

An Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD

Government Buildings

Upper Merrion Street

Dublin 2

July 12th, 2023

Dear Taoiseach,

I write to you as the CEO of SHINE, a national charity that supports people with lived experience of mental illnesses and family members and supporters, in relation to the upcoming Budget 2024.

We are a mental health organisation that has been serving Ireland for over 40 years. Our vision is of a more compassionate Ireland where those affected by mental illness and stigma are supported and included in all aspects of society.

We are made up of four programmes:

- Nationwide Community Mental Health Recovery Support
- Advocacy and Research
- Headline: Ireland's national programme for responsible reporting and representation of mental ill health in the media
- See Change: National Mental Health Stigma Reduction Programme (Green Ribbon)

We believe that additional investment in the community and voluntary sector will greatly benefit the implementation of Sharing the Vision, Ireland's Mental Health Policy, and recognise the remarkable contributions made by these organisations.

Recommendation 14 of Sharing the Vision states that *"Where Voluntary and Community Sector organisations are providing services aligned to the outcomes in this policy, operational governance and funding models should be secure and sustainable"*.

The contributions of the community and voluntary sector towards the implementation of Sharing the Vision cannot be overstated. This sector plays a vital role in filling significant gaps in service provision, particularly when national services are lacking or there are long waiting lists. Our ability to engage with individuals in need of support faster ensures that people do not have to endure prolonged waiting periods for essential mental health services. At the same time, we often provide services to those who will not or cannot engage with statutory services.



The work of community and voluntary organisations is key to normalise conversations around mental health, reduce stigma, and create safe spaces for open discussions and support. By sharing real experiences, we raise awareness, destigmatise mental health, and educate the public.

Our support networks, peer groups, and education courses offer hope, support, and recovery opportunities to individuals and families and complement HSE services, empowering individuals in their recovery journey. Additionally, we provide valuable skills and resources, relieving the burden on the healthcare system and promoting a healthier society. We are often underfunded and face resource constraints that hinder our ability to fully realise our potential. A timely intervention is crucial in preventing further deterioration and promoting early recovery.

Allow me to highlight the specific contributions that Shine has made in advancing the goals of Sharing the Vision. These contributions can vividly demonstrate the transformative impact that enhanced funding can have on the successful implementation of our national mental health policy:

- ***Nationwide Community Mental Health Recovery Support***

Shine is one of the only mental health Community and Voluntary organisations in Ireland that provides direct front line recovery support to people affected by mental illness and their family and supporters.

The team possess specialised knowledge and skills that enable them to address the diverse and complex needs of individuals experiencing mental illnesses (diagnoses such as psychosis, schizophrenia, bi-polar disorder and personality disorder) and the challenges faced by family members and supporters.

All elements of our recovery service are available to individuals experiencing mental illnesses and family members and supporters. A person using the Shine Recovery Service has access to national mental health information and a support line, local individualised recovery key working, community-based support groups and recovery education courses.

The Shine Recovery Service is a small national team of 15.6 whole time equivalent (WTE) mental health recovery support workers supported and supervised by 3 WTE team leaders. In 2022, over 1,300 people were supported in their recovery through 12,604 contacts. This is a ratio of 1:85 of staff to service users.

At end of Quarter 2, 2023, Shine Recovery Services have engaged and supported 977 individuals offering 6,893 contacts. This is an increase of 48% in individuals accessing our service and an increase of 57% in sessions offered on Quarter 2 of previous year. However, we know that there is a greater need for more services in the community than we are currently unable to reach.

The work of Shine's Recovery Service is crucial in bridging the gaps between the statutory mental health system and community inclusion. Alongside our HSE Mental Health partners, Shine provides a comprehensive and consistent national mental health recovery service empowering individuals to regain control over their lives and work towards their personal goals.



With our expertise, knowledge and skills in area of psychosis, we are the community and voluntary referral pathway of choice for the HSE National Clinical Programme for Early Intervention in Psychosis for service users and for family members and supporters.

By expanding our services and ensuring our presence throughout the country, we can bridge the existing gaps in service provision and create a more comprehensive and inclusive mental health system.

