

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

Re: World Mental Health Day

10 October 2009

Dear Minister

I am writing to you to mark the occasion of World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2009 and in particular to highlight my great concern about the lack of accountability that has been exposed in the HSE's financing of mental health services.

A recent report published by Amnesty International found damning evidence of major gaps in the HSE's accounting of the national mental health budget. The report, compiled on behalf of Amnesty International by Indecon Independent Consultants, also revealed that the money that can be tracked is not being spent efficiently. This would be a serious concern at any time, but in light of the current economic situation it is completely unacceptable.

Furthermore, upon review of the allocation of human resources by the HSE, the report found that only 19 per cent of mental health staff within the HSE are currently working in community services. The majority of staff continue to be deployed in old institutional settings that do not represent the best value for money and do not respect people's right to the most appropriate services. It also indicates that the HSE's implementation of the Government's 2006 mental health policy *A Vision for Change*, is severely off-target.

The net result of these and other failures is a poor mental health service that fails to uphold the human rights of service users and does not represent effective and efficient allocation of taxpayer's money.

Accountability is a fundamental principle of human rights, as it should be for any sound system of public finance. I am therefore calling on you as Minister for Health and Children to demand more rigorous and transparent reporting from the HSE with regard to mental health spending. Two recommendations from the report are particularly critical to achieving this:

- New performance indicators along with supporting up-to-date data should be developed and published by the HSE to enable accurate monitoring of the national mental health budget.
- In order to ensure the most effective use of scarce public expenditure and to improve value for money, the dependency on acute, long-stay inpatient beds, needs to be reduced in favour of increased provision of community-based services.

I would request that you address these issues as a matter of urgency and would appreciate a prompt response from you.

Yours Sincerely