



PSYCHIATRIC NURSES' ASSOCIATION

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**Mr. Michael Noonan, T.D.
Minister for Finance,
Department of Finance,
Government Buildings,
Upper Merrion Street,
Dublin**

November 2011

PNA Budget Submission

Dear Minister Noonan,

The Psychiatric Nurses Association believe that this year more than any other we should make you aware of our serious concern that as a result of current HSE and Government policy the Irish Mental Health Services are being systematically undermined and damaged to a point that adequate and appropriate services can no longer be guaranteed to patients.

In that context we are appealing to the Government to use the forthcoming Budget to reverse this trend and to make budgetary provision for the appropriate funding to maintain psychiatric services for those most vulnerable in our society.

Minister you will be aware being a former Minister for Health yourself that psychiatric ill health is a major issue to be dealt with and must be a priority for Government. The enormous impact that mental health issues, including suicide, are having in families and communities across the country have been highlighted again and again by the PNA and indeed by patient advocacy groups and a number of independent bodies and agencies over recent years and were highlighted most recently in the public declarations of all the candidates in our recent Presidential election. You will be aware that:

Up to 50% of the Irish population, that is 1 in every 2, will experience some Mental Health problem at some stage of their lives. The World Health Organisation estimates that by 2020 that Mental Ill Health will cause a greater difficulty than heart disease and that currently 5 of the 10 causes of disability globally are due to Mental Health conditions with depression and anxiety being the main contributors.

There were 486 deaths from suicide in 2010 which is more deaths than on our roads. Of these 486 deaths, 386 were males and 100 females with the vast majority being males under 25. This is a national scandal and with very limited resources available for dealing with the tragedy of suicide.

In that same year there were 11966 presentations to hospitals due to deliberate self harm- a 4% increase on 2009 and the fourth successive increase in the national rate of hospital treated deliberate self harm.

Focus Ireland has stated that 5000 people will be homeless this Christmas. We know that the vast majority of those suffer some form of Mental ill health, highlighting again the huge challenge that mental health issues pose for our society and our health services.

Mental Health – A Vital Service Without A Budget :

- Budget 2011 (Dec 2010) contained a provision that the Mental Health Budget would be cut by no more than 1.8%.
- Unfortunately the budget for Mental Health is not explicit or separate in the general health budget so it remains impossible to verify if particular commitments to Mental Health spending are being honoured, and having regard to the number of services that are being closed/amalgamated/downsized it is our strong belief that this commitment is in fact not being honoured. Our efforts to get clarity on this issue from the HSE, including a request for an urgent meeting, have to date been ignored.
- We believe that having regard to the crisis in funding in the HSE (a €320m deficit projected for year end) that monies which are guaranteed to the Psychiatric Services are being redirected to the General Services many of which are massively over budget. Why is it the case that psychiatric services are being asked to pay the price for budgetary overruns in other services.? As I write this Mr Liam Mc Namara, National Chairman and secretary of St. Joseph's Branch in Limerick, and whom I understand you know, has been in contact with me to state that HSE Mid West have had to admit that they are €1m under budget for the year to date but yet are presiding over the destruction of the service in Limerick.

The Current Funding Situation :

- When Vision for Change was endorsed by Government in 2006 it was detailed in the report that in order to implement its recommendations it would require an additional €21.6 million every year for seven years for an additional €150m of new money. That was on top of the €800m then being spent on Mental Health Services. Some new money was put in, €26.2m in 2006 (€1.2m of this for suicide prevention) and €25m in 07 but then no new money in 2008. €3.2m in 2009 for the very specific purpose of creating new Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health teams and again nothing in 2010.
- Five years on we should have €108m of new funding on top of the €800m to give a total of €908 with another €42m to come. The service plan for 2011 states that €708m will be available to fund the Mental Health Service.
- New money in the amount of €54.4m was made available during this five year period and during the same time four times that amount was then taken away.
- In further trying to establish the budget for Mental Health we have examined HSE Service Plans for 2010 and 2011. The Service Plan for 2011 stated the Budget for 2011 was €708m. The Service Plan for 2010 stated that the resources available to the Psychiatric Service would be €734m. The service plan for 2011 also detailed that what was actually spent in 2010 was €721m which is €13m short of what was provided for. The €708m referred to as the budget for 2011 represents a 1.8% reduction on what was actually spent in 2010 not on what was allocated. Therefore the actual reduction is 3.55% when the €708m is compared with what should have been spent i.e. €734m.. We started in 2006 with a budget of €800m and were promised another €150m on top of this but five years later we are €92m short of where we were in 2006.

We have no idea whether the amounts outlined in the service plans are the amounts that were actually spent. We cannot get answers. What we do know is that spending on Mental Health has reduced as a percentage of the Health Budget from 13.7% when "Planning for the Future" was launched in 1984 to currently 4.9%. A massive reduction by any standards.