People that accessed Shine's recovery services mentioned:

(...) "Many thanks for welcoming me to the Group....I found that the experience of listening to other people who have been coping for years with the kind of issues posed by my son to be very helpful"

(...) "When I struggled, my support was, and still is, Shine. With the support of Shine, its support groups (where peers meet), its education courses and one-to-one support, I don't feel the need to go to others for help. I have found that Shine has supported me in ways I didn't even know I needed—very practical ways of dealing with stress and helping me to lead a more manageable life."

(...) "They have taught me many different coping techniques which I use in my daily routine. Shine don't use labels; they see you as a person... they've taught me to be more open with my family and friends help them understand my daily difficulties."

- **Advocacy and Research**

Shine is uniquely positioned to inform government departments about the real needs and challenges faced by individuals with lived experience of mental ill health. Through our close interactions with the community, we have first-hand knowledge of the issues faced by priority groups and those whose voices are often unheard. This insight enables policymakers to develop more effective mental health strategies and interventions that address the specific needs of the population.

In May 2023 we launched a new initiative called 'The Voice Platform', a group of 50 people that voluntarily agreed to collaborate with us, providing their voice and testimonies towards advocacy, policy, service development, research and communication initiatives. Members of the Voice Platform mentioned:

(...) " I want to help normalise the topic of mental illness, I am passionate about policy implementation and advocacy. I want to contribute to these processes with my personal experience and skills. "

(...) " I am joining the Voice Platform to engage with likeminded individuals for the improvement of mental health support, services, policy and legislation in Ireland.'



Since March 2022, Shine has been given the prestigious role of hosting and coordinating the work of the Reference Group that monitors and offers insights for the implementation of Sharing the Vision in collaboration with the National Implementation and Monitoring Committee (NIMC). The Reference Group are very passionate and committed to improving the access to and the quality of mental health services in Ireland. This work is giving Shine great insight into mental health policy, including areas of success and key challenges.

A member of the Reference Group mentioned:

(...) we need to ensure that the voice of the lived experience is being listened to when policies are being developed. Because if programs and policies are being made without the lived experience how can this make a difference? I hope that the learning and the empowerment from this reference group is embedded within all programmes, within all policy, to ensure that everyone feels included in their own journey and meeting their needs."

- ***Headline: Ireland's national programme for responsible reporting and representation of mental ill health in the media***

Headline, another key pillar of Shine, plays a critical role in ensuring accurate and responsible reporting of mental health in the media.

As a leading global programme on media and mental health, Headline has been at the forefront of promoting informed and compassionate coverage of suicide and many mental illnesses. By working closely with journalists, media organisations, media representative bodies and regulators, Headline has provided valuable guidance and resources to enhance understanding and sensitivity in reporting on mental health, most importantly, reducing the media's effect on suicide contagion.

Our media monitoring function keeps track of how mental health is reported, identifying and addressing concerning themes across online and print media, as well as broadcast media which we were previously funded to monitor.

We have actively fostered partnerships and collaborations, facilitating dialogue between mental health experts, people with lived experience of mental health challenges, and the media to promote accurate portrayals and avoid stigmatising narratives. Our student education programmes are embedded in journalism courses across the country, ensuring the next generation of media professionals are equipped to tell mental health stories responsibly, and help audiences better understand mental health challenges.

Not only do we support media in how to tell these stories, we also support journalists to care for their own mental health. Our 2021-2022 Newsroom Mental Health pilot project provided training to journalists across the country, including frontline journalists at the national broadcaster. These workshops addressed issues like Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (more prevalent among journalists



than the general population), vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue, as well as addressing issues of newsroom culture. Attendees described the workshop as a ‘transformative experience’. Feedback consistently indicates this training should be compulsory for media organisations.

(...) ‘I have worked with traumatic content as a journalist for over 20 years and I recognise so many of the pitfalls of engaging with this work. It is heartening to see a greater understanding of the effects of traumatic content on journalists now within the industry, much of it down to the excellent work by Headline.’

