

College of Psychiatry of Ireland cautious in welcoming Minister Lynch's ring fencing of €35million for Mental Health Services

The College of Psychiatry welcomes the budget announcement confirming, as per the Programme for Government, that €35m is to be ring fenced for mental health and in particular for the development of community mental health teams as per 'A Vision for Change'. However the College continues to have concerns related to reductions in staffing for existing Community Mental Health Teams that have occurred in the last two years. *"Due to staff retirements and the moratorium on recruitment, staffing of mental health services is reaching crisis point. We know nurse and other mental health personnel are actively being taken from the Community Mental Health Services & teams and brought back to staff acute hospital services. This reverse migration is not only contrary to the recommendations in 'A Vision for Change' but counterproductive and therapeutically disastrous to those who have been availing of these Community Mental Health Teams and who we know have better outcomes in terms of improved mental wellbeing. We call for a priority to be placed on staffing Community Mental Health Teams in line with 'A Vision for Change' recommendations."* says **Dr Anne Jeffers, Director, External Affairs and Policy.**

The College also welcomes the Minister's reference to increased psychological therapies, but with caution. With no national standards for the accreditation or governance of counsellors and psychotherapists there is a danger of non-specific counselling in Primary Care and Secondary Care being ineffective and counter therapeutic. *"We urge that we learn from international experience. Increasing counselling and psychotherapy has only been effective when introduced in the context of well developed Community Mental Health Teams, who work in collaboration with Primary Care" said Dr Jeffers. "It is also worth noting that one area of counselling that has been shown to be effective is Guidance Counselling in schools, however, educational cuts will result in a reduction in availability of Guidance Counsellors. Child and Adolescent Psychiatrists have identified this as putting young people at risk. This decision needs to be reviewed."*

Once again, the College joins with other agencies in calling for the immediate installation of a Mental Health Directorate, as recommended by 'A Vision for Change'. Dr Anne Jeffers reiterated that *"Only with this can we ensure services are developed in an equitable manner,*

and the €35m that is referred to so often is not lost in the system.” Over the Years College members have produced a number of reports highlighting resource inequalities in mental health. This has still not been adequately addressed. With diminishing resources available for mental health services this needs to be addressed urgently.

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