

Implementation of a Vision for Change is slow and inconsistent across the country, according to the Mental Health Commission

Wednesday 23rd January 2013: The Mental Health Commission has said the Government's implementation of its own policy on mental health, *A Vision for Change*, has been slow and inconsistent.

In a statement marking the seven year anniversary of the publication of the policy the Commission Chairman Mr John Saunders said the aim of the policy – to refocus services from old-style institutional care to a community-based model – was now very widely supported. “But it is clear from reports of the independent body monitoring the implementation of this policy that insufficient community services have been put in place.”

A Vision for Change, which was published in 2006, set out a ten year plan to shift the delivery of mental health services from old style institutional care to a more modern community based service.

The number of people in old style institutions has reduced from 1,352 at the end of 2009 to 394 in January 2013. Commenting on this Mr Saunders said “while these gradual closures is good progress the fact remains that the putting in place of supports required for delivering effective and modern care in the community is slow.”

The Commission pointed to a number of issues which was hampering the progress of the policy's implementation namely:

- the public service moratorium
- the ongoing cutbacks in the public service
- the decision to delay spending the additional ring fenced €35m during 2012 which impacted the staff numbers of Community Mental Health teams across the country.
- the need to progress the development of specialist services for the elderly, those with an Intellectual Disability, and areas of rehabilitation.
- the need to move from a largely medicalised response to individual needs toward a more holistic approach by filling the number of vacant Psychology, Social Work and Occupational Therapist posts in the HSE Teams.

The Commission also highlighted the need for ongoing independent monitoring of the implementation of *A Vision for Change* and said that since the dissolution of the second Independent Monitoring Group in June 2012 there was no independent Monitoring of the implementation of the policy. “There is currently no public plan to

review the implementation of Vision for Change in 2013 as envisaged by the Vision for Change document, which is a matter that needs to be addressed,” said Mr Saunders.

The Commission took the opportunity to welcome a number of positive developments including:

- the advertising of the post of Director of Mental health services which Mr Saunders said “once fulfilled would hopefully lead to the creation of a Directorate as envisaged in A Vision for Change.
- the retention of Budget 2012
- the fact that the government has committed to the same level of spending in Budget 2013 in addition to the €35 million which was not spend during 2012.
- the continued roll out of innovative youth friendly services and other mental health care services that are being developed through partnerships between the statutory, voluntary and philanthropic sector.

ENDS

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Notes to the Editor: About the Mental Health Commission

The Mental Health Commission is an independent statutory body. The primary functions of the Mental Health Commission are to foster and promote high standards of care and good practice in the delivery of mental health services and to ensure that the interests of those involuntarily admitted are protected, pursuant to the Mental Health Act 2001.

A Vision for Change

A Vision for Change, the government's policy on mental health was published in January 2006. It is a policy document designed to build positive mental health services throughout the community and to provide community based specialist services for people with mental illness. The policy proposed the reorientation of the delivery of mental health services away from the old style model of institutional care to community based services.