

Mental Health and Human Rights – A Call to Action

The economic crisis confronting us should not mean mental health services in Ireland remain underfunded and unequal.

We are now three years into the implementation of the government's mental health policy *A Vision for Change* and we still do not have an adequate implementation plan. When it was launched many campaigners welcomed the policy because it promised an overhaul in how services are provided to enable the move from institutional care to care in the community. At that time, Minister Harney announced an €25 million in additional funding and assured that further investment would continue.

It also recognised the crucial importance of having service users centrally involved in planning and decision-making.

But three years into the policy progress is painfully slow while funds under *A Vision for Change* have simply not materialised.

In the 2006 and 2007 Budgets the mental health sector was allocated approximately €25 million to develop this policy but the whereabouts of much of it remains a mystery. Millions were diverted into spending gaps in other areas of the HSE.

In Budget 2008 there was no allocation at all and this year again mental health service users have not received the required additional funding.

The right to adequate and appropriate mental health services is a fundamental human right. It is enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which Ireland ratified in 1990. But this right is far from a reality for the majority of people seeking services today.

Because of a lack of facilities children are still being placed in adult psychiatric facilities. Figures from the Mental Health Commission show that almost 200 children were admitted to adult centres from January to October 2008.

Specialist mental health services, such as for people with eating disorders or brain injuries, are largely unavailable outside of Dublin.

It might be argued that we cannot afford to spend money on mental health. Amnesty International would respond that at a time of economic crisis when demand on mental health services is increasing, investment in mental health services is even more urgent.

In September of last year the Mental Health Commission report, *The Economics of Mental Health Care in Ireland*, estimated the direct annual cost of poor mental health in Ireland at a staggering €3 billion, or 2% of GNP. In this economic climate, surely we should be increasing, not decreasing, investment in mental health services.

The right to health is not a stand-alone right; it embraces a wide range of socio-economic duties on Government to promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life such as food and nutrition, housing, safe and healthy working conditions, and a healthy environment. All Government departments must live up to *A Vision for Change*.

To achieve this Amnesty International Ireland needs your help. Hundreds of people around the state take action every month as part of our Mental Health Lobbying Network, demanding that their elected representatives honour their commitments on mental health services and calling for all Departments to take action.

With your support we can end the practice of putting children in adult psychiatric wards. We can get a real implementation plan with ring-fenced funding for mental health services. We can force the Government to roll out the Community Mental Health teams programme.

The Local Elections provide an ideal opportunity to send a message to our elected officials about the importance of mental health. To find out more and access campaigning materials log on to the mental health section of www.amnesty.ie.

For more information or to join the hundreds of people who take monthly action in Amnesty International's mental health campaign, email mentalhealth@amnesty.ie and help put human rights at the heart of mental health policy in Ireland.