

**Oireachtas Sub-Committee on Mental Health**

**Minister for Mental Health, Mary Butler TD**

**Opening remarks**

**14 September 2021**

An update on the provision of mental health services and how they have been impacted by the pandemic.

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Chair, members of the Committee,

Thank you for the invitation to attend today.

The pandemic has undoubtedly had a serious impact on the delivery of all public services, including mental health services. We have relied on our national solidarity and the dedication and commitment of healthcare workers nationwide to keep going through this difficult time. Now, we hope, we are at the beginning of the end. As a Government, we are planning for how we can get back to some sort of “normality”. As Minister for Mental Health, however, I’m acutely aware that our services may be needed more than ever over the coming period.

Throughout the pandemic, with the necessary adaptations, specialist mental health services continued to operate at approximately 85-90% capacity. In addition, expanded and enhanced digital services were crucial in responding to both existing and new and emerging need. The HSE supported many NGO partners to do this, including the delivery of 24 hour services.

This means that the HSE are able offer a more blended mental health service to meet the evolving, often complex needs of people seeking or accessing supports.

Service innovations have been matched with financial commitments – with the largest mental health budget on record in 2021 with over €1.1 billion. I have been working closely with the HSE on ensuring that this budget, including the €23 million for implementation of many of the short-term recommendations in *Sharing the Vision* is spent in full.

Of note, many of these recommendations have been significantly progressed, including in the areas of mental health promotion, digital mental health, perinatal mental health services, the national mental health clinical programmes and reform of the Mental Health Act. I am also fully committed to ensuring further financial commitments to the development of mental health services in 2022.

At a very practical level, I want to see expanded and enhanced services available and delivered to those who need them, when they need them. It is vital that these services are delivered in accordance with our national mental health policy *Sharing the Vision* which provides the framework for future development of our mental health system.

There have been a number of recent developments in the area of out of hours supports including the selection of Waterford as the first proposed pilot site for a Crisis Resolution Team. Other sites will join the pilot testing in 2022. Construction works commenced on the Crisis House in Clonmel yesterday, establishment of CAMHS telehubs are progressing, and last month a community café in Galway officially opened. All of these provide innovative, alternative out of hours services, which I expect to be rolled out nationally.

In the area of child and youth mental health, a specialist group has been established as part of the National Implementation and Monitoring Committee on *Sharing the Vision*. Work is ongoing to recruit 29 additional staff for CAMHS this year and last month I announced 4 million to reduce the number of under 18s waiting more than 12 months to access primary care psychology. There is also a need to develop a sustainable Primary Care Psychology service in the longer term through multi-annual funding and recruitment of additional permanent staff. This will be considered as part of 2022 Budget Estimates.

It is planned to open a new state of the art National Forensic Mental Health Service in Portrane this year. There have been delays with this facility, but we are almost there.

Significant work has progressed on the national mental health clinical programmes, with three new mental health models of care launched in recent months in the areas of mental health and intellectual disability, Adult ADHD and talking therapies. Advancements on the National Clinical Programme for Eating Disorders will mean that there will be three new specialist ED teams and the completion of the three existing teams by year end.

All six main hub sites are in operation and all 13 spoke sites now have mental health midwives in place under the national clinical programme on specialist perinatal mental health services. In the area of dual diagnosis a National Clinical Lead and a Programme Manager have been appointed. They have quickly established a multidisciplinary Working group to finalise the model of care and develop pilot sites to start the programme.

I am also very pleased that the draft heads of a Bill to amend the Mental Health Act in full were published in July. Reform of the Act will ensure that the rights of people who need inpatient mental health care and treatment are fully vindicated. The heads of bill have been sent to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Health for pre-legislative scrutiny and a formal bill will be drafted by the Office of the Attorney General. I am very keen, as are my officials, to ensure this legislation is introduced to the Oireachtas as early as possible.

I know that it is often said, but I must restate my view that our mental health services are operating well, to a large degree. There is great work happening in our communities where dedicated healthcare workers are keeping people safe and where people, whoever they are and whatever the nature of their difficulties, are getting the help that they need. At the same time, I am also aware that we must continue to do more. We must maintain and increase momentum. We have to keep developing, innovating, managing change. I am passionate about our mental health services and I believe that we have it within our grasp to make them exceptional.

Thank you, and I'm happy to take questions.