

MENTAL

HEALTH

SINN FÉIN

PROPOSALS

ELECTION

2020





Mental Health

Just as everyone requires health services to provide expert care for physical ailments, we all require a system which treats our mental good health as a priority. Sinn Féin recognise that physical and mental health are inextricably linked and that any world class health service must treat our minds as well as our bodies.

Decades of mismanagement and underfunding of mental health services, despite the hard work and dedication of frontline professionals, has left us with a service which currently does not meet the needs of the people who depend on it. This is by no means irreparable. Despite the problems which exist, there is reason to be hopeful and ambitious in pursuit of a truly recovery based, accessible, flexible and effective model of mental health care in Ireland.

A Vision for Change identifies many solutions and key proposals needed to reform our mental health services. It is fourteen years old and remains largely unimplemented. Sinn Féin in Government will not allow this to continue.

We also have a great deal of professional experience to draw from coupled with the inspiring work of patients, patient advocates, and loved ones who have tirelessly campaigned for positive changes.

Through uniting these voices and placing mental health reform as a priority of government, we can create the system we need. Sinn Fein in government would provide that political will, drive and inclusive spirit needed for this job.

Realising the Vision for Change

Published in 2006 after exhaustive work by an expert group on mental health, A Vision for Change (AVfC) was a bold and progressive plan for a new recovery-based model of community mental health services far removed from the old days of institutions and stigma.

Unfortunately, much of the reforms have yet to be fulfilled or even partially implemented. Past governments preferred to prioritise the less costly recommendations leading to a reduction in Whole Time Equivalent positions in the system. Some institutions were closed or scaled down but community services to replace them were slow to follow, too often inadequately resourced or without a full complement of staff.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- » **Publishing a funding and implementation plan to deliver Vision for Change reforms which are outstanding**
- » **Streamlining recruitment of mental health staff and ensuring decent pay and conditions to retain staff and attract new applicants.**
- » **Recruiting a minimum 2000 additional full-time mental health staff**
- » **Increasing Child and Adolescent Mental Health teams to 100 and fully staff them**
- » **Increasing Community Mental Health Teams to 50 across the state and fully staff them**
- » **Implementing recommendations of the Oireachtas Future of Mental Health Care Committee and Sláintecare**
- » **Empowering an Oireachtas Mental Health Committee to oversee implementation and hold the Minister, department and HSE to account**



24/7 Care for a 24/7 problem

One of the major gaps in the services most commonly experienced by those in distress is the lack of care outside of office hours.

People who fear for their safety or the safety of those around them due to their mental ill health are forced to attend crowded and chaotic A&Es which in most cases have no one qualified to deal with their needs. Others are forced to go to the Gardaí or an out-of-hours GP service which despite the best efforts of staff are not adequate in these situations. Far too often, this has led to tragic consequences with people in vulnerable positions taking their lives while in the care of the A&E department or shortly after discharge.

The solution is clear, mental ill health does not operate by office hours and neither should the services designed to treat it.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- » **Delivering 24/7 crisis services within the 1st term of government**
- » **Establishing a Crisis House in each HSE catchment area**
- » **Ensuring that every A&E, garda custody suite, and prison has a Mental Health Nurse available on a 24/7 basis**

A patient centred model which protects rights

Despite the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in early 2018, existing legislation is not in line with the spirit of the Convention or the Vision for Change document.

There remain glaring gaps in rights legislation and many people with mental health issues continue to have their rights denied, especially involuntary patients.

Currently, people receiving care in our mental health services have no statutory right to advocacy. While services such as the National Advocacy Service and Irish Advocacy Network are in place and do good work, their remit is limited and suffers from the lack of a statutory footing as well as general under funding.

Advocacy services while primarily at this time focused on those in inpatient care, should be available to all who are engaging with mental health services. Children should be a particular focus for advocacy services.

Such support can be an empowering and encouraging experience for those suffering with mental ill health and struggling to navigate the services on their road to recovery.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- » **Legislating for a statutory right to advocacy for all patients**
- » **Increasing funding to advocacy services to meet demand, establishing a dedicated service for children in the services and initiating a campaign to raise awareness of advocacy services**
- » **Legislating for Advanced Care Directives to allow patients to have input into their future care**
- » **Ratifying the Optional Protocol of the UNCRPD**
- » **Fast-tracking a regulatory body for counsellors and therapy services to ensure best practice**



Primary Care - accessible care where it's needed

Mental health provision at a Primary Care level is a key point for early intervention. Ireland continues to have a high rate of inpatient admissions and re-admissions; this is not only a sign of the failure to properly address mental ill health at an early stage but is a much more costly and ineffective way of dealing with enduring mental illness.

Sinn Féin understand that primary care is the most viable way of close the treatment gap and ensuring that people get the mental health care they need.

