

# Lobbying Network: Action 45

## Protecting mental health resources in the 2011 budget

**AMNESTY  
INTERNATIONAL**



In its pre-budget submission, Amnesty International Ireland (AI) has called on Government to protect mental health resources and ensure the HSE develops mental health services in line with Government policy. Mental health services are being cut disproportionately in the current economic downturn and this cannot be allowed to continue. Mental health service spending has reduced to just 5.3 per cent of the HSE budget, and in real terms from 2006-9 by 9.2 per cent. While overall health service staffing reduced by 1,300 Whole Time Equivalents in 2009, the mental health services lost 700 staff, a high proportion of the overall reduction. There is an urgent need to strengthen the accountability framework for the HSE in order to ensure that designated mental health funding is spent as intended and that mental health services do not continue to suffer disproportionately by HSE cutbacks.

### **BACKGROUND: WHAT IS THE ISSUE?**

The Government's mental health policy *A Vision for Change* provides a blueprint for reform of Ireland's mental health services. Successive reports by the Independent Monitoring Group for *A Vision for Change* (IMG), the Mental Health Commission and the Irish Mental Health Coalition (IMHC) have highlighted unacceptably slow implementation of this policy. Furthermore, a report by Indecon International Economic Consultants (Indecon) published by AI in 2010 found that there were weaknesses in financial management systems for mental health expenditure.

Currently there is inadequate accountability for the HSE's expenditure. Due to the lack of both legislation requiring accountability for spending by care group, and a national accounting system within the HSE, at present there is no way of guaranteeing that the appropriation for mental health services set out in the Revised Estimates will be spent on mental health services; and the HSE still does not account for its expenditure on a care group basis. Even within the mental health care group, there is no published information on the breakdown of recurrent mental health expenditure by catchment areas or specialist services.

### **WHAT DO HUMAN RIGHTS SAY?**

Human rights law and standards do not demand that the State be overburdened financially. Instead, the human right to health imposes an obligation on States to ensure, at the very least, the satisfaction of core minimum essential levels of services required under this right.

Under the principle of 'progressive realisation' the State is required to take steps (which must be deliberate, concrete and targeted) to the maximum of its available resources with a view to progressively realising the right to health over time.

### **SPECIFICS: WHAT ARE WE ASKING FOR?**

1. The Minister for Health and Children must use her powers to ensure that the HSE's 2011 National Service Plan details and quantifies planned mental health service provision and development under *A Vision for Change* for next year.
2. The Minister for Health and Children must ensure that the HSE begins implementing a national accounting system in 2011 that will enable it to account for expenditure by care group.
3. Government should amend existing health and mental health legislation in order to underpin the provision of comprehensive and community-based mental health services, and ensure transparent planning and reporting on the funding and delivery of mental health services by the HSE.

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### WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- **Circulate** this action by distributing to friends and family or leaving copies in public places (such as your community centre, library, work place)
- **Write** a letter to Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan, Minister for Health Mary Harney, Minister of State for Disability and Mental Health John Moloney and/or your local T.D
- **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](http://www.amnesty.ie/mentalhealth).

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#### GOT FEEDBACK?

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