



Submission to the consultation on the Pathways to Work strategy

September 2025





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 2023-2027 – [‘The Future in Mind’](#), is firmly rooted in these principles and commitments.

SPMHS welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on the Pathways to Work 2026-2030 strategy. This submission will focus on the significance of mental health within the strategy. We have based the submission on the ‘Consultation Questions’ set out in the consultation guidance document.

1. What progress do you feel has been made in achieving the aims and commitments set out in Pathways to Work 2021-2025?

The review of the Reasonable Accommodations fund and inclusion of in-work support programmes and other expanded funding and supports within the Work and Access programme are positive. There is a need for continued efforts to increase awareness from both employers and employees as to rights to reasonable accommodation, in particular for ‘hidden’ disabilities such as mental health and or neurodivergence-related needs. The 2025 SPMHS annual attitudes to mental health and stigma survey findings indicate a trend of increasing familiarity about such issues with 54% of the more than 1000 people surveyed, aware that people with mental health difficulties have the right to reasonable accommodation within the workplace (pending publication). This represents a significant increase since 2022 when the rate was 45%.

2. What are the key challenges facing the Irish labour market that Pathways to Work 2026 – 2030 will need to address over the lifetime of the strategy?

The World Health Organisation (WHO) highlights that when work is meaningful, and work conditions and environments are safe and good, it can be protective of our mental health. (WHO, 2022, [Guidelines on mental health at work](#)) Importantly, work can contribute to recovery and inclusion for people experiencing ongoing mental health difficulties. In relation to supporting both mental health within the workforce and society as a whole, and job retention outcomes within the labour market, it is thus essential that the conditions of people's work are recognised as significant. From SPMHS' insights contributing to employee assistance programmes, key issues that can influence mental health within the workplace include workplace bullying and increased or unsustainable workloads. For example where there is inadequate staffing - ‘working short’, and which may require consideration and responsiveness within and beyond the strategy.



It is further important to acknowledge the increasing prevalence of mental health difficulties amongst children and young people in Ireland – many of whom may be entering the workforce over the lifetime of the strategy .(Dooley et al, 2024 [Mental health of Irish adolescents following the COVID-19 pandemic: results from a population-based cross-sectional survey | Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine | Cambridge Core](#)) This highlights the interconnected need for cross-government responsiveness to ensure both a ‘healthy’ workforce and labour market, and reinforces the urgent need for adequate funding and resourcing of the health service to address continued shortfalls in child and adolescent mental health services.([Hundreds of children waiting more than a year to access mental health services – The Irish Times](#))

3 Are there any changes that you would suggest for Pathways to Work 2026 – 2030, considering the potentially changed economic circumstances? This can include suggestions on the high-level ambitions, strands of action, specific commitments and targets or overall strategy design.

The convening of the new cross-government Steering Group for Mental Health may facilitate a more comprehensive consideration of mental health-related issues pertinent to the strategy, in line with the ‘mental health in all policies approach’ it espouses. An example of same in practice has recently been showcased by WHO Europe - [Housing and employment programmes show what “mental health in all policies” can look like on the ground](#) . This may be especially pertinent in consideration of potential economic challenges over the coming years. Ensuring funding and adequate resourcing of crucial individualised employment support services which include practical employment preparation skills, for people with disabilities and or other marginalised groups, such as the Employability service or the innovative Open Doors Initiative, will also continue to be essential.

4. Do you have any suggested actions to help improve the employment prospects and outcomes of people underrepresented in the labour market (such as people with disabilities, migrants, lone parents, members of the Traveller and Roma communities, among others)? This can include, for example, actions in relation to the Public Employment Services, training and employment supports and programmes, the social welfare system, and/or engagement with employers.

Awareness-raising and support for employers regarding mental health difficulties within the workplace, including equality law protections and rights to, and related examples of, accommodations within the workplace must be progressed. Discrimination, on the basis of mental health difficulty, as a barrier to seeking or retaining employment must continue to be robustly tackled. In the 2025 SPMHS annual attitudes to mental health and stigma survey findings, one in three people felt they/ someone they know had been discriminated against at work, at home, or in the local community due to mental health difficulties. The WHO have highlighted the significance of tackling mental health stigma as a barrier to accessing support - “Most critically, the stigma surrounding mental health conditions remains a dominant barrier to disclosure at work, to the implementation of support at work for people living with mental health conditions or, indeed, to the uptake of available support for workers.” (WHO, 2022, [Guidelines on mental health at work](#), p.2)

The WHO (2025) have further highlighted the need for work and employment programmes to be tailored to specific challenges and take into account additional equality issues –



Unemployment is strongly associated with mental health problems, poverty, and various social and economic challenges. Initiatives may include job search assistance, supported employment, internships, or vocational training for those facing barriers in the job market due to social, demographic, or health or gender-related factors. Tailoring support to address specific challenges, such as gender discrimination or caregiving responsibilities, can help individuals gain stable employment and economic independence. (WHO, 2025, [Guidance on mental health policy and strategic action plans. Module 2](#), p. 110)

SPMHS' #NoStigma campaign, which launched in 2020 aimed to reframe mental health stigma and discrimination by imagining what a life without stigma in the home, workplace or community would look like. This is set out within a campaign resource which focuses on life without stigma in the workplace and supports for seeking and engaging in employment ([mental-health-at-work-nostigma-in-the-workplace-booklet.pdf](#)). SPMHS considers that work without mental health stigma would mean:

- Our workplaces are inclusive and supportive environments
- We all experience equal opportunities for employment and for progressing at work
- We all get access to available support in the workplace if we need it
- We can let others know if we are struggling
- We don't delay in looking after our mental health.

In this regard, SPMHS would agree with the continued importance ascribed to “employer engagement ...particularly around the employment of under-represented groups”, within the Mid-term Review and Second Annual Progress Report. Of note also, research indicates a need for greater awareness and responsiveness to neurodivergence-related needs within the workforce. ([AsIAm – Autism in the Workplace 2023 report](#)) Online training opportunities for employers would be of benefit to support inclusive workplaces and wellbeing at work for all.

The potential for public employment services themselves to act as a valuable partner in anti-stigma efforts has also been identified within the 2024 WHO Europe [Mosaic toolkit to end stigma and discrimination in mental health](#).

Submission ends