

Ms Mary Coughlan, T.D.
Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment
23 Kildare Street
Dublin 2

25 November 2009

RE: Mental Health and Employment

Dear Minister,

I am writing to you because I think it is a disgrace that people with mental health problems in Ireland face massive barriers in getting employment.

The National Economic and Social Forum reports that only 14 per cent of people with mental health problems in Ireland are in full time employment. This is all the more scandalous because we know that meaningful employment can be crucial to recovery and social inclusion.

Good mental health rests on the fulfilment of a variety of underlying factors such as education, housing and employment. The denial of an individual's right to work therefore also undermines their right to the highest attainable standard of mental health, both set out in international human rights treaties that Ireland is bound by. The Government's mental health policy *A Vision for Change* recognizes the need for a cross-departmental response to mental health and includes a number of recommendations on employment that must be driven forward by your Department.

So far, your Department has responded to the employment needs of people with mental health problems through the Department's Disability Sectoral Plan. While this work is welcome, it does not adequately address the issues that affect the 43 per cent of people with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 64 who are disabled by a mental health problem. They face specific barriers to employment that require suitably tailored response from your Department.

To rectify this, your Department should 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*.

A similar approach was taken by the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in developing its housing strategy for people with disabilities.

I call on you personally to act on the issues raised in this letter and would appreciate a response from your office,

Yours sincerely,