

Lobbying Network: Action 38

Mental Health and Housing

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Not enough is being done to provide adequate and appropriate housing for people with mental health problems. The Government's mental health policy *A Vision for Change* makes clear recommendations about housing. However, action is being blocked because different agencies cannot decide who is responsible.

BACKGROUND: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?

Housing is a significant issue for people who experience a mental health problem. Just having secure housing can itself be the key to an individual's recovery. On the other hand, it is very difficult to recover from a mental health crisis without having a secure place to live. An insecure housing situation can put a person's mental health at risk and there is a clear link between homelessness and mental health.

The National Economic and Social Forum recognises the link between the need for adequate housing and the social inclusion of people with mental health problems. Internationally, the World Health Organisation has identified poor housing as a significant risk factor for mental health.

In 2007, over four thousand people were in long-stay residents in either in-patient hospitals or community residences in Ireland. With the right supports, the HSE judged that one quarter of these people could have been living more independently as part of their recovery, but these housing supports are not available. This includes services such as resettlement or tenancy sustainment and assistance with budgeting, paying bills and dealing with debts

MENTAL HEALTH & THE RIGHT TO HOUSING

The human right to the best possible mental health is not limited to mental health services but includes other factors like that determine your health, such as housing, education and employment. Mental health is therefore dependent on other rights such as the right to housing.

The right to housing, which is included in the right to an adequate standard of living, is protected in Article 11 of the International Covenant on

Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It means more than just having a roof over your head; it means having a place to live that is safe and comfortable.

Human rights experts have said that disadvantaged groups, including people with mental health problems, should be given some priority when it comes to housing. This means that a country's housing law and policy must take account of the particular housing needs of this group.

SPECIFICS: WHAT WE ARE ASKING FOR?

AI recommends that the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government take the following steps:

1. When publishing its housing strategy for people with disabilities, include comprehensive guidelines relating to people with mental health problems
2. This should include clarifying who is responsible for providing housing supports for people with mental health problems, as well as how these supports will be delivered.

KEY POINTS:

- The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government must clarify the provision of housing supports to people with mental health problems in its Disability Housing Strategy

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WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Write** a letter to you local TD, the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Minister of State for Housing

Circulate this 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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