

Implementation of government policy on mental health continues to be slow

Minister's intention to allocate funding a welcome step, says MHC

Tuesday 26th January 2010: The Mental Health Commission (MHC) has said today that the implementation of the Government's policy on mental health services '*A Vision for Change*', which is now four years old, continues to be slow.

The MHC acknowledged some of the progress made during 2009, including the appointment of the Assistant National Director for Mental health Services, but concluded that the fundamental changes to mental health services, recommended in the Government's policy had not taken place.

"The appointment of an individual within the HSE with specific responsibility for driving change is a very important step, and we hope this will produce results. However establishing a National Mental Health Services Directorate is necessary to ensuring progress on implementation is made", said Hugh Kane, Chief Executive of the Mental Health Commission. "In addition one of the key principles of a Vision for Change is a fundamental move from institutional care to community based care and this in general has not happened.

"The Government's aim is to sell off old institutions and use the proceeds to develop community service, but this has not happened", he went on. "However it is very heartening that the Minister of State with Responsibility for Mental Health John Moloney has said he will shortly outline the details of a €43 million capital programme, which was announced in last December's Budget," he concluded.

The Mental Health Commission's Chairman, Dr. Edmond O'Dea said, "This is a real opportunity to show how genuine commitment in this area will translate into real improvements in the quality of the nation's mental health services. The commitment in principle exists within the HSE and at government level. The Minister's capital programme if combined with some relaxation in the current recruitment restrictions, which apply to mental health services, and a much needed shift toward a recovery approach by service providers has the potential to actually make it happen."

The Mental Health Commission published a paper last November giving an analysis of the progress towards implementation of a Vision for Change by the HSE. The paper found that the evidence based requirements for successful implementation were largely missing from the HSE implementation plan and recommended that the implementation plan should include the following:

- an overall sense of the HSE vision for mental health services
- a statement of specific outcomes;
- a map of the steps needed to achieve these outcomes with real targets, timelines, resources and responsible agents clearly described;
- and finally an outline of the measurable benefits arising from the implementation including the monitoring of the outcomes as they are being achieved.

"The successful implementation of every aspect of '*A Vision for Change*' is necessary if those with a mental illness are to be provided with modern, accessible and integrated care. I hope 2010, the fifth year of the plan, will be the year that we will see real and fundamental change," concluded Dr. O'Dea.

A Vision for Change, the government's policy on mental health was published in January 2006. It is a policy document designed to build positive mental health services throughout the community and to provide community based specialist services for people with mental illness. The policy proposed the reorientation of the delivery of mental health services away from the old style model of institutional care to community based services.

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Note to the Editor:

The Mental Health Commission is an independent statutory body. The primary functions of the Mental Health Commission are to foster and promote high standards of care and good practice in the delivery of mental health services and to ensure that the interests of those involuntarily admitted are protected, pursuant to the Mental Health Act 2001.