

# **Submission from Mental Health Reform to the public consultation on the “Roadmap for Social Inclusion: Mid-Term Review”**

14<sup>th</sup> October 2022

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### **Some of the Key Recommendations**

- **Recognise that enduring mental health difficulties are psychosocial disabilities & therefore included in all considerations**
- **Social Welfare: Implement a flexible benefits system to facilitate opportunities for people with a mental health difficulty to access work, step out of work and re-enter the workforce numerous times, without fear of losing income support**
- **Supported Employment: Incentivise engagement with supported employment programmes (e.g. IPS)**
- **Disclosure Considerations: Allow people to control the amount of information they want to share about their mental health**



## Introduction

Mental Health Reform (MHR) is Ireland's leading national coalition on mental health. Our vision is of an Ireland where everyone can access the support they need in their community, to achieve their best possible mental health. We drive the progressive reform of mental health services and supports, through coordination and policy development, research and innovation, accountability and collective advocacy.

Together with our 81 member organisations and thousands of individual supporters, MHR provides a unified voice to the Government, its agencies, the Oireachtas and the general public on mental health issues.

MHR is delighted to submit to this public consultation on behalf of our 81 members. MHR would like to thank our members for their continued insight, input and work<sup>1</sup>. Further information on our members can be found on the MHR website.

MHR is a funded member of the Disability Participation and Consultation Network (DPCN). The role of DPCN members is to *“provide the views and opinions of people with disabilities living in Ireland on law, policy and other important issues. Working on specific issues, this could mean, for example, attending workshops and meetings (online, or in person, having discussions with other members, or completing questionnaires).”*<sup>2</sup>

People who have long-term mental health difficulties have rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The term used by the United Nations to describe people living with enduring mental health difficulties is “psychosocial disabilities”.

This is not about a medical diagnosis; it is about the interaction between someone with a mental health difficulty and their social environment. Psychosocial disability refers to the functional impact or barriers that those living with enduring mental health difficulties experience every day. For example, under the Convention people living with psychosocial disability should not be discriminated against based on their mental health experiences. This is true also of Ireland's Equality legislation. People may choose not to identify as disabled or with a diagnosis but the fact remains that they have rights.

People with psychosocial disabilities face high levels of stigma and discrimination, have higher costs of living and are at risk of living in consistent poverty. In fact, the Cost of Disability Report 2019 shows that the average cost of having a mental health difficulty amounts to €13,251 per year which is a significant financial burden to bear.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mentalhealthreform.ie/membership/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/a3ef2-launch-of-disability-participation-and-consultation-network/>



MHR would like to highlight that while some areas of disability sit under the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, mental health has remained with the Department of Health. MHR advocates for the implementation of a cross governmental approach to mental health as committed to in our National Mental Health Policy *Sharing the Vision*.

MHR notes the work of the Social Inclusion Forum, the progress reports on the Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025 Ambition, Goals and Commitment. Furthermore, MHR advocates for the inclusion of mental health in all discussions relating to disability and so welcomes this opportunity to highlight some considerations about social inclusion and mental health. MHR requests that the pre-budget submission to Budget 2023 [‘The Cost of Waiting’](#) be consulted alongside this submission. The Cost of Waiting contains information on priority groups in mental health policy.

## Social Inclusion

The Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020-2025: Ambition, Goals, Commitments is the national strategy for poverty reduction and improved social inclusion. It aims to “reduce consistent poverty to 2% or less and to make Ireland one of the most socially inclusive countries in the EU”<sup>3</sup>.

Many aspects of the Roadmap for Social Inclusion relate to people’s wellbeing and good mental health. There is no health without mental health and enduring mental health difficulties are also known as psychosocial disabilities. Therefore, MHR requests that social inclusion be viewed through a lens that impacts on mental health, wellbeing and disabilities. All chapters in the roadmap will directly or indirectly impact on people’s mental health and wellbeing. For example, ‘Flexible Welfare Benefits’ in Chapter 2; ‘Ensuring Work Pays’ in Chapter 3; supporting children, families and people with disabilities; health, housing and poverty.

*The National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR) was agreed in 2012 and aimed to reduce the percentage of the population in consistent poverty to 2% or less by 2020, from a baseline rate of 6.3% in 2010.*

*Over the following years, the national consistent poverty rate rose, reaching 9.1% by 2013. The most recent data, taken from the 2020 EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions and published by the CSO in December 2021, showed that the percentage of the population in consistent poverty in 2020 was 5.0%.<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/d3a7b-public-consultation-on-the-roadmap-for-social-inclusion-mid-term-review/#background>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/be955a-social-inclusion-division/#key-policy-information>



## Employment and Mental Health

### National Legal and Policy Framework

#### *Legal*

The Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015<sup>5</sup> aim to promote equality in employment and ban discrimination on nine grounds, one of which is disability.

