



**OUR
MENTAL
HEALTH
CRISIS**

AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

**2,551
children
on CAMHS
waiting
lists**

**490%
increased
traffic to
government's
mental health
website**

**242
children
admitted to
adult psych
services**

**1,553
adults waiting
on psychology
treatment**

**Only
3 adult eating
disorder beds
available
state-wide**

**6 in 10
people
report feeling
downhearted
and
depressed**

**8,893
children
waiting
psychology
appointment**

INTRODUCTION

The State is in the grips of a mental health crisis.

This crisis demands an emergency response.

Over the last number of weeks the Sinn Féin party leader Mary Lou McDonald and I as the spokesperson on mental health, have met with representative bodies and front-line community and voluntary services. They each told us that they are experiencing an unprecedented demand for mental health care.

Many people using mental health services are doing so for the first time with too many being left out in the cold as the services are just not there to meet the huge increase in demand.

This increase is set against excessive pre-pandemic waiting lists for care, and the result is the perfect storm we are now experiencing.

Our already under-resourced mental health services, that were struggling to cope pre-Covid, are now operating over capacity. This is not sustainable.

GPs are overwhelmed and many have requested referrals to talk therapies and counselling.

Mental health advocates want to see mental health prioritised at the cabinet table, this failed to materialise.

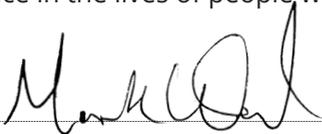
Speaking at the recent Oireachtas Covid Committee the Mental Health Commission's CEO told members that our mental health system "is not fit for purpose and is out of date¹." Sinn Féin wants to change this.

It is unacceptable that in a year of national crisis that this Government chose not to increase investment in mental health proportionally to the overall health budget.

We need to tackle the issue of mental health in a real and sustainable way with a road map for capacity-building in the system.

But right now what we need more than anything is an emergency response to the crisis we are currently in.

That is what this document sets out to do through a series of common-sense and practical proposals which, if implemented now will make a real difference in the lives of people who are struggling.



Mark Ward TD - Sinn Féin Spokesperson on Mental Health



1 https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/special_committee_on_covid_19_response/2020-07-14/4/

THE FACTS:



The World Health Organisation recommends that a minimum of 14% of a country's overall health budget be allocated for mental health.



SláinteCare recommends a minimum mental health budget of 10%.



Government's mental health spend for 2020 was just 5.2%, a marked decrease in funding.



There are 2,551 children and young people waiting for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and 8,893 children waiting for primary care psychology. There are also 1,553 adults waiting on primary care psychology treatment with the HSE.



Under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil's watch there have been 242 children admitted into adult psychiatric services over the last three years, with almost 30 of these in the first 10 months of 2020.



With only three specialist eating disorder beds for adults in the entire state the Government has failed on its promise to deliver Specialist Eating Disorder Teams in each of the nine CHO areas.



One of the major gaps in the services and commonly experienced by those in distress is the lack of care outside of 9 to 5pm. At present, there is no state-wide provision of 24/7 crisis service at a community level. Adults and children must have access to urgent mental health treatment as and when they need it.



Programme for Government funding for mental health reduced from €35 million in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 to €13 million to 2020.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

Accountability for mental health services within the HSE continues to be adversely affected by the decision to withdraw the National Director for Mental Health position.

Through its commitment to examine the reappointment of this position, the Programme for Government acknowledges that this decision had an adverse impact on mental health services.

There remains a lack of urgency and political will in progressing this promise.

- ➔ **The National Director for Mental Health should have the authority but more importantly, they should be accountable for planning and developing services and managing available resources.**
- ➔ **They would also report directly to the CEO of the HSE and the Minister for Health.**



WHY WE NEED EMERGENCY FUNDING FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE:

We know the impact of COVID-19 on people's mental health has been far reaching.

A paper co-authored by a number of clinical and public health mental health specialists² in May 2020 warned that:

“Like the scenario faced by intensive care units at the start of this COVID pandemic, in mental health we are starting at a low base and facing into a tsunami of mental health need. Similar to the approach taken in the acute hospitals, we need urgent investment, building of capacity and innovation to ensure that mental health services are not overwhelmed and are able to respond to service users in a timely manner.”

Almost six in ten people who responded to a recent CSO Social Impact of Covid-19 survey³ believe that Covid-19 has impacted negatively on their mental health and wellbeing. In the 18 to 34 age group, one in five reported being downhearted or depressed all or most of the time.

Traffic to the HSE mental health website increased by 490% between March and July 2020⁴. By August last year Jigsaw had already experienced a 50% increase⁵ in demand for its service. There was an 18 week waiting time for an appointment with JIGSAW in some areas in 2020. In its pre-budget submission Mental Health Reform warned⁶ that COVID-19 has adversely affected the mental well-being of many people in Ireland and that significant investment in mental health services and supports was needed to provide for the capacity to cope with the additional strain on services now and into the future.

