

# **MHC: pandemic cannot deny or delay access to people who urgently require mental health care**

## **Immediate access to involuntary detention beds must be prioritised**

**Friday, October 6<sup>th</sup>:** The Mental Health Commission has warned that the closure of in-patient mental health centres to admissions because of Covid-19 may put some of the most vulnerable people in the country at risk if appropriate plans are not put in place to ensure they are immediately accommodated elsewhere.

It was reported to the Commission two weeks ago that three in-patient centres, in the same Community Healthcare Organisation (CHO), made the decision to close their centres to new admissions because of the high number of Covid-19 cases in each centre. The Commission's dedicated Covid-19 monitoring hub has been monitoring the situation in the interim and was this week informed of a risk relating to new admissions.

The decision by all three centres to close to new admissions may have left a number of people who urgently require involuntary admission on a waiting list while alternative accommodation was sought.

"The closure of the three centres, while necessary, has exposed again how the pandemic is severely affecting the most vulnerable," said the Chief Executive of the Mental Health Commission, John Farrelly. "People who require involuntary detention are obviously very unwell and require urgent care and treatment. We know that management and staff in the area worked extremely hard to find these people alternative arrangements, but delays may have occurred. When people are very unwell, and perhaps suicidal, we cannot afford any kind of delay before they start receiving treatment.

"The lesson from this week is that the health service must immediately put in place a contingency plan to ensure that those who require involuntary detention are accommodated in a timely manner in the event that this type of situation occurs again elsewhere. The Commission has already escalated this to the HSE and the Department of Health as a matter of concern."

As of this morning, the three centres in question reported a total of 55 confirmed cases of Covid-19 among staff and residents.

"We must also bear in mind that these three centres are all located in busy urban areas, while the buildings they are housed in are all about 20-25 years old," added Mr. Farrelly. "That the virus is particularly high in these old buildings and, in many cases, in units located in busy areas is something that the Commission intends to keep a close eye on over the coming weeks and months and escalate any concerns we have as appropriate."

The Commission provided the following metrics to the HSE and the Department of Health this morning (Friday, October 6<sup>th</sup>):

- 19 services reporting suspected or confirmed cases (compared to 30 last week)
  - 13 services reporting confirmed staff cases (compared to 18 last week)
  - 8 services reporting confirmed resident cases (compared to 10 last week)
- 94 total confirmed or suspected cases (compared to 102 last week)
- 32 confirmed or suspected cases residents (compared to 35 last week)
  - 22 confirmed cases (compared to 23 last week)

- 10 suspected cases (compared to 12 last week)
- 62 confirmed or suspected cases staff (compared to 67 last week)
  - 61 confirmed cases (compared to 58 last week)
  - 1 suspected case (compared to 9 last week)

There were no additional deaths reported to the Commission in the period. The last death in services relating to suspected or confirmed cases was reported in late September, which brought to 18 the total number of deaths since monitoring of all services commenced at the beginning of April. The last death in services prior to this took place in early May.

## **Notes to the Editor:**

### **About the Mental Health Commission**

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. The Mental Health Commission also has statutory responsibility for the Decision Support Service under the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015.

### **Covid-19 and the Commission**

Although the Commission had been in regular contact with the approved in-patient mental health units since the beginning of March in relation to plans to deal with the virus, it was requested by the Department of Health at the start of April to risk-rate these units, along with the (unregulated) 24-hour community residences.

There are currently 183 services monitored by the Commission, comprising of 66 in-patient units (services that have always been and continue to be regulated by the Commission), and 117 (unregulated) community residences. Combined, these facilities care for more than 3,900 service users across the country.

The Commission continues to monitor all residential mental health services in relation to the pandemic, and provides data to the Department of Health and the HSE on a weekly basis, with any identified issues escalated as appropriate.