

Lobbying Network: Action 36

Mental Health and Employment

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Not enough is being done to help people with mental health problems to get and maintain employment. The Government's mental health policy *A Vision for Change* makes clear recommendations about employment. However, the Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment has yet to produce specific plans to implement these recommendations. Of the 172,000 people between the ages of 18-64 with a disability in Ireland, 43 per cent reported experiencing a mental health problem. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment must introduce specific measures to cater for the needs of this sizeable chunk of the population.

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

People with mental health problems have a very high rate of unemployment. In Ireland it has been reported that only 14 per cent of people with a mental health problem are in employment. Research in the UK has shown that these people have up to a 40 per cent lower chance of obtaining employment compared with other disability groups.

There are a number of reasons for this. One is stigma. Only 7 per cent of the public believe that employers would be willing to hire someone with a mental health problem. Furthermore only one fifth of Irish employers have a written policy on mental health. Three quarters of employers say they do not know enough about the law regarding mental health and the work place.

This need not be the case. Evidence has shown that, with appropriate supports, as many as 60 per cent of people with even serious mental health problems can gain and sustain employment.

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE RIGHT TO WORK

The human right to the highest attainable standard of mental health is not limited to mental health services but extends to what are known as the underlying determinants of health, such as housing, education and employment. Mental health is therefore dependent on other rights such as the right to work.

The right to work is recognized in Articles 1 and 23 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Ireland has ratified

this convention. It means that the right to work should be enjoyed equally by all people in Ireland, including those with mental health problems.

Finally, The World Health Organisation has stated that collaboration with the employment sector is vital to making good mental health policy.

SPECIFICS: WHAT WE ARE ASKING FOR?

AI recommends that the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment take the following steps:

1. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy should contain a dedicated strand to consider specific approaches for people with mental health problems
2. A mental health sub-group should be established for the development of the strategy. This should include representation from people with direct experience of a mental health problem and mental health sector NGO's
3. The strategy should implement all of the relevant recommendations of *A Vision for Change*.

KEY POINTS:

- The Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment must include specific measures for people with

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WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Write** a letter to you local TD and the Minister for Enterprise Trade and Employment
- **Circulate** this action by distributing to colleagues in your place of work. Ask your employer to endorse this action and send it too.

(Alternatively you can circulate the action in public places such as your community centre, library, church, or health-centre)

- **Tell** your story, by contacting Amnesty International, if you have been affected by these issues and are interested in becoming a spokesperson for mental health and human rights
- **Join** Amnesty and make us stronger by adding to the number of human rights defenders in Ireland (Text JOIN to 51444 or call 01 836 8356)

RESOURCES:

- Template letters, as well as tools and tips for lobbying, are available for download on our online Lobbying Network resource centre at www.amnesty.ie/mentalhealth.

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GOT FEEDBACK?

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