

**Opening Statement on Behalf of the Traveller Counselling Service to the all-party  
Oireachtas Committee on Issues Effecting the Traveller community**

**8/10/2019**

At present the Traveller community in Ireland are experiencing a mental health crisis which impacts on the whole Traveller community across Ireland, as was highlighted in a recent study carried out by Behaviour and attitudes on Behalf of Community Foundation Ireland, where the study found that

*90% of Travellers agree that mental health problems are common among the  
community.*

This crisis has been developing over the past number of decades, unfortunately it has been ignored by the Irish state, who have ignored the warnings and calls from Travellers and Traveller organisations including ourselves, for the need to address these issues, one example of this, is lack of culturally inclusive mental health services which was recommended in the vision for change 11 year ago, as yet little action has been taken on this.

While at the same Traveller suicide has continued rise, where the suicide rate among both Traveller men and Traveller women is much higher than in the settled community, where members of the Traveller community are taking their own lives on frequent bases, and where it is clear that this now a national issue, as highlighted in the same study above, which found that

*82% of the community have been affected by suicide*

For many families this is has become intergenerational, where generations of families have been affected by suicide and mental health.

Unless the Government takes appropriate and immediate action this situation will continue to get worse where the unbearable suffering of families, who have lost loved ones, sometimes multiple members of their family, feel they are being ignored by a state that seems to be indifferent to the problems and suffering of the Traveller community.

The Traveller community has been crying out for support to address the mental health problems in the community, yet their calls seem to be falling on deaf ears. How many families will have to suffer before the state takes appropriate action, while members of the Traveller community continue die around us on a monthly basis sometimes, weekly

Travellers do not have political representation and are dependent on the good will of some politicians and others to raise these issues, unfortunately even though this good will is welcomed it has not been enough to address these issues.

## **Conclusion**

This is a human rights issue where a marginalised excluded minority community are dying as a result of government inaction. The government of Ireland has to be held accountable for this lack of action.

This Committee presents a Beacon of hope for many Traveller families, that things can change and improve, however this hope has to be met with real action and delivers real change otherwise it will be another disappointment and let down in a long line of disappointments and let downs for the Traveller community in Ireland

What is needed to begin to address these issues is;

- The establishment of a national Traveller mental Health steering group
- Development of a National Traveller Mental Health strategy
- The necessary resources to ensure its implementation

