

## **[Sample letter to Min for Health]**

**[Insert your own  
address]**

Mary Harney TD  
Minister for Health and Children  
Department of Health and Children  
Hawkins House  
Hawkins Street  
Dublin 2

**[Insert date]**

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you to express my concern the levels of poverty and social exclusion experienced by people with mental health problems in Ireland, documented in the National Economic and Social Forum's (NESF) report published in November.

The report, Mental Health and Social Inclusion, highlights how poverty and social exclusion are a cause of mental health problems, and how vulnerable groups such as disadvantaged children, women experiencing domestic violence, or vulnerable older people, experience higher rates of mental ill-health and discrimination.

It also shows how social exclusion and discrimination are consequences of ill mental health – for instance, only a fifth of people with mental health problems are employed. It identifies stigma and discrimination against people with mental health problems as the greatest barrier to their social inclusion. This gravely concerns me.

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

The NESF report makes important recommendations for Government action across six strategic areas. I believe that if these recommendations must be implemented. The report says that responsibility to drive forward and oversee follow-up on its recommendations should be given to the Senior Officials Group under the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion. For this purpose, it says, targets, implementation schedules, performance indicators and outcomes should be established and regular reports prepared and published by that group for public information and debate. It

also recommends that a cross departmental team be established to ensure detailed implementation.

In January 2006, the Irish Government committed itself to a new national policy framework for mental health, *A Vision for Change*. It too sets out a broad agenda for addressing the practical day-to-day difficulties and discrimination experienced by people with mental health problems. 22 months on, no implementation plan has yet emerged, and it has only been slowly implemented. I am concerned, therefore, that the NESF report will be equally neglected.

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

- How exactly will the Senior Officials Group take these recommendations forward under the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion?
- Will the Senior Officials Group publish regular reports on the implementation of the NESF's recommendations, and if so, when will the first be produced?
- Will targets, implementation schedules, performance indicators and outcomes be established and published, and if so when?

I am calling on you to discuss this issue with your party colleagues and raise it with all relevant Ministers and Government Departments whose roles are mentioned in the NESF report.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

**[Insert your name]**