

The Mental Health Commission has this afternoon formerly written to each political party to ensure that mental health is appropriately prioritised within any programme for government.

The text of our letter is below.

Letter to political parties – 08.05.20:

The Mental Health Commission is the independent regulator of mental health services in Ireland. Over the last 15 years, it has identified both the strengths and weaknesses in Ireland's mental health system.

The Commission believes that Ireland, at this critical juncture, has the opportunity to address the issues that continue to afflict our mental health service. Among many things, the current Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted in stark terms the need to have a modern, community-based mental health service.

The Commission holds the view that the provision of a modern, person-centred mental health service in Ireland will only occur when mental health is appropriately prioritised within any programme for government.

The Commission is aware of and welcomes the work to refresh previous mental health policies but is disappointed by the slow pace and lack of progress in this area. It is of the view that it is only through the appointment of a fully-resourced task force - with appropriate clinical and operational leadership - that a root and branch overhaul of current services can occur and a fit-for-purpose and comprehensive mental health system be put in place.

Without appropriate levels of leadership and drive, and without the reform of the governance and management structures of our mental health system, systemic and long-term change will not occur.

As per the evidence of the Inspector of Mental Health Services, the current mental health system is ad hoc and sporadic; lacks integration; and much of the mental health journey is linked to institutional care as opposed to delivering same within a community setting.

The Commission recognises that Slaintecare provides the key principles for reform. However, the task force approach can add drive and focus. Furthermore, the application of any individual policy, no matter how well intentioned, will fail unless the governance and funding model within our mental health system is changed to drive in accountability for community-based, holistic, integrated care that meets people at the earliest point in their mental health journey and ensures that primary, secondary and specialist care is integrated. This approach is pivotal to ensure that no individual falls through the cracks at their time of greatest need.

The Commission would recommend a model akin to the evidenced-based reform of cancer care in Ireland. This requires:

- clear political stewardship, ownership and oversight
- an evidenced-based approach shared by all stakeholders
- clinical leadership and integrated governance structures
- input of service users
- appropriate ring-fenced financial resources

The Commission is prepared to assist in developing this approach. Furthermore, there are key people at clinical, managerial and service-user level who can contribute to a shared focused

implementation of any agreed programme.

The Commission is available to brief your representatives on this position with a view to creating a shared clarity of purpose to deliver a modern, person-centred mental health service throughout Ireland.

Ends