

New government must drive through mental health policy

Implementation is key, says MHC Chair

Wednesday, June 17th: The Chairman of the Mental Health Commission has issued a stark warning to the incoming government that they must commit to ensuring the full implementation of the refreshed mental health policy if Ireland finally want to move mental health care out of the shadows of the past.

Acknowledging the publication of 'Sharing the Vision – a Mental Health Policy for Everyone', John Saunders said that it is essential that the policy secures and retains appropriate levels of political and administrative support if it is to succeed.

"The last policy was warmly welcomed by everyone 14 years ago as modern, progressive and ambitious," said Mr. Saunders. "The reason why it failed was not because of what it proposed, but because it was not fully implemented. This was partly because no appropriately positioned person, office or body was entrusted with ultimate responsibility for implementation, resulting in ad hoc, inconsistent and selective action. We can't allow that to happen again.

"We have been talking about the failures of the mental health system in Ireland for far too long," added Mr. Saunders. "While we have made huge strides over the last half century, we still have a long way to go before we can truly be proud of our services. This policy presents the new government - and a new minister - with the perfect opportunity to finally and comprehensively implement person-centred, holistic, community mental health services."

While commitment at government level would send out a strong message, Mr. Saunders said that it is essential that this assurance is met by an appropriate level of support and authority at health service level.

"The accompanying framework to ensure implementation is welcome. This policy will have an even greater chance of success if the HSE ensures ownership at executive and board level to drive through the new policy, and address any issues or concerns at the highest levels on an ongoing basis."

Mr. Saunders welcomed the fact that the core principles which formed the basis of the previous policy have remained as a central plank of the refreshed policy.

"If all recommendations are implemented, the people of Ireland will finally have a modern, integrated and holistic service, which is person-centred, collaborative and focussed on recovery."

Ends

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.