

**[Sample letter to Ministers for Health]**

**[Insert your own address]**

Ms. Mary Harney T.D  
Minister for Health and Children  
Department of Health and Children  
Hawkins House  
Dublin 2

**[Insert date]**

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you regarding your Department's role in implementing the 2006 national mental health policy framework, *A Vision for Change*. While I welcome this policy, I am concerned that it does not fully explore the link between mental health and gender-based violence against women.

A statutory body, the Women's Health Council, published a report in November 2007 entitled *Violence Against Women & Health*, which outlines how gender-based violence has huge consequences on a person's mental health. Psychological consequences of violence against women, it says, include depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, psychosis, phobias, substance abuse, sleep and psychosomatic disorders, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide. For example, in a national survey carried out in 1995 by Women's Aid, *Making the Links*, 65% of women who experienced violence in the home reported that they had also suffered from depression.

The Women's Health Council makes a number of recommendations:

- All health professionals be trained on violence against women so that they can recognise it and deal with it more effectively within their services or refer women appropriately to other services.
- The screening of women presenting at mental health services for experiences of gender-based violence.
- Data collection mechanisms within the health sector be improved so that the extent of the problem and its impact on health services can be documented and budget allocations amended accordingly.
- A national systematic approach by the health sector in providing its own services, as well as linking with other statutory and non-statutory service providers.

It expresses the hope that the new government office, COSC - Irish Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence, will bring provide leadership in the development of an integrated response to include a health sector plan for violence against women.

It also advises that the Department of Health and Children and the HSE should develop a nationwide strategy so that women receive appropriate responses when disclosing abuse.

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

What measures are planned, or have been adopted, by your Department, to address the link between violence against women and mental ill health, and to implement the WHC's recommendations?

Will additional funding and support be granted to expert counselling and support organisations in the community and voluntary sector for women who experience violence who are at present grossly underfunded?

I would be grateful for a comprehensive response as this a matter that greatly concerns me. I also call on you to discuss this issue with your party colleagues and raise it with the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

**[Insert your name]**