#### *Policy*

The importance of employment for people with mental health difficulties has been acknowledged in Irish policy for quite some time.

*A Vision for Change* (AVFC), the previous national mental health policy states that “access to employment.....for individuals with mental health problems should be on the same basis as every other citizen”<sup>6</sup>. The Expert Group on AVFC recognised that in order to achieve a recovery-orientated mental health system, whereby individuals can live a full life in their community, “supportive communities [are necessary] where actions are taken to address basic needs such as employment”.<sup>7</sup> This is further endorsed in a detailed report on mental health and social inclusion, in which the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) in Ireland concluded that work is the best route to recovery and employment is the best protection against social exclusion.<sup>8</sup> *A Vision for Change* specifically recommended that “evidence-based approaches to training and employment for people with mental health problems should be adopted...”.<sup>9</sup>

*Sharing the Vision* (STV) 2020<sup>10</sup>, the successor to AVFC, carries forward this recommendation around employment and mental health. Specifically, Outcome 3(c) relates to improved outcomes in employment and the policy outlines the importance of securing or returning to employment as a pivotal factor in recovery.

The fourth strand of the Department of Social Protection *Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025* is entitled ‘Working for All - Leaving No One Behind’. It focuses on extending employment supports to those facing extra challenges, including those with

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/21/enacted/en/html>

<sup>6</sup> Department of Health (2006) *A Vision for Change*, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.

<sup>8</sup> National Economic and Social Forum (2007) *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, Dublin: National Economic and Social Forum.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Health (2006), p.39.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Health (2020) *Sharing the Vision; A Mental Health Policy for Everyone*. Dublin: Government of Ireland



disabilities. The aim is to increase employment rates among people with disabilities from 22% to 33% by 2026.<sup>11</sup>

The Department of Justice and Equality's (2015) *Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (2015-2024)* notes the particularly low employment rates for people with mental health difficulties. It advocates for early intervention, prior to any work absences where possible, and that support should be given to facilitate reducing the length of an absence if it does occur. This is because the longer the absence, the less likely someone is to return to employment.<sup>12</sup>

The Healthy Ireland at Work 2021–2025 policy also acknowledges the importance of addressing mental health difficulties in the workplace. Objective 5 relates to providing supports, including fiscal incentives to support employers to adapt work environments<sup>13</sup>.

## **International Legal and Policy Framework**

### *Legal*

The right of people with (mental health) disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others, is fully enshrined in the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). As specified in Article 27 of the Convention:

*“States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities”<sup>14</sup>*

While *Sharing the Vision* uses the terminology ‘mental health difficulties’, the UNCRPD refers to ‘psychosocial disabilities’. MHR advocates for the choice of the individual in how they prefer to identify or describe their mental health.

### *Policy*

In addition to the UNCRPD, the World Health Organisation's World Report on Disability, the EU Disability Strategy and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Social Protection (2021) Pathways to Work Strategy 2021-2025, Dublin: Government of Ireland

<sup>12</sup> Department of Justice and Equality (2015) Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (2015-2024). Dublin: Government of Ireland

<sup>13</sup> Department of Health (2021) Healthy Ireland at Work; A National Framework for Healthy Workplaces in Ireland 2021–2025

<sup>14</sup> UN General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: resolution/adopted by the General Assembly, 24 January 2007, A/RES/61/106, available at <http://www.refworld.org/docid/45f973632.html> [accessed 27 April 2022].



and Development (OECD) all emphasise the importance of raising employment rates for people with disabilities. In particular, the OECD has identified the high costs of mental health difficulties, not only to the individual, but also to the employer and the economy.<sup>18</sup>

## Unemployment and Mental Health

Employment can have a significant impact on an individual's mental wellbeing as outlined in *Sharing the Vision*;

*“Meaningful employment fosters hope, participation and a sense of a better and brighter future. In addition, employment can reduce and/or stabilise symptoms, increase self-worth and provide greater disposable income.”<sup>15</sup>*

The Irish Health Survey (2019) reported that 21% of participants who were unemployed experienced some form of depression, compared to 9% of those in employment.<sup>16</sup> This shows the possible impact that unemployment can have on an individual's mental wellbeing. Employment can also be an important part of someone's recovery when they are experiencing mental health difficulties.<sup>17</sup> In fact, supporting people to gain or retain employment has a significant impact on more life domains than nearly any other type of medical or social intervention.<sup>18</sup>

People with a mental health difficulty are nine times more likely to be out of the labour force than those of working age without a disability, the highest rate for any disability group in Ireland.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a significant worsening of population mental health<sup>20</sup>. Findings of a survey carried out on the impact of COVID-19 on mental health has revealed that, at a minimum, one-third of people in the Irish population reported experiencing serious mental health difficulties during the pandemic.<sup>21</sup> Thus, mental health and employment should be an even higher priority in this context, especially given the benefits of employment for someone's mental health, as outlined above.