‘This training should be implemented for all media employers in Ireland’

Research from 2021 showed that when journalists prioritise their mental well-being, they are better equipped to engage with individuals who have lived experience of mental ill health, creating opportunities for meaningful interviews. This promotes more accurate, impactful storytelling, which challenges stereotypes and reduces stigma surrounding mental health.

Headline’s Mental Health Media Awards programme bridges the gap between those with stories of recovery and hope, and those who can share that story with a national audience.

A participant of the Mental Health Media Awards 2022 mentioned:

(...) “I finally felt like somebody heard me and listened...and [they] could explain my story better than I could myself”

- **See Change: National Stigma Reduction Programme (Green Ribbon)**

SHINE’s national stigma reduction programme, See Change, plays a pivotal role in destigmatising mental health in Ireland, both within communities and in workplaces. As a leading advocate for mental health awareness and understanding the impact of stigma on people who experience mental health difficulties, our See Change programme has spearheaded transformative initiatives that have challenged misconceptions and fostered a more inclusive and supportive environment for individuals experiencing mental illness. Through the See Change Workplace Programme and flagship national Green Ribbon campaign, See Change has shared personal stories of individuals with lived experience, emphasising that mental health issues can affect anyone.

See Change has also provided advice and content to the HSE and Decision Support Service in relation to the national Suicide Prevention in the Community guide, and The Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 documentation and related HSE training.

By humanising the experiences of those living with mental health difficulties, See Change has helped break down barriers and encourage empathy and support.



The work of See Change has helped reduce stigma, increase understanding and promote a more inclusive and supportive society for individuals facing mental illnesses and their family members and supporters.

Over 450 people attend Green Ribbon events annually, with 700,000 Green Ribbons distributed across the island of Ireland. Over 40 See Change Ambassadors facilitate trainings, information sessions, media events and stigma reduction initiatives.

In 2022, See Change conducted survey on attitudes towards conversations about mental health following the national Green Ribbon Campaign.

- 44% agreed that The Green Ribbon campaign has encouraged them to start conversations about mental health with people they know.
- 34% agree that they have heard more colleagues in work talking about mental health since The Green Ribbon campaign. [Increase from 2020 at 31%]
- 36% agree that they have heard more family and friends talking about the mental health since the Green Ribbon campaign. [Increase from 2020 at 33%]

See Change Ambassador mentioned:

(...) talking helped and continues to help. It dilutes the shame; it erases the stigma. We need to talk about mental health, and mental illness – the differences between them, and how they impact each other. I'm very proud to be associated with See Change in helping to do just that."

See Change Workplace programme mentioned:

(...) " We're committed to playing our part in helping to de-stigmatise mental health and prompting valuable conversations in communities we serve. We're grateful to support the Green Ribbon campaign, prompting conversation and ultimately reducing the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health."

Corporate Social Responsibility at Boots Ireland

The community and voluntary sector play an invaluable role in advancing the implementation of Sharing the Vision, Ireland's Mental Health Policy. By recognising the exceptional value of the community and voluntary sector and providing us with the necessary resources, we can create a society where mental health is prioritised, stigma is reduced, and recovery and support services are accessible to all.

We urge you Taoiseach, to strongly consider our pre-budget submission and allocate an additional **€1,000,000** per annum in budget allocation towards Shine services. For this, we can ensure that we



can grow the work of our **National Community Mental Health Recovery Service, Headline, See Change and Advocacy and Research programmes.**

In addition, we can fill gaps that we believe will become very apparent once the CHO areas change to RHA areas. We are concerned that there is a risk, especially in the Eastern region that legacy Service Level Agreements will mean that people will miss out on access to our services. We are keen to remove the postcode lottery.

This investment will not only ensure the remarkable contributions made by the sector continues, along with the effective implementation of Sharing the Vision and the fulfilment of our collective commitment to improving mental health for all.

From a SHINE perspective, additional resourcing of our four programmes would strengthen our work and presents excellent value for money.

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with me should you need further information or wish to meet and discuss any of the points included in this pre-budget submission.

Nicola Byrne

Shine CEO