

PRESS RELEASE

PNA SAYS ADDITIONAL MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING MUST BE RING-FENCED AND MORATORIUM LIFTED TO TACKLE STAFFING CRISIS

The Psychiatric Nurses Association (PNA) said today (Monday) that while it welcomed the Budget announcement by Minister Kathleen Lynch of an additional €35m for Mental Health for 2012 the overall cut of 2% in the Mental Health budget will have the net effect of reducing that €35m to €21m in additional funding for 2012.

The PNA also warned that previous announcements of additional monies have never materialised as the HSE has continuously reduced expenditure on mental health by even more than the additional monies committed by the Minister.

Commenting on today's Budget announcement, PNA, General Secretary, Des Kavanagh said:

'While the Minister's efforts to maintain some semblance of service against a background of continuous cutbacks is to be welcomed, PNA have demonstrated that the HSE cannot be trusted with the Mental Health Budget. Every time dedicated funding for critically needed mental health services is announced by Government, the HSE merely pocket that money for use elsewhere in the Health Service and take some more from the existing budget for good measure.'

The PNA points out that since the publication of Vision for Change, the Government blueprint for the Mental Health Services, €150m was announced in necessary additional expenditure for implementation of the Plan. However in the same actual five year period total spending has reduced from €800m. to €708m.'

Des Kavanagh warned that; *'Unless Mental Health funding is ring-fenced and guaranteed, announcements of extra funding are meaningless. The Minister knows this. We are demanding assurances which will guarantee that this money will be real and extra. Even with today's announcement we will still be working on a budget nearly €60m less than what it was in 2006. We will still be a long way short of the recommended 8.2% of the Health Budget recommended in Vision for Change'*.

'In the debate on Health Budget figures it is all too easy to forget that cuts in resources translate into real cutbacks in services for people and their families who are often in crisis. For example psychiatric staff were confronted recently with an appalling situation where over a weekend 17 people were assessed for admission in the North Dublin mental health services, but none could be admitted because no beds were available.'

Mr Kavanagh said that in other instances throughout the services cutbacks are being introduced to make short term savings which are then squandered as expensive crisis beds are being purchased from the private sector.

'Mental Health has been cynically targeted for cuts over the last few years. The staffing moratorium has had a hugely disproportionate impact on mental health with retirements of psychiatric nurses resulting in mental health contributing up to 45% of the annual job cuts in the HSE. The impending retirement deadline of February next will worsen that situation.'

'As a vital frontline service we are witnessing a loss of jobs at an appalling rate. We cannot continue to maintain services unless psychiatric nursing is exempted from the Moratorium. The Government must recognise that we have made our contribution and we cannot give any more!'

Ends

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