



Press statement

4th December 2020

College welcomes Mental Health Commission report on Mental Health Services for Older People.

The College of Psychiatrists welcomes the [Mental Health Commission \(MHC\) report](#) today calling for appropriate care for those with mental illness among our older population. The findings in the report are a stark confirmation of what we know is missing.

Ireland has a long way to go to support our treasured older parents, grandparents, and family members who deserve integrated supports, interventions and services when and where they need them. As defined by the MHC, 'Integration is a single system of needs assessment and service provision that aims to promote alignment and collaboration between the care sectors'.

Despite the well-documented projected increase of our older population (over 65), the provision of nationwide access to mental health services with a multidisciplinary team approach has not kept pace.

Timely access to treatment and ongoing care in the community and hospitals for older people with illnesses like dementia, depression & anxiety are severely lacking. Only 66% of teams needed are in place. Those teams are at only 54% of the staffing levels required for a multi-disciplinary team.

COVID-19 has not just impacted our older population in nursing homes but has, as we know, inflicted the very negative consequences of social distancing and isolation on this population. As the MHC point out, as well as 'carrying the highest mortality and morbidity risk from COVID-19, they [the older population] have a heightened perception of the risk of death and illness' which impacts their mental health. It is known that 'isolation is strongly linked to depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline, and reduces resilience factors such as self-worth, sense of purpose, and feeling valued'.

The requirement for access to appropriate mental health support and services for all, including our generation in later life, is more acutely needed than ever.

As Dr Tom Reynolds in a recent [opinion piece](#) stated:

'It is not a time for a further reshuffle of the system we have, a further rearranging of the deck-chairs.

It will take significant new investment, considerable effort, hard decisions and radical re-thinking of many facets of our system.

We cannot allow a further neglect of our older citizens and their right to a quality of life like every other citizen that includes best practice and care for their mental as well as physical needs'.

(Dr Reynolds is Consultant Psychiatrist for Later Life and former Chair, Faculty of Old Age Psychiatry, College of Psychiatrists of Ireland)

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