



# Submission to the consultation on the Statement of Strategy 2021- 2023, of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

**November 2020**



St. Patrick's Mental Health Services (SPMHS) is Ireland's largest independent, not-for-profit mental health service provider. St. Patrick's Mental Health Services' vision is a society where all citizens are empowered to live mentally healthy lives. SPMHS works to provide the highest quality mental healthcare, to promote mental wellbeing and mental health awareness, and to advocate for the rights of those experiencing mental health difficulties. SPMHS achieves this through a human rights-based approach, through the enhancement of evidence-based knowledge, and by striving to be at the cutting edge of new initiatives and advances in the field. SPMHS is committed to furthering the development of the competencies of those choosing to work in mental health and of the organisations providing mental health care services, and to enhancing partnership with service users. Our strategic plan for 2018-2022 – [‘Changing Minds. Changing Lives’](#), is firmly rooted in these principles and commitments.

SPMHS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on the Statement of Strategy for the period 2021-2023, for the newly formed Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. This brief submission will focus on the significance of mental health as a cross-cutting key strategic issue which we believe should be prioritised within the development of the Statement of Strategy.

## **Children and Youth**

It is vital that the merging of the former Department of Children and Youth Affairs within this new Department, sees the promotion of children's and young people's wellbeing remaining a key priority and strategic objective<sup>1</sup>, and that children's right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health is robustly protected<sup>2</sup>. The mental health impacts of the pandemic on children and young people are not yet known, however there is some evidence that young people in particular are experiencing negative impacts on their mental wellbeing<sup>3 4</sup>. It will be necessary that timely attention and action is directed towards mitigating and responding to any such impacts in future iterations of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014-2020*, and any other related policy developments over the period of the Strategy Statement.

SPMHS supports the key points of the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children's (ENOC) *Position Statement on ‘Child Mental Health in Europe’*, as regards the promotion and protection of children's right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of mental health requiring the undertaking of “all



appropriate actions" by government, and would advocate that due consideration of its key recommendations is given with regard to the development of the Statement of Strategy<sup>5</sup>.

## **Equality and Disability**

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission have highlighted the disproportionate impacts the Covid-19 pandemic has had on particular groups in society and the risks for exacerbation of existing inequalities, including amongst older people, people with disabilities, minority ethnic groups and women <sup>6</sup>. It is recognised that social determinants such as experience of inequalities can negatively impact mental health, and that mental health difficulties are disproportionately experienced within groups experiencing disadvantage <sup>7</sup>. Mental health thus must be acknowledged as a cross-cutting issue, and the promotion and protection of the wellbeing of such groups recognised as a key strategic issue, within the Statement of Strategy. Furthermore, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty should be prominently highlighted within the Strategy Statement, and its role and relevance in considering equality and human rights impacts within Covid-19 response and recovery, in particular, emphasised<sup>8</sup>.

Gender equality is a notable new function which falls under the remit of the Department. As referenced above, and evidenced both nationally and internationally, there have been significant gendered impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic with associated repercussions for women's mental health<sup>9 10</sup>. The need for a gender analysis and response to the Covid-19 pandemic has been highlighted as necessary from both a human rights and equality perspective, but also from a mental health perspective, and this should be reflected within the key strategic issues<sup>11</sup>.

The importance of eliminating mental health discrimination remains not only a key equality issue, but necessary for timely support and intervention for individuals experiencing mental health difficulties. With the State's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>12</sup> in 2018, there is an obligation to strengthen the rights of people with disabilities, including psychosocial disability, to be protected from discrimination, and SPMHS would advocate for this to be addressed as a key issue within the Strategy Statement.

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## References

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- <sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. 20 November 1989, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 1577. Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/crc.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs, & Economic & Social Research Institute (2020) *The Implications of the Covid-19 Pandemic for Policy in Relation to Children and Young People. A Research Review*. July 2020. ESRI Survey and Statistical Report Series Number 94. Available at: [https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/SUSTAT94\\_3.pdf](https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/SUSTAT94_3.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> United Nations (2020) *Policy Brief: Covid-19 and the Need for Action on Mental Health*. 13 May 2020. Available at: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/UN-Policy-Brief-COVID-19-and-mental-health.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (2018, p.1) *Position Statement on 'Child Mental Health in Europe'*, 21 September 2018, Paris. Available at: <https://www.kinderrechtencommissariaat.be/sites/default/files/bestanden/enoc-2018-statement-child-mental-health-fv.pdf>
- <sup>6</sup> Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2020) *Guidance Note - Covid-19 and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty*. Available at: <https://www.ihrec.ie/documents/guidance-note-covid-19-and-the-public-sector-equality-and-human-rights-duty/>
- <sup>7</sup> World Health Organisation (2014) *Social Determinants of Mental Health*. Available at: [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/112828/9789241506809\\_eng.pdf;jsessionid=BF7FCBB87BD78837B8459D13E02E1446?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/112828/9789241506809_eng.pdf;jsessionid=BF7FCBB87BD78837B8459D13E02E1446?sequence=1)
- <sup>8</sup> Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (2020) *Guidance Note - Covid-19 and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty*. Available at: <https://www.ihrec.ie/documents/guidance-note-covid-19-and-the-public-sector-equality-and-human-rights-duty/>
- <sup>9</sup> Central Statistics Office (2020) *Social Impact of Covid-19 on Women and Men, April 2020*. Available at: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/sic19wm/socialimpactofcovid-19onwomenandmenapril2020/>
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- <sup>11</sup> Mental Health Reform and National Women's Council (2020) *Women's Mental Health and the Covid-19 pandemic*. July 2020. Available at: <https://www.mentalhealthreform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/MHR-NWCI-Policy-statement-Final-22nd-July-2020-1.pdf>
- <sup>12</sup> UN General Assembly. *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. 24 January 2007, A/ RES/ 61/ 106. Available at: <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>