

July 2023: Press Release

Response of *Families for Reform of CAMHS* to the final report of the Mental Health Commission's Review of the provision of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)

Families for Reform of CAMHS welcomes the publication of the final review of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) by the Mental Health Commission and **urges the Government to take urgent action.**

The review follows on from the [Interim report](#) which was published early – ahead of the final report – in January due to the Mental Health Commission's "*serious concerns and consequent risks for some patients*" of CAMHS which required urgent and targeted action.

Both the Interim and Final Report paint a bleak picture, clearly highlighting an overwhelmed and poorly governed system with inadequate staffing and resources contributing to **inefficient and unsafe CAMHS services**. This is not news to our families who have experienced the effects of this first-hand.

Families for Reform of CAMHS is a group of over 150 families from across Ireland calling for better mental health services for children and young people in Ireland and urgent and real reform of CAMHS. At present, the children of this country are being **failed consistently** and our families left without adequate support at a time when we most need it.

Serious issues and concerns about CAMHS have been reported repeatedly¹. This is not new. The HSE has acknowledged that "*there are service deficits, both in terms of access, capacity, and consistency in the quality of services*"² and an apology has issued. Yet we have seen no real reform.

While the **Government is currently considering the reduction of the number of CAMHS teams** across the country³, we call for more. More for our children and more for the 22,000 children being referred to the service every year⁴.

At present there are 11,000 children awaiting appointments for primary care psychology, with over 4,000 of these children waiting over a year.⁵ There are **4,500 children waiting for first-time CAMHS appointments** and this accounts only for the children who have not been turned away from the service. In addition, the number of children with **medical referrals to CAMHS being refused** by the Service has jumped by 12% since 2020.

For those children who secure an appointment with CAMHS, they are often met with **a service that lacks capacity to provide appropriate therapeutic interventions and with absent or poor care planning**.⁶

¹ See additional information on reports and findings under 'Additional information for the editor' below

² [Oireachtas sub-committee on mental health](#), 14 February 2023 HSE chief operations officer Damien McCallion

³ Parliamentary Question response: [26974/23](#): as a means of tackling the lack of staff by centralising services

⁴ [Oireachtas sub-committee on mental health](#), 14 February 2023 HSE chief operations officer Damien McCallion

⁵ [Oireachtas Debate](#): 24/05/2023

⁶ See [Mental Health Commission's Interim Report](#), January 2023.

Position of Families for Reform of CAMHS

Families for Reform of CAMHS believe that all children have a right to appropriate support, treatment and intervention to ensure the highest attainable standard of mental health and rehabilitation in line with Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child⁷.

Numerous Government and HSE policies are consistent with the [reforms that our group](#) is calling for but have not been delivered on. We are calling on the Government to move into a place of **real implementation so that the prioritisation of children's mental health services is not limited to ideals and rhetoric.**

Given the urgency of the situation and the impact on the health and wellbeing of our children, we are disappointed that the Minister for Mental Health Mary Butler does not have availability to meet with us.

Our families are found across Ireland, in all communities and groups, and **we call on our neighbours, communities and friends to support our [petition](#) calling on the Government to make real change and improve supports mental health supports for children in Ireland.**

We do not support the current consideration to reduce the number of CAMHS teams and are disappointed that the discussions around this consideration did not appear to involve any parent or family representative groups who will be most impacted by this reform⁸.

We call on the Government and the HSE to implement the following reforms as a matter of urgency:

- Address the clinical and administrative staffing shortage in CAMHS;
- Remedy issues preventing access to CAMH Services (including lengthy waiting lists and lack of consistency around acceptance of referrals to the service);
- Integrate the children's mental health services with other children's services to prevent the current myriad of endless and uncoordinated waiting lists and the pass-the-buck approach currently being experienced by our families;
- Increase the availability of supports offered to promote a child-centred approach to recovery (including ending the practice of discharging children whose families decide not to use medication and delivering on the commitment to provide out-of-hours mental health services);
- End the systemic discrimination against autistic children in the provision of mental health services and greater recognition of the prevalence of mental health issues amongst autistic children;
- Increase the number of CAMHS-ID teams and ensure a clear referral path to access them;
- Ensure the appointment of a key worker and provision of a Care Plan to every child under the remit of CAMHS in line with the [HSE CAMHS Operational Guidelines 2019](#) (this has not been the experience of our families);
- Substantially improve the communication and provision of information between CAMHS and families under their remit; and
- Ensure the introduction of a transparent, accessible and safe review and complaints process.

For further information see: <https://www.families-for-reform-of-camhs.com/>

Media enquiries can be directed to: familiesforreformofcamhs@gmail.com

⁷ Article 24 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

⁸ Parliamentary Question response: [26974/23](#)

Additional information for the editor:

- In Ireland, mental health services for children are provided by Primary Care for mild to moderate mental illness and by CAMHS for children who have moderate to severe mental illness.

Recent Reports:

- In January, an [Interim report](#) was published by the Mental Health Commission ahead of a final report - due later this year - as a result of "*the serious concerns and consequent risks for some patients*" of CAMHS which requires urgent and targeted action. The Report highlighted an overwhelmed and poorly governed system with inadequate staffing and resources contributing to inefficient and unsafe CAMHS services.
- This report was followed in February, by the [Observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child](#). The Committee raised serious concerns about the "*insufficient and inadequate mental health services for children*" in Ireland and urged the Government to "*ensure the availability of therapeutic mental health services and programmes for children*", including by "*significantly increasing the resources allocated for the implementation and monitoring of the mental health policy*".
- The concerns and recommendations pointed to in recent reports are not new. The Mental Health Commission previously highlighted serious concerns in its [2017 Report](#) relating to inadequate staffing, variation in funding, waiting lists, referrals and emergency cover. In the [2016 Observations](#), the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child recommended that the Government "*undertake measures to improve the capacity and quality of its mental health services for children and adolescents*".⁹

Childrens Mental health in Ireland: Key Statistics

As the statistics below illustrate, mental health challenges amongst children in Ireland is common. They are not solely confined to a minority of the population and many families will be impacted at some point in time.

Suicide: In 2017, Ireland was ranked fourth highest in the EU/OECD region for teen suicide. For girls, Ireland ranked the highest for girls dying by suicide in Europe.¹⁰

Self-harm (including attempted suicide): The number of children aged 10-14 years who are self-harming has increased indicating that the age of onset of self-harm is decreasing¹¹. In 2020, One in every 128 girls between the ages of 15-19 presented to hospital due to self-harm¹².

Mental health: In 2021, Ireland ranked in the bottom one-third of 41 countries in the EU/OECD for child mental health¹³

⁹ <https://www.childrensrights.ie/resources/un-committee-rights-child-concluding>

¹⁰ <https://www.unicef.ca/sites/default/files/2017-06/UNICEF%20Innocenti%20Report%20Card%2014%20EN.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² <https://www.nsrfe.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/NSRF-National-Self-Harm-Registry-Ireland-annual-report-2020-Final-for-website.pdf> one in every 233 boys between the ages of 15-19. Self harm includes intentional drug overdose, self-cutting, attempted hanging, attempted drowning, self-poisoning.

¹³ Ireland was placed 26th out of 41 countries for child mental health: <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Report-Card-