



**College of Psychiatrists
of Ireland**

Wisdom • Learning • Compassion

2021 Budget Submission

Covid-19 has exacerbated the need to realise people with mental illness require parity of esteem with those who have physical illness. Allocating an adequate proportionate percentage of the Health Budget to services that support them is vital. A fit for purpose Mental Health Service for all is not possible without adequate funding and clinical staff resourcing.

EAP Department October 2020

The College is the professional and training body for psychiatrists in the Republic of Ireland. The Mission of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland is to promote excellence in the practice of Psychiatry and advocate for supports and services for those with mental illness.

Covid-19 has impacted on the mental health of the nation, including those with severe mental illness. If mental health is genuinely a priority then:

- **2021 Budget must urgently prioritise the required funding (€2billion) and resourcing of Mental Health Services.**
- **An additional Covid-19 Impact on Mental Health funding in the 2020/2021 Winter Plan is also required.**

A fit for purpose Mental Health Service for all requires a funded, transparent, accountable and actionable policy which can ensure our citizens with mental illness and mental health difficulties have access to adequate, timely and appropriate supports, interventions and hospital beds, in all areas and not based on a post code lottery. Their ability to lead economically productive, as well as socially and emotionally, good quality lives, relies on it.

The College has consistently advocated for many years for Mental Health Services to be funded with 12% of the Health Budget, as recommended by several documents (also for many years) and as is the norm in similar jurisdictions. That percentage has remained scandalously low at 5 or 6 percent for at least ten years. Four years ago, the College suggested an incremental approach over 5 years to increasing the mental health budget from 5 or 6 percent of the Health budget to 12 percent. We are now approaching that 5 years. To make matters more stark, the consequences of Covid-19 in Ireland have added additional pressure to services, to the well-being of mental health professionals and to the patients they work with.

In 2020 the circa 1 billion euro currently provided needs to be doubled to 2 billion (to reach 12%) to enable mental health to have parity of esteem with physical health. Urgent implementation of mental health policy and provision of appropriate supports and interventions to those who need them, when and where they need them, is not feasible without this adequate investment. Covid-19 consequences have amplified this fiscal need.

While Mental Health Services across the life span require adequate budgetary allocation, the two major cohorts whose mental health and quality of life are critically under pressure, due to well documented population growth, are the young and those in later life. Investment in the mental health needs of these two groups would bring immediate benefits to those with mental health problems and to their carers.

To deliver services at a basic level in the Mental Health Services to those with mental distress and illness, an urgent plan to address the clinical staffing retention and recruitment crisis is required, including ensuring necessary

psychiatry trainee numbers to fulfil consultant demand in the future. This can only succeed with adequate fiscal allocation and non-transferable budgetary expenditure along with a strategic plan. Without addressing this, a recovery-oriented, person-centred service is not attainable for those vulnerable in society who badly need it.

The economic burden of not doing this will increase. UK research shows that for every one pound invested four pounds are saved in the economy as a whole. We believe this applies in the Irish economy also.

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland proposes the following priorities:

1. Designate a Covid-19 mental health consequence budget with actionable plan

All age groups in Irish society are valuable. All have been impacted negatively by the pandemic. We need a Covid Impact on Mental Health budget both in the Winter Plan and in the 2021 budget. While the nation's mental health has been negatively affected in some way, most will adjust and cope going forward. However those with mental illness are particularly affected, especially by restrictions in how treatments and supports are delivered. At a minimum restoration of bed capacity to pre-Covid levels, including more single room capacity, and return of mental health staff to wards and day facilities, is urgently needed.

The 15 to 25 age group are particularly negatively impacted. Their lives have been and continue to be put on hold in what are significant stages in their educational and social development trajectories. They are our valuable future generation but major life milestones, that form part of their transition from one stage to the next in becoming young adults and contributing members of society, are completely disrupted. Levels of illness will continue to increase and/or increase in severity, which not only will affect our young people emotionally and socially but will have an economic impact too. We need a dedicated plan and investment to reduce the negative impacts on their development and potential.

2. Ensure Parity of Esteem with Physical Health Services by allocating appropriate budgetary commitment to Mental Health Services

Immediate increase of the Mental Health Services budget to a minimum 12% of the overall Health Service budget in 2021. This should be separate to extra funding allocated each year for once off projects/capital expenditure.

3. Designate 25% of the budget to Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Begin with our children and adolescents to ensure better mental health outcomes for future generations. Regardless of investment, 2% of under 18s develop serious mental disorders and illness. Investment in early detection and intervention across the developmental trajectory of a young person is key to their long-term good mental health outcomes. This will also lessen the economic burden in the longer term, both in society and on Mental Health Services at community and hospital level. Funding for assessment, support, intervention and specialist services at all stages needs to be increased and prioritised to include raising resources to levels needed, as regularly highlighted and documented in the last few years.

4. Urgent funding and implementation of a Mental Health ICT system

A Mental Health Services ICT (information and communication technology) system with adequate WIFI, devices and facilities in services nationwide, is essential to plan and deliver efficient, safe and supportive services and more so now while working under Covid safety guidelines and restrictions. Sufficient budgetary and development planning, in phases if necessary, is required to facilitate: communication between mental health professionals (both Psychiatry and Primary Care); communication between the system and patients/service users; development of adjunct tools, where appropriate, to enable flexible, alternative supports and services using digital technologies; and audit and review to ensure efficient use of resources. It is scandalous and bewildering that in 2020, and in a country praised for its technically advanced skills and companies, that our health service still works on paper files. In Mental Health Services it creates risky and dangerous situations.

5. Mental health needs of our Later Life Population and their Carers

Immediate and continued resourcing of existing strategies and reports is vital for the health needs and quality of life of Irish citizens now in later life, as well as for their carers, many of whom are also in the later life stage and suffering from the excessive burden of caring. Carer burden is further increased due to Covid restrictions and the reduction/cancellation of necessary supports and services has resulted in their physical and mental health suffering further.

Finally

The College believes that the dissolution of the Mental Health Division and the lack of a National Director for Mental Health means that the necessary focus on mental health is lacking from the day to day planning and development of health services. This mis-step also sent out a negative message about the place of those with mental health problems in our health services. For progressive, effective reform and development of mental health services, the role of a national Mental Health Director/Lead and a Mental Health Division with accountability to the Department of Health are essential and should be reinstated with protected and adequate funding.

Over eleven years after the publication of the National Mental Health Policy, *A Vision for Change*, financial and philosophical commitments to the development of a world class mental health service lag far behind those envisioned in that document. This results in some of the most vulnerable people in Irish society lacking the supports they need to realise their potential. The College continues to advocate for simple, ample budgetary commitments to rectify this. This includes allocating funding with timelines, transparency and accountability to realise the aims of the new *'Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone'* along with those of *'A Vision for Change'*.

There are many other areas in need which have been referenced and advocated for in previous [pre budgets submissions \(see documents here\)](#).