

Progress on implementing official government policy on mental health is slow says Mental Health Commission

“Change must be a reality, not just a vision”

Monday 26th January 2009: The Mental Health Commission (MHC) remains disappointed at the slow progress towards the implementation of the Government's policy on mental health services, which is now three years old.

The Commission welcomes the implementation of some elements of *A Vision for Change* in 2008. These include the establishment of the National Service User Executive (NSUE) and progress in providing additional inpatient capacity for children and adolescents. These changes will bring tangible benefits to people and we welcome them, said the MHC Chairman Dr. Edmond O'Dea.

However speaking after today's press conference on the subject by the Minister of State Mr. John Moloney, the Commission said the central elements of the policy were still awaiting implementation.

“We welcomed the decision by the Government to adopt *A Vision for Change* in 2006”, according to Dr O'Dea. “But the long and inexplicable delay by the Health Service Executive (HSE) in delivering on its core recommendations causes us concern, three years on. At this stage the Commission would have expected to see more substantial indicators of real change”.

Official Government policy as set out in *A Vision for Change* is to implement an enlightened model of mental health service provision in Ireland. It proposes the building and fostering of positive mental health within the community, and the provision of accessible, community based specialist mental health services for people with mental illness.

The policy document describes the reorganisation and restructuring of mental health services as “the first step” that needs to be taken, and that this must happen through the establishment of a National Mental Health Services Directorate. Three years on this key component has not been established and it appears that the Health Service Executive does not intend to implement this recommendation.

The MHC welcomed the Minister's statement that monies raised from the sale of lands and assets currently within the mental health services will be reinvested in the development of community mental health services. The current financial constraints cannot be used as an excuse for the non-implementation of *Vision for Change*. The report “The Economics of Mental Health Care in Ireland” published last year by the Mental Health Commission provided evidence of the economic, social and individual gains to be achieved from investment in mental health services”.

"The implementation of '*A Vision for Change*' is critical in ensuring that Ireland has a modern, accessible and integrated mental health service. Every recommendation contained in '*A Vision for Change*' must be implemented so that people with a mental illness can avail of a high quality mental health service. Three years on, we can no longer simply have a vision for change: Change must be a reality," Dr. O'Dea concluded.

ENDS

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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.