

Dear Deputy,

I am seeking your support to ensure that the Government protects mental health resources ahead of the next Budget and ensures that 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. At a time when the suicide rate is dramatically increasing, there is an urgent need to ensure adequate mental health services. Mental health service spending has reduced in real terms from 2006-9 by 9.2 per cent.

Currently, there is no way of guaranteeing that money set aside for mental health services as set out in the Revised Estimates will actually be spent on mental health services. This is due to the lack of both legislation requiring HSE accountability for spending by care group, and a national accounting system within the HSE.

A report by Indecon International Economic Consultants (Indecon) published by Amnesty International Ireland in 2010, highlighted the incredibly slow progress in implementing the Government's mental health policy *A Vision for Change*. It pointed to poor accountability between the HSE and the legislative and executive branches of Government as a key problem. Indecon also found weaknesses in financial management systems for mental health spending and outlined the need for full transparency in relation to budgeted and actual levels of expenditure taking place within the mental health service.

The Minister for Health and Children must protect the mental health budget from disproportionate cuts in 2011 and 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.
- The HSE begins implementing a national accounting system in 2011 that will enable it to accurately account for expenditure by care group.

The Government should also amend existing health and mental health legislation in order to drive forward 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.

In short, the Government must 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.

I look forward to a response from your office.

Yours sincerely,