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<sup>15</sup> Department of Health (2020) *Sharing the Vision*, p. 68

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ihsmr/irishhealthsurvey2019-mainresults/healthstatus/>

<sup>17</sup> Department of Social Protection (2017) *Make Work Pay Action Plan*, Dublin: Government of Ireland

<sup>18</sup> OECD (2011) *Sick on the job? Myths and realities about Mental Health and Work*

<sup>19</sup> Watson, D., Kingston, G. and McGinnity, F. (2012). *Disability in the Irish Labour Market: Evidence from the QNHS Equality Module*, Dublin: Equality Authority/Economic and Social Research Institute, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/tackling-the-mental-health-impact-of-the-covid-19-crisis-an-integrated-whole-of-society-response-0cca0b/>

<sup>21</sup> Mental Health Reform (2020). *Responding to the Mental Health Impact of COVID-19*. Mental Health Reform. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthreform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Responding-to-the-MentalHealth-Impact-of-COVID-19-Report-July-2020.pdf>





Due to delays relating to COVID-19, the most recent Census data available is from Census 2016. At that time, the Central Statistics Office (CSO) reported that 13.5% of the population had a disability (a total of 643,131 people). A 2019 European Commission country Report for Ireland showed that Ireland has one of the lowest employment rates for people with disabilities in the EU at just 26.2 %, in comparison to 48.1 % in the EU<sup>22</sup>. In 2017, an Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) report found that around 35,600 people with a disability would join the active workforce if Government policy facilitated their access to employment<sup>23</sup>. The Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection's (DEASP) 2015 survey of Disability Allowance (DA) recipients, found that 50% of participants reported mental health difficulties as the primary reason for being on DA.<sup>24</sup> However, it further identified significant levels of interest among individuals on DA in taking up employment (including both part-time and full-time work). Among those who were not currently working, 35% expressed an interest in working part-time, while a further 8% expressed an interest in full-time employment, given the right supports<sup>25</sup>. This was also echoed in the Cost of Disability report produced by the Department of Social Protection in 2021<sup>26</sup>. Participants with experience of mental health difficulties stated that there were insufficient employment supports and that if these were improved they would likely be able to work.

## Social Protection and Mental Health

### Flexibility in the Social Welfare System

There is a lack of flexibility in the current social welfare system in Ireland. Mental health difficulties are often episodic<sup>27</sup> and it can take time for some individuals to settle into how to manage their condition and maintain stability. Fear of losing social welfare benefits and the medical card are the most highly reported barriers to taking up work and achieving individual employment goals within the Irish context<sup>12</sup>. Mental Health Reform is of the view that there is a fundamental need to implement a flexible benefits system to facilitate opportunities for people with a mental health difficulty to access work, step out of work and re-enter the work force numerous times, without fear of losing income support.

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<sup>22</sup> [2019-european-semester-country-report-ireland\\_en.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.esri.ie/system/files?file=media/file-uploads/2017-03/RS58.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> Judge, C., Rossi, E., Hardiman, S. and Oman, C. (2016). Department of Social Protection Report on Disability Allowance Survey 2015, Dublin: Department of Social Protection

<sup>25</sup> Judge, C., Rossi, E., Hardiman, S. and Oman, C. (2016). Department of Social Protection report on. Disability Allowance Survey 2015. Dublin: Department of Social Protection

<sup>26</sup> Indecon (2021). Department of Social Protection report on Cost of Disability. Dublin: Department of Social Protection

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/q-and-a/whats-the-difference-between-mental-health-and-mental-illness>



**Recommendation:**

Implement a flexible benefits system to facilitate opportunities for people with a mental health difficulty to access work, step out of work and re-enter the work force numerous times, without fear of losing income support

MHR would like to outline a number of reasonable accommodations that can be put in place by employers in order to support an employee with a mental health difficulty. These include:

- Adjusting working hours<sup>28</sup>
- Adjusting tasks<sup>28</sup>
- Providing time off to attend counselling/medical appointments<sup>28</sup>
- Phased return to work after someone has been on sick leave<sup>28</sup>
- Mentoring and peer support within the workplace<sup>29</sup>
- Consulting with an employee in order to accommodate their return to work (in instances of absence)<sup>29</sup>
- Allowing employees to work from home<sup>29</sup>
- Provision of relevant training to support the employee to carry out their duties<sup>29</sup>
- Organisation wide awareness training on mental health<sup>30</sup>

