

[Sample letter]

[Insert your own address]

Mr John Moloney
Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, Mental Health and Equality
Department of Health and Children
Hawkins House
Hawkins Street
Dublin 2

[Insert date]

Dear Minister,

I am very concerned that mental health services remain woefully inadequate, leading to neglect, hardship and breaches of the fundamental human rights of the most vulnerable in our society.

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

As you know, the Independent Monitoring Group established to monitor the implementation of the national mental health policy, *A Vision for Change*, published its second report in June. It is heavily critical of the "slow progress" to date in implementing this policy. It points to "the lack of a systematic approach to implementation and the lack of clarity in responsibility for implementation in the Health Services Executive (HSE)". It points to the "absence of clear, identifiable leadership within the HSE to implement *A Vision for Change*". It remarks that 'by and large the recommendations in its first report were not addressed in 2007'. This is an astonishing state of affairs.

A central recommendation from the Independent Monitoring Group was for the HSE to establish a Mental Health Directorate to ensure a systematic approach to implementation of its recommendations, two and a half years later this remains unfulfilled. As a result, the development of mental health services has faltered with inadequate and piecemeal reform, lack of accountability and a clear absence of transparency in how mental health budgets are managed. Incredibly, the Monitoring Group said it is not apparent 'who in the HSE has budgetary responsibility for mental health services or how budgetary decisions affecting mental health services are met'. The Group concludes that 'the HSE was mistaken in their decision not to implement the recommendation to establish a National Mental Health Service Directorate', and recommends the appointment of a Director for Mental Health to drive the implementation of policy over the next three years.

Unfortunately, it is clear from the Monitoring Group's report that *A Vision for Change* has not marked a turning point in the decades of Government neglect of mental health services. The HSE response to the Monitoring Group's report fails to address the core concerns or recommendations made in the report. If this policy stands any chance of being realised, action is needed immediately to bring accountability and transparency to the HSE's implementation of *A Vision for Change*.

However, Government responsibility is not just for adequate mental health services. Promotion, prevention, early intervention and support across Government Departments is critical if access to mental health services is to have any real value, i.e. if Government is not just to wait for people to become unwell before it takes action. It is clear from the Monitoring Group's report that other Government Departments are not fulfilling their responsibilities under *A Vision for Change*. The Group noted that progress reports from Departments lacked specific information and clarity. I cannot see how departments will take responsibility for their components of *A Vision for Change* unless a cross-departmental action plan is produced.

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

- Will your office ensure that the HSE commits to the appointment of a Director of Mental Health as recommended by the Independent Monitoring Group?
- Will your office ensure that the HSE fully implements all recommendations from the Independent Monitoring Group?
- What steps will be taken by your office to coordinate implementation across Government Departments, as recommended by the group?
- Will a crossdepartmental action plan be produced to ensure coordinated implementation by all responsible Government departments?

If the Monitoring Group again reports a lack of action by the HSE and other Government Departments in 2009, it will be a complete betrayal of those who put their trust in Government when *A Vision for Change* was adopted. If the human rights of people with mental health problems matter to Government, this must be the turning point.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name]