



# Mental Health Reform

Promoting Improved Mental Health Services

## Opening Statement to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health

Wednesday, 17th May 2017

Shari McDaid, Executive Director of Mental Health Reform:

Chairman,

Thank you for your invitation and thank you for agreeing to allow Caroline and I to speak to you about the facts and the consequences of the mental health challenge facing us. I will speak to Mental Health Reform's position and Caroline will speak to the issues from her own personal experience.

Mental health is a huge issue for our country and for our wellbeing. But our response is neither adequate to the need, nor proportionate to the scale. We will speak to just two aspects of this challenge today: civil rights and mental health services.

Mental health difficulties are one third of the disease burden in Europe. By 2030 mental health difficulties are expected to be the largest contributor.

The cost of poor mental health in Ireland has been estimated at 2% of GNP.<sup>1</sup> This represents more than twice the cost of overweight and obesity.

But figures are a superficial yardstick. We are here today to talk about people in crisis, for whom support is inadequate and unacceptably lacking.

Caroline McGuigan, CEO of Suicide or Survive:

I am Caroline, I am CEO of Suicide or Survive, a voluntary organisation that I founded and I will speak from my personal experience. I'm a trained psychotherapist, a trained advocate. Most importantly I am a mother of a 19-year-old boy, born when I was attending psychiatric services. I am also the mother of a 16-year-old girl born years later when I was attending Trinity College.

People can recover and do. They lead full and meaningful lives. Every single one of us has mental health and will have dips in our mental health. It's called being human. But how we treat people in the different stages of their mental dip has massive impact on their distress, their experience and their recovery.

I once read an Irish survey in which 40% of the people said someone like me shouldn't have children, and we need to turn that around.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid. p. v.

At a time in my life when I lay in a bed having attempted suicide, my husband was encouraged to sign me in. I am grateful he had enough love and understanding to know that to sign me in involuntarily would have had a massive negative impact on my recovery.

Mental health can be and is messy, but by being educated and informed I can manage life and crisis, and it takes all of us working together.

Shari:

In Mental Health Reform's view, excluding people involuntarily detained in psychiatric units from the right to an advance healthcare directive under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 is clearly discriminatory. It is clearly contrary to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD).

The Mental Health Act, 2001 is simply out of line with the UN CRPD. In March, 2015, a Government-appointed Expert Group made 165 recommendations for reform. Only one recommendation has been enacted.

The Mental Health (Amendment) (No.2) Bill passed second stage on 2<sup>nd</sup> May. It is now before you. It strengthens the rights of people when in hospital for mental health treatment. We powerfully advocate you prioritise this Bill, this session. We ask you to ensure that Government delivers the comprehensive legislation required to reform the mental health civil law by the end of this year, and that you verify the promised time-line.

People in emotional distress face unacceptable gaps in services.

Out of hours support from the HSE's mental health services are uneven and inadequate. This year, again, we have closure of some Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services to new referrals due to lack of staff. There is under-capacity in primary care mental health supports. There are waiting lists for third-level counselling services.

The Government's meager allocation of just €15 million towards implementing A Vision for Change in 2017 fails to meet the clear commitment in the Confidence & Supply Arrangement to fully implement the policy. It is time the Government was held to account for this commitment.

We ask the Committee today:

- To urgently prioritise consideration of the Mental Health (Amendment) (No.2) Bill 2017 and ensure it returns to the Dáil for Report and Final Stage before the summer recess;

We ask the Committee today:

- To seek real clarity from the Health Service Executive on expenditure to date of the 2017 allocation of €15M development funding, and on any unspent funding from previous years;

We ask the Committee today:

- To call the Department of Health and the HSE together, before the summer recess, to account together on the funding required in 2018 to deliver on the Confidence & Supply Arrangement commitment to full implementation of A Vision for Change, including the deficit accrued from this year's shortfall in allocation;

and finally we ask the Committee today:

- To establish with the Department of Health the timeframe and the process for the review of A Vision for Change

Mr Chairman,

People with mental health difficulties depend on your actions and on your advocacy.

Thank you for your consideration.