*Individual Placement and Support (IPS)*

Individual Placement and Support (IPS), also known as ‘evidence-based supported employment’, is a model that facilitates people with mental health difficulties to move into mainstream competitive employment. Under the IPS model, anyone is viewed as capable of undertaking competitive paid work in the community, if the right kind of job and work environment can be found and the right support is provided. MHR were involved in the Integrating Employment and Mental Health Support (IEMHS) project, which piloted the IPS in four sites across Ireland between 2015 and 2017.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> <https://seechange.ie/information-for-employees/>

<sup>29</sup> The Equality Authority (2011) ***Equality and Mental Health: What the Law Means for your Workplace*** (Dublin: Equality Authority, 2011), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Paluch, T., Fossey, E., & Harvey, C. (2012). “Social firms: building cross-sectoral partnerships to create employment opportunity and supportive workplaces for people with mental illness”. *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment and Rehabilitation*, 43, no. 1: 63–75.

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.mentalhealthreform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Steps-into-Work.pdf>





## Additional Comments

MHR notes the lack of prioritisation of mental health and wellbeing throughout the Roadmap and the meeting reports of the Forum. As we have laid out at the start of this submission, all aspects of social inclusion can impact people's mental health. The reference to the mental health of children is noted and MHR has welcomed the Budget 2023 announcement of the appointment of a National Lead in Youth Mental Health. MHR has been advocating for the reappointment of a National Lead in Mental Health in the HSE for a number of years but this compromise is a welcome step forward.

MHR has focussed this submission on employment, unemployment and social protection payments for brevity. The UNCRPD was ratified by Ireland in 2018 and yet there is no mention of psychosocial disabilities in the roadmap. As members of many of the disability group fora, we request an acknowledgement that disability includes those with psychosocial disabilities.

## Considerations around Disclosure

People living with psychosocial disabilities experience lower levels of workforce participation compared with the overall population (22% compared with 53%). Those who do report workforce participation are more likely to experience either discrimination or harmful effects from discrimination in occupational settings<sup>32</sup>. In a public attitudes survey carried out by See Change (2018), 70% of respondents felt that a diagnosis of mental health difficulties would have a negative effect on their job and career prospects. 60% said that they were not aware that mental health difficulties were covered under the nine grounds of discrimination<sup>33</sup>. The See Change findings relating to stigma are consistent with research conducted by the National Disability Authority into the disclosure of disabilities in workplace settings<sup>34</sup>, which found, inter alia, that the experience of those with 'invisible disabilities' was complex regarding whether to disclose a disability or not. The review of the Ability Programme 2018-2021, which aimed to support people with disabilities across Ireland with employment, also echoed this finding, stating that those with mental health difficulties were hesitant to identify with having a disability due to fears of stigma or discrimination<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Banks, J., Grotti, R., Fahey, E. and Watson, D., (2018). Disability and Discrimination in Ireland, pp. 5

<sup>33</sup> <https://seechange.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Mental-Health-Matters-web.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Millward Brown Lansdowne, Public Attitudes towards Mental Illness: A Benchmark Study for See Change (unpublished).

<sup>35</sup> Quality Matters (2021) Ability Programme Evaluation 2018-2021, available at <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/221963/bf76dc5f-e11e-4585-983d-6883c0fa5364.pdf#page=null> [accessed 4<sup>th</sup> May 2022].



The consequences of this reluctance can be harmful in a range of ways, including that such persons cannot avail of supports and reasonable accommodations that may be due to them under Irish employment and equality law<sup>36</sup>.

Given the fears around disclosure of mental health difficulties in the workplace, consideration should be given as to how much information is required to be disclosed by the employee for reasonable accommodations to be provided. MHR would advocate that the individual is allowed to control the amount of information they share about their mental health difficulties. For example, an individual can disclose that certain supports are needed without outlining the details of their specific difficulties or diagnosis.

**Recommendation:**

Allow people to control the amount of information they want to share about their mental health

## Conclusion

MHR welcomes the opportunity to reflect on the Roadmap to Social Inclusion 2020-2025. While a mid-strategy review is very welcome, much needs to be done in the second half of the strategy to ensure that people with psychosocial disabilities and enduring mental health difficulties are socially included.

Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

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<sup>36</sup> National Disability Authority of Ireland (2009). Disclosing Disability in the Workplace a Review of Literature and Practice in the Irish Public Sector. Dublin

