



Submission to the Department of the Taoiseach on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan

February 2021



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.¹

SPMHS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. This brief submission will focus on the significance of mental health and wellbeing, and human rights and equality, as cross-cutting key strategic issues which we believe should be prioritised within the considerations and development of the plan.

Q.1 Taking into account the guidance provided by the European Commission, what are the areas Ireland should prioritise for 1) investments and 2) reforms for inclusion in our National Recovery and Resilience Plan?

SPMHS advocates that: 1) health and wellbeing, with particular attention to mental health, and 2) human rights and equality are positioned as central considerations in the development of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. The emergent impacts on collective wellbeing and societal mental health over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, and the interlinked potential for a deepening of inequalities and a frustration of progress towards greater enjoyment of human rights within society continues to be evidenced.^{2, 3, 4}

In this regard SPMHS would suggest that an ‘Economy of Wellbeing’ approach be used as a meaningful touchpoint in the drafting of this plan. This approach recognises wellbeing and economic growth as interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and, aims to advance a fairer and more inclusive society.⁵ Such an approach aligns with the six pillars included in the regulation, and the 2019 and 2020 country-specific recommendations, in several regards. Recovery plans informed by a ‘wellbeing lens’ have been highlighted for their potential for positive longer-term transformative impacts.⁶ This could include the incorporation of an evaluation of impacts on wellbeing of policy measures proposed, alongside equality and human rights impacts which may serve to



mitigate against or redress inequities worsened or caused by the effects of the pandemic.⁷

Q. 2 Of the Country Specific Recommendations received by Ireland in 2019 and 2020, which are considered the most relevant for reflection upon in Ireland's National Recovery and Resilience Plan?

SPMHS would advocate that the aspect of the 2020 Country-Specific Recommendations - "...Improve accessibility of the health system and strengthen its resilience, including by responding to health workforce's needs and ensuring universal coverage to primary care", is most relevant, and would strongly assert that increased attention and investment be directed towards bolstering access to, and resilience of, the mental health service components of the larger health system. Mental Health Service components funding remains below the 10% of the overall health budget recommended within the Sláintecare report.⁸ On the point of accessibility, and, given the rapidly increased role of telehealth within mental health service delivery since the start of the pandemic, SPMHS would highlight that this may further interlink with Country-Specific Recommendation no.2 for 2020 as it pertains to the digital divide and its implications for many of those who may be most at need of accessing mental health support. This may include, for example, people in later life or people experiencing deprivation.

Beyond this however, SPMHS would reassert that health, including mental health, be viewed as a cross-cutting priority issue in the development of this plan, with human rights and equality principles underpinning policy development. As noted in a thematic report on the pandemic, by the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health:

Health inequities can never be overcome by the health-care system alone. The underlying and social determinants of health extend beyond the health-care sector. ⁹

The levers for health lie beyond the health sector and viewing cross-sectoral projects from this perspective, with a long-term preventative scope, may increase the impact of funding secured. An example is the interconnectivity of environmental issues, inequality and mental health, dimensions of which are reflected within Country-Specific Recommendations no. 2 and 3 for 2020, and no. 2 for 2019.¹⁰ Such an approach is further endorsed within the thematic report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to health:

When designing pandemic recovery stimulus and support packages, States should adopt human rights principles to ensure that the voices of people in communities are listened to in an effort to protect their



environments and their livelihoods in sustainable and nature-positive ways.

A further example, which highlights the relevance of Country-Specific Recommendation no. 2 for 2019 as it pertains to increasing access to affordable and quality childcare, concerns issues of gender equality/inequality. It has now been well-evidenced, both nationally and internationally, that gendered impacts of the pandemic have manifested in numerous ways, with associated impacts for women's mental health in particular.^{11,12} This further reinforces the significance of ensuring that both a human rights and equality, and a wellbeing perspective is applied in the development of, and prioritisation within, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan.

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References

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