

[Sample letter to Min for Health/Finance and local TDs]

[Insert your own address]

[Insert date]

Dear Minister,

One in four people will experience a mental health problem at some point in their lives. Yet, the lack of adequate, appropriate and comprehensive mental health services in Ireland is a significant human rights issue.

- At present, children must wait years for assessment - reported as being up to five years in Kerry in the Mental Health Commission Annual Report for 2006.
- Four inpatient units for child and adolescents were promised by end-2007, but are not yet at the point of construction, so children are placed in adult facilities in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- There is widespread unavailability of alternatives to medication, mainly psychological and social interventions, in breach of the right to the most appropriate and the least restrictive or intrusive treatment.
- Ireland still has a high rate of hospitalisation for mental health problems due to the slow development of community services, conflicting with the right to treatment in the least restrictive environment.
- The annual reports of the Inspector of Mental Health Services finds the conditions in some mental health facilities unacceptable.
- Even though Government almost trebled of annual Government expenditure on mental health from €326m in 1997 to €1b in 2006, it is clear that it is not enough.

This is something that gravely concerns me. Directly or indirectly, almost everyone and every family in Ireland is impacted in some way by this neglect. The economic and social cost to Irish society of Government inaction is enormous. Without even including the human cost of marginalisation, the new national policy framework for mental health, *A Vision for Change*, estimates that the annual financial cost to the State of mental ill health is €11 billion. From a financial point of view, investing much more in mental health services makes sense.

Also, there is a ten-fold variation in funding for mental health across different services around the country, with least funding going to socio-economically deprived areas. While operational responsibility for the development and funding of mental health services has been devolved by the Department of Health & Children to the Health Service Executive at national and regional levels, the Minister for Health and Children remains politically accountable for the performance of the health services.

[Insert specific concerns in your own community, or use your experience as an example of your concern, related to the monthly question(s)]

In January 2006, the Irish Government committed itself to a new national policy framework for mental health, *A Vision for Change*. It sets out a broad agenda for promoting mental health, preventing mental health problems, providing adequate mental health services, and addressing the practical day-to-day difficulties and discrimination experienced by people with mental health problems. *A Vision for Change* sets out how much Government needs to spend in developing mental health services. But there is far more in *A Vision for Change* that will need Government investment.

I would be grateful for an answer to the following questions:

- **Will Budget 2008 include provision for significantly increased resources for mental health services, reflecting the economic and social benefits of investing in prevention and more effective intervention in mental health?**
- **If mental health is to achieve parity with other areas of health, as mental health problems account for nearly 12% of what economists call the "global burden of disease", should not funding for mental health services progressively reach a minimum of 12% total health spend, from the present 7.7%? The relative percentage is 12% in England and 18% in Scotland.**
- **Will the huge differences in funding between services be resolved in Budget 2008, and how will this be achieved?**

I am calling on you to discuss this issue with your party colleagues and raise it with the Minister for Finance, and other Government Departments whose roles are mentioned in *A Vision for Change*.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name]