Primary care can also be an excellent way to focus on particular communities which have additional need for easily accessible mental health services such as the traveller community, new Irish or areas with particularly high levels of deprivation.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- » **Investing in Primary Care Mental Health services to ensure access for all to the care and support they need in their community regardless of income.**
- » **Ensuring that all primary care teams include at least one mental health post**
- » **Providing additional resources for primary care teams in areas with higher need or levels of deprivation**
- » **Free universal counselling services with a GP referral**
- » **Issuing guidelines to allow longer term (20 sessions rather than the current limit of 8) access to primary care counselling on a case by case basis**
- » **Developing plan to address local suicide epidemics through local taskforces encompassing the Primary Care Team and other relevant community bodies to focus resources.**
- » **Implementing recruitment changes recommended by Oireachtas Mental Health Committee to attract new Psychologists for the service**

Long term support towards recovery

Mental health services in conjunction with other relevant departments must provide supports which provide the best opportunity for recovery by addressing these issues.

Finding employment which provides an income, a routine, and empowers those in recovery is something the state must support. Ensuring that those who are trying to overcome their illness do not have to worry about evictions or homelessness is a very basic way of assisting them in long term mental health.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- » **Providing targeted funding to support tenancies for people with severe and enduring mental health difficulties in order to prevent homelessness.**
- » **Greater support for people with mental health difficulties to enter employment and training schemes**



Fostering good mental health at an early age

Schools present a great opportunity to teach young people the necessary coping skills for life while ending the stigma of speaking about our mental health. Through set curricula, children can learn how to express and understand their feelings and how to help others in difficult times.

Schools should also be a safe and welcoming place for children experiencing mental health difficulties or struggling generally.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- » **Developing curriculum for Positive Mental Health classes at Primary and Second level**
- » **Providing age appropriate suicide prevention training to all second level students through the National Office of Suicide Prevention**
- » **Ensuring full time Guidance Counsellor for every secondary school and an additional position for schools over 500 pupils.**

Suicide Prevention

The tragedy of suicide is one that has touched nearly all sectors and communities in Ireland. While some groups may be more at risk, no one is immune to it. Suicidal ideation can occur to almost anyone, at any stage of life. This in itself can be a very traumatic experience. A society which promotes mental good health must care and look after all its members and the state should ensure that we all have the skills and services in place to do this.

It is important also to recognise that suicide and self-harm are often desperate responses to real life problems. Sinn Féin in government will support communities and give young people hope for their future by guaranteeing a living wage, protections for workers, world class affordable public services and a secure home for all. These would be massive steps in tackling suicide and self-harm.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES INCLUDE

- » **Building a more fair and equal Ireland**
- » **Delivering 24/7 crisis intervention services including a national 24/7 crisis hotline working with existing services.**
- » **Ensure mental health posts covering all A&Es, garda custody suites, and prisons and a full complement of Suicide Crisis Intervention Nurses across the state**
- » **Increasing funding for Primary Care counselling to cut waiting times**
- » **Providing suicide prevention training for frontline public sector workers such as Gardai, Nurses, Teachers and those working in public offices.**
- » **Providing age appropriate suicide prevention training in schools**
- » **Increasing funding for the National Office of Suicide Prevention**



Drugs & Addiction

Drug and alcohol misuse are primarily public health issues. Harm reduction and prevention are guiding principles for Sinn Féin in the development of future drug and alcohol strategies.

Treatment and rehabilitation strategies will go hand in hand with recovery initiatives that will help to support people in recovery. Sinn Féin supports a holistic approach for prevention, rehabilitation and recovery.

Sinn Féin recognises that those addicted to drugs and alcohol can have mental health disorders and vice versa. At present, mental health and addiction are treated almost exclusively as separate conditions.

According to the American Medical Association nearly half of those abusing drugs or alcohol have a serious mental illness and 29% of those with a mental illness abuse drugs or alcohol. Yet currently some people seeking mental health care are being refused that care due to an existing issue with, or even a history of, substance abuse.

Current funding to tackle this issue is wholly inadequate. The wider harms caused to society by drugs and the criminal gangs that control its distribution must be tackled. The drug crisis including drug-debt related violence and intimidation of families and communities needs to become a priority of any new government. Community engagement in conjunction with increased Garda numbers, visibility and responses are key.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES INCLUDE:

- » **Ensure that a Minister who sits at the Cabinet table is given responsibility to tackle this crisis.**
- » **Increasing investment in the Drugs Strategy and Drug and Alcohol Task Forces by 12 million and mandating all relevant agencies to fully engage in working together on the delivery of the strategy.**
- » **Increase support for services which treat mental health and addiction in conjunction**
- » **Amend existing legislation and publishing guidelines for dealing with Dual Diagnosis of mental health and addiction and establishing a No Wrong Door Policy to ensure that no one goes without treatment because of their addiction**
- » **Increasing the number of medical detoxification and rehabilitation beds by 20**
- » **Ensure a structured outpatient treatment program incorporating an inter-agency partnership approach for everyone released from prison including homeless and mental health services.**
- » **Commencing the biggest Garda recruitment drive in the history of the state bringing the service strength to over 16,000 Gardaí, with a focus on community policing.**
- » **Recruiting 2000 civilian staff to free up Gardaí from behind desks**
- » **Increasing the number of Gardai and resources in the National Drugs Unit and the establishment of area-based Garda Drugs Units.**
- » **Establishing Drug-free zones of radius of 300m of a primary or secondary school with increased penalties for illegal drug-related activities in such Zones.**
- » **Establish Prescriptions Drug Monitoring Programme (PDMPs)**

