

[Sample letter to Ministers for Health]

[Insert your own address]

[Insert date]

Dear Minister,

Today, World Mental Health Day, I am writing to you regarding your Department's role in implementing the 2006 national mental health policy framework, *A Vision for Change*. The global theme of this year's Mental Health Day is making mental health a global priority by scaling up services through citizen advocacy and action.

While I welcome *A Vision for Change*, I am concerned that in Ireland and elsewhere-mental health is not given the political priority it deserves. Despite significant efforts, Irish mental health promotion, prevention and services remain out of step with international best practice and, as such, fail to fully comply with international human rights law.

Ireland is a signatory to the human rights treaty, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights(ESCR). Article 12 of this treaty states that *every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health*. The highest attainable standard of mental health means that that, for any person in Ireland

- They will receive appropriate mental health services when they need and want them, and those services will be designed towards people's empowerment and recovery.
- When they are using services they will be treated with dignity and respect.
- Government policy will be conducive to good mental health, and not negatively impact on anyone's capacity to enjoy good mental health.

As you are aware, Ireland will be reporting to the United Nations Committee on ESCR in 2009 on its implementation of this treaty and must account for its action on mental health.

This human right is not confined to the right to all to mental health services, Government also has a duty to promote conditions in which people can lead a mentally healthy life, addressing the underlying determinants of mental health, such as access to work, education or appropriate housing. It must also create an environment where stigma and discrimination against those experiencing mental ill-health is minimised.

I am very concerned at not just the slow pace of expansion and change within mental health services, but also, from the two annual reports of the Independent Monitoring Group of *A Vision for Change*, little or no engagement by Departments outside Health. A new report from the Mental Health Commission on the economic benefits of investment in

mental health services shows that the main economic costs of mental health problems are located in the labour market as a result of lost employment, absenteeism, lost productivity and premature retirement. In light of the economic downturn, it makes more sense than ever to ensure that all Government Departments are 'pulling their weight' in preventing mental health difficulties and supporting people towards recovery.

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

Will an interdepartmental working group be established to drive and coordinate action by all Government Departments whose role *A Vision for Change* mentions?

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 Ministers in other Government Departments.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[Insert your name]