- Your Governments "*programme for Government*" set out that your policy on Mental Health incorporates the recommendations of "*A Vision for Change*". The Programme has promised to ring fence €35m annually from within the Health Budget to develop services as outlined in "*Vision for Change*". We have not seen one red cent of this money to date.

The case for providing adequate funding for Mental Health Services are compelling and we are not the only ones expressing concern.

- The inspector of Mental Health Services has described the funding of Mental Health Services in a recent report as *"opaque and almost incomprehensible"*.
- A report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture on Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (C.P.T) following its visit to Ireland published (February 2011) stated *"The CPT understands that the current economic difficulties require the Irish authorities to cut public expenditure. However, even in times of financial austerity, the authorities should always ensure that there are, at all times, sufficient staff available for psychiatric hospitals to remain safe and secure for patients and staff alike as well as to provide adequate treatment and care for patients; such essential tasks should not be sacrificed"* (Para 135).
- The Independent Monitoring Group in its annual review of the implementation of "Vision for Change" stated that there had been *"little substantial progress"* The report pointed out that Mental Health spending was just 5.3% of the overall health spend. The report states that not only does this reflect the continuing decrease over the last number of years but it also falls far short of the 8.4% spend recommended in *"Vision for Change"*.

Mental Health – A Vital Service Without Staff.

The Government Moratorium on recruitment is having a particularly detrimental effect on the provision of mental health services. The reduction in numbers of Psychiatric Nurses is creating a crisis situation for the provision of services and cannot be allowed to continue.

- In 2009 596 Psychiatric Nurses retired or resigned which accounted for 42% of the 1447 **Total** staff reduction requirement in the HSE for that year.
- In 2010, 500 retired or resigned again accounting for almost 40% of the HSE entire staff reduction requirement for that year.
- In 2011 and up to the February 2012 it is expected that another 650 will retire.
- This means that the Psychiatric Services will lose 30% of its Psychiatric Nurses the very people who are the critical front line care givers.

The HSE have accepted that the Government Moratorium is having a disproportionate impact in the Psychiatric Service and have described it as a *"blunt instrument"*.

The Moratorium is now having such catastrophic effect on mental health services that Psychiatric Nurses must now be exempt from its provisions.

There is a growing consensus of opinion among a number of independent agencies and observers that our mental health services are in serious decline and that faced with a continuous cutbacks in budget and staffing, we cannot adequately meet the growing demand for these services across society.

- The Mental Health Commission Annual Report highlighted *"slippage in a number of areas, including staffing, therapeutic services and programmes, recreational activities, privacy and premises"*
- The inspector of Mental Health Services said that he observed *"regression in the way services were provided"* and how staffing cuts were having a *"disproportionate impact on the development of Community Mental Health teams"*. This is, he said, *"causing a reversion to a more custodial form of Mental Health Service"*
- Mr Colm O'Gorman of Amnesty International has called on the Government for an *"immediate commitment to prioritise Mental Health"*

The central recommendation in "Vision for Change" that "each citizen should have access to local specialised and comprehensive mental health services provision that is of the highest standard" . While it would be impossible to outline all of the deficiencies that exist in our mental health services we will outline two examples of the gross inadequacies that exist for two of the most vulnerable groups on our society.

- In respect of child and adolescent services, although some progress is being made, particularly with the provision of acute in-patient beds, the number of beds at just over 50, is in fact only the number that we had 10 years ago. It remains a scandal that according to the HSE's own figures there are still 2800 young people on waiting lists for access to services with:
 - 500 waiting for more than one year.
 - 600 waiting between six months to one year.
 - 615 waiting between three months to six months.
- Earlier this year the Irish College of Psychiatric produced a report on the needs of people with Intellectual Disabilities. The Report refers to the Vision for Change recommendation that there should be 39 Mental Health Intellectual Disability Teams nationally yet it concludes that five years on only two exist in Dublin and even those are not staffed appropriately.

It is the PNA submission that the Government in this Budget must:

Confirm that the funding as recommended in "Vision for Change" of 8.4% of the Health Budget will be adopted as Government Policy.

Honour the commitment given in 2006 and outlined earlier in respect of funding to bring it up to this figure.

Honour the promise in this Government's 'Programme for Government' that the €35m additional funding will be made available to mental health services.

Act immediately to separate the Mental Health Budget from General Health Budget to ensure transparency and assurance that mental health services are not being annihilated while valuable resources, that should be spent on mental health, are being used to prop up other services which have failed to live within their budget allocation. This is totally unacceptable to the PNA.

Lift the Moratorium on the employment of Psychiatric Nurses which is having a disproportionate and damaging effect on the provision of vital services throughout the system.

Mr. Seamus Murphy
Deputy General Secretary