely manner. The Oversight Group, in line with its terms of reference, is currently overseeing the development of this refreshed policy for mental health based on the recommendations arising out of the Expert Review and other relevant contributing documents. Work is scheduled to conclude in December 2018.

The Oversight Group engaged in a detailed consideration of present policy actions and recommendations. It established a number of sub-groups to focus on specific areas of attention, including child and youth mental health, the mental health of the over-65 age group, and examination of policy outcomes. The Outcomes subgroup focused on how outcomes can operate as a paradigm shift within the system to work better, more efficiently and to serve the service user in a better way, drawing from existing research and practice.

The Oversight Group has determined that their work will have a focus on developing measurable outcomes, within an outcomes-focused framework.

An ecological framework will also inform the refreshed policy. An ecological approach focuses on both population-level and individual-level determinants of health and interventions. It is acknowledged in much of recent research that health is determined by influences at multiple levels, such as public policy, community, institutional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors

An evaluation of the current context and how that relates to 'A Vision for Change' and other current mental health-related current policies was also deemed necessary. This document examines whether specific actions have been implemented and if so to what success. The evaluation also examines whether specific actions have been implemented through other policies in this area and considers whether actions are still relevant; if they are not implemented,

I understand that this is the document the Oireachtas Committee referred to in your 2nd interim report. A preliminary report has been received and is tabled for discussion at the next meeting of the Group which takes place tomorrow May 31st. Following this meeting, the researcher will be asked to finalise the report which when this final version is received it will be shared with the Oireachtas Committee.

I also note that the Committee has referenced 'Engagement with the Department of Health' as an area for Action in its Second Interim Report. As mentioned in my letter to the Committee last December, the Oversight Group agreed to report further to the Joint Committee when the initial part of our deliberations was completed. As you will have seen in the Oversight Group's work plan furnished to the Joint Committee in March 2018, these deliberations have mostly taken place within the Oversight Group up to this point. While we have not been in a position to share working documents, I would like to reassure the Committee of our shared goal and the Oversight Group's on-going commitment to this goal.

We are currently engaged in a Stakeholder Consultation Process, and the first Advisory Group meeting took place earlier today. For this part of the process two half day meetings have been scheduled- one held today, with the other on June 20th. These days will gather input from mental health clinical experts who currently work in frontline services and service user representative organisations.

It has been important to the Group that the positive aspects of A Vision for Change would not be lost. The Group is attentive to their mandate which is to complete a *refresh* of 'A Vision for Change'. The Oversight Group are working on developing a framework document that will guide both the stakeholder process and assist the Oversight Group to work within a shared vision.. Stakeholder feedback received is extremely important to the oversight Group and it is hoped that all relevant information received will inform the recommendations in the refreshed report .

While the final domains have yet to be decided, it is anticipated that the following five domains will be considered:

Social Inclusion and recovery; Prevention and Early intervention; Access, Coordination and continuity; Improvement and innovation; and Accountability and transparency.

Outcomes and specific actions will then flow from these Domains. Enablers that exist will also be explicitly recognised, as it is important to note what has contributed to the positive aspects of current service provision in order to ensure it continues.

Wider public consultation is also set to take place in Dublin, Cork and Sligo in August. All of this feedback will be incorporated into the work of the Oversight Group, with the Group ultimately producing 'an updated draft policy framework which sets out current and future service priorities within a time-bound implementation plan'.

I would once again like mention that the feedback from these stakeholder sessions and the working document mapping recommendations against current context, alongside any other completed items of work, can be provided to the Committee once available.

6. The Oversight Group acknowledge the good work completed by the Oireachtas Committee. In several Oversight Group meetings it was agreed that the existence of the Oireachtas Committee was a very positive development because their work would assist greatly in ensuring that the policy refresh would have political support. . The Oversight Group is clear that the terms of reference ask it to focus on refreshing policy. Policy determines outcomes for individuals in need of mental health support and shares a vision of what good mental health outcomes ought to look like. This differs from the work of the Joint Committee whose focus is on service improvement, staff shortages and funding. There is certainly a role for both groups and working together will result in a real shift in prioritising mental health in government resulting in positive changes in policy and service provision

Once again I thank you for inviting me to be with you today. I would be happy to address questions members may have in relation to the Oversight Group.