2 Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19 in Ireland and the Need for a Secondary Care, Mental Health Service Response <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/irish-journal-of-psychological-medicine/article/mental-health-impacts-of-covid19-in-ireland-and-the-need-for-a-secondary-care-mental-health-service-response/245F1F782304C84F90ECEB9F2EF106AA#>

3 <https://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/presspages/2021/socialimpactofcovid-19surveyimpactofschoolclosuresfebruary2021/>

4 <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/qid/covid-19-qi-learning/qi-resources-to-support-learning-from-covid19/covid-19-pandemic-impact-paper-2021.pdf>

5 <https://www.thejournal.ie/jigsaw-increase-in-calls-anxiety-and-psychological-distress-5213453-Sep2020/>

6 <https://www.mentalhealthreform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Mental-Health-Reform-Pre-Budget-Submission-2021-Final.pdf>

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child provides that every child should have the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. The Children’s Rights Alliance 2021 Report Card⁷ called on Government to address the ongoing barriers for children in accessing early mental health support, poor investment in services, and workforce recruitment and retention issues. Yet by January 2021 there were 2,551 young people on waiting lists for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), and this is in addition to the 10,466 adults and children waiting on psychology appointments in the public system.

Despite this unprecedented increase in demand for care the HSE Service Plan for 2021 commits to increase capacity by a meagre 6,250 additional counselling hours and talk therapy⁸. The additional €10m in funding committed to in the Government’s COVID-19 Resilience and Recovery 2021 Plan⁹ falls far short of what is needed to provide the emergency care adults and children desperately need. We also have no detail on how these monies will be distributed and for what services.



7 <https://www.childrensrights.ie/sites/default/files/Report-Card-23-Feb-2021.pdf>

8 HSE Service Plan 2021, Page 67, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/serviceplans/national-service-plan-2021.pdf>

9 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c4876-covid-19-resilience-and-recovery-2021-the-path-ahead/>

AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE:

Sinn Féin is proposing a significant emergency investment in mental health care for a six to twelve month period, through the provision of surge capacity provided by private practitioners providing urgent and immediate care.

This emergency provision will address waiting lists and meet immediate demand through private care while giving the public system the breathing space it needs to increase capacity for the long term. Alongside emergency provisions Sinn Féin will be putting in place measures that will have a positive long term impact for mental health services

KEY MEASURES:

Emergency Talk Therapy Fund

Create an emergency fund to provide an additional 128,000 sessions with an accredited counsellor or therapist in the private system for urgent care on referral from a GP.

COST €10m

Introduce Universal Counselling within the Counselling in Primary Care Service

Remove GP and medical cards accessibility barriers to deliver universal access to counselling. **COST €20.2m**

Expand Capacity in CAMHS & Primary Care Mental Health Services

Recruit 138 additional child and adolescent psychologists and one additional adult psychologist in each primary care facility. **COST €22.75m**

Fund for Trainee Educational & Counselling Psychologists

Trainee Counselling Psychologists collectively contribute almost 5,000 hours of therapy each year, and trainee Educational Psychologists provide 2,000 days annually.

Sinn Féin would create two funding streams to support these much-needed trainees in their education and meet increased costs of completing such work during the pandemic. **COST €1.2m**

Establish a 24/7 Care Public Crisis De-escalation, Multi Agency Triage Team Ambulance Service

Our proposal reflects a similar pilot underway in the north through the acquisition of an additional ambulance for each of the nine CHO areas and the necessary staff to operate a 7pm to 7am service 7 days of the week to deliver 24/7 emergency mental health care within all communities. **COST €6.2m**

Accessing Emergency Acute, Clinical and Emergency Care from the Private Healthcare System

From the outset of the latest lockdown Sinn Féin's Spokesperson for Mental Health has called on the Minister for Health to extend the surge capacity in private hospitals to include mental health acute care.

The HSE subsequently secured some private mental health capacity for public patients however these arrangements do not go far enough.

The Minister for Health and HSE CEO must urgently seek to extend the surge capacity agreement to all private hospitals with acute mental health beds.

Private hospital care would relieve increased demand within the public system and ensure current and pre-existing unmet need are provided for.

If you are worried about your mental health,
please know you are not alone. It is ok not to
be ok. Please reach out and talk to someone
you trust

You can also contact:

The Samaritans on



freephone

116 123 or

Pieta House on



1800 247 247

You can seek financial advice and support
confidentially from:

MABS (Money Advice & Budgeting Service)



through their Helpline on

0761 07 2000

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