

Mental Health Commission outlines road map for the transformation of mental health services in Ireland.

Minister's stated commitment to change is an important step, says Commission

Thursday November 19th: The Mental Health Commission today published a paper giving an analysis of the progress towards implementation by the HSE of the Government's 2006 policy on the mental health services, a Vision for Change.

This policy was widely welcomed and embraced by all parties as the framework for developing mental health services in Ireland. However as we approach the fourth anniversary of the publication of Vision for Change, the fundamental changes to mental health services as recommended in Vision for Change have not taken place.

The Commission notes and warmly welcomes the commitment made this week by the Minister of State with Responsibility for Mental Health John Moloney to a core element of this policy – the closure and sale of the State's old psychiatric hospitals and the ring-fencing of the proceeds of those sales for the development of new mental health services, and the transfer of patients from the old institutions to community based settings.

According to the Chairman of the Mental Health Commission Dr Edmond O'Dea: "It was very encouraging to hear the Minister say that early in the New Year he would outline the properties to be sold and the five-year capital programme for delivering Vision for Change. Such a funding commitment is vital.

"The other element required is an implementation plan, with targets, timelines, specific steps and clear identification of the individuals responsible for each element. This is detailed further in the paper we have published today."

The MHC paper acknowledges that implementation of a complex policy with many recommendations in a system that is undergoing significant change is a challenging process. The paper outlines what works in implementation and discusses the extensive literature on effective implementation processes. This requires co-ordinated change at system, organisation, programme and practice levels.

The MHC acknowledges the recent appointment of the Assistant National Director Mental Health Services as a positive indicator of the HSE's response to Vision for Change. However, the MHC states in its paper that the evidence based requirements for successful implementation are largely missing from the HSE implementation plan. The MHC states that the implementation plan from the HSE should include:

- 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.

"Everybody wants this." according to the Chairman of the MHC, Dr Edmond O'Dea. "These are straightforward matters of process. However, if they are to happen there must be a change of attitude. There is a real opportunity here to show public policy making and change management at its best. This can and must change so that there is a real difference in the mental health services that are delivered in Ireland."

A Vision for Change government policy on mental health was published in January 2006. A Vision for Change is a policy 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 and envisages specialist community care and treatment that addresses the biological, psychological and social factors that may contribute to a person's mental illness.

Specific changes it envisages to include are:

- the development of community based multidisciplinary community mental health teams;
- a focus on the recovery approach;
- strong links between specialist mental health services and primary GP care;
- the closure of the older type mental hospitals and the re-investment in mental health services from the money raised from their sale;
- the establishment of a National Mental Health Services Directorate.

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Note to Editors:

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.