Mental Health & Social Inclusion

NESF Report 36 · October 2007
Introduction

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) is a social partnership organisation which advises the Government on policies to achieve greater equality and social inclusion. This leaflet summarises the findings and recommendations of the NESF’s latest report on *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, which looks at ways to increase the social inclusion of people with mental ill-health as well as identifying broader strategies and actions to promote mental well-being across Irish society. The Project Team that prepared the report comprised representatives from the Oireachtas, the social partners, mental health professionals and also service users.

Why Focus on Mental Health and Social Inclusion?

- One in four Irish adults is likely to experience mental ill-health at some point in their lives. The burden falls disproportionately on vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of the population.

- Poverty, gender, age and ethnicity play a role, both in the onset of illness but also in terms of access to services and recovery rates.

- International and national evidence clearly shows the increased social exclusion of those experiencing mental ill-health through loss of income, employment and social contact as well as the wider negative effects on society as a whole, estimated to be 3–4% of GDP across Europe.

- The consequences of mental ill-health are far-reaching for Irish society, in terms of reduced economic performance, human and social capital and increased health and social welfare costs.

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1. A copy of the full Report, *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, is available from the NESF.

2. Mental health is used here to refer to “a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. WHO (2001), *Mental Health: Strengthening Mental Health Promotion*. Fact Sheet No. 220.


There is No Health without Mental Health

A Vision for Change sets out the policy framework for mental health in Ireland. This report complements this with a focus on social inclusion, recovery and a population health approach. As increasingly acknowledged nowadays, mental health is shaped by our social, cultural, economic and physical world. As a result, there has been a welcome shift in policy from a purely medical model, to the promotion of mental health and well-being in many policy arenas. The main perspectives which underpin the report are presented in Figure 1.

Scope of the Report

The report examines integrated strategies for policy implementation on mental health. It draws from international and national examples of good practice, as well as from the 80 Submissions the Project Team received. As part of the Project, research was commissioned on mental health and the workplace, conducted by Millward Brown IMS.

Findings

The following distinct areas are examined in this report:

Mental Health Can Be Strengthened

- Co-ordinated action is needed at all levels to increase social inclusion. This includes action at a society level, within organisations, in the community and at the individual level. International evidence suggests that strategies have to focus on all these levels to be effective.

- Vulnerable groups require particular action.

Work Is The Best Route To Recovery

- Employment is the best protection against social exclusion. However, only a fifth of people with severe and enduring mental ill-health in Ireland are employed.

- Only 20% of Irish companies has a written policy on mental health, yet nearly all employers would welcome information and guidance in this area.

- There are negative attitudes among employers, with risks for employees in disclosing a mental health difficulty.

- Those with recent mental ill-health experience found the workplace more challenging and reported more negative attitudes among employers.

Social Supports Protect Against Mental Ill-Health

- There is a strong association between positive mental health and social supports in the community.

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6. A summary of this research, Mental Health in the Workplace, has been published separately and is available from the NESF.
Integrated Services Play A Key Role In Recovery

- To ensure a continuum of care from early intervention to recovery, the links to non-health sectors need to be included and strengthened at every service point. A co-ordinated approach is needed to meet the housing and support needs of service users.

Reducing Stigma Contributes To Social Inclusion

- Stigma and discrimination have been identified as the greatest barrier to social inclusion, quality of life and recovery for people with mental ill-health.

Strengthening Communities Supports Mental Health

- Community engagement and community development are key to building social capital, particularly in facilitating a self-help approach within communities, so that they can provide solutions to collective problems such as ill-health. The key elements needed to improve mental health are presented in Figure 2.

Summary of Recommendations

The report charts a new cross-cutting approach and argues that multi-level action across communities and society can have a huge impact in improving mental health and greater social cohesion and well-being for all. The recommendations and the key actions under each of these strategic areas are presented in Figure 3, overleaf.
**Figure 3 Six Strategic Areas: Recommendations**

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<td>Health Impact Assessments for all major policies, in conjunction with service users</td>
<td>Holistic health education to be developed in all schools</td>
<td>Specific gateways to access health services and develop support in drop-in centres</td>
<td>Health and Well-being Framework Strategy for the workplace should be developed by social partners</td>
<td>Integrated services with vocational support</td>
<td>Support community development approaches</td>
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<td>Healthy Public Policy Strategy</td>
<td>Continuing health education and mental health literacy to be drawn up by the HSE</td>
<td>Early intervention initiatives</td>
<td>Develop Supported Employment Schemes and Clubhouses</td>
<td>Integrated Community Mental Health Teams, Outreach Services and Primary Care</td>
<td>Audit of public services and community groups</td>
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<td>Responsibility for vocational and social outcomes should be given to the NAPS Senior Officials Group</td>
<td>Media awareness campaigns</td>
<td>Greater support for youth services</td>
<td>Strategic plan for training, work and employment services to be developed by cross-departmental team</td>
<td>Case management approach</td>
<td>Guidelines for community groups in relation to mental health support work led by the HSE</td>
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<td>Cross-departmental team to draw up targets, priorities and implementation schedule</td>
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<td>Improved staff training, increased employment targets</td>
<td>Staff training in recovery model</td>
<td>Greater support and recognition of community and voluntary sector</td>
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<td>This team to address barriers to social inclusion for vulnerable groups</td>
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<td>Review pay and conditions for sheltered employment schemes</td>
<td>Step-down services including housing and training in local communities</td>
<td>Social support initiatives in local communities</td>
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<td>Cost-benefit analyses of proposals</td>
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<td>Better training and more effective programmes to be delivered by FÁS</td>
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<td>Fully implement recommendations from <em>A Vision for Change</em></td>
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<td>Co-ordinated action on housing and tailored housing supports</td>
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Implementation

Responsibility to drive forward and oversee follow-up on the report’s recommendations should be given to the Senior Officials Group under the Government’s NAPinclusion (National Action Plan for Social Inclusion). Within this framework, a cross-departmental team should be established to ensure detailed implementation on the ground of the policy changes proposed in the report. This team should, in turn, report at regular intervals to the Senior Officials Group.

The Project Team recommends that increased expenditure be allocated, as necessary, to support the implementation of A Vision for Change. Furthermore, a cost-benefit analysis should be conducted to quantify those expenditures beyond the provision of mental health services, as the basis to provide additional resources for the implementation of the recommendations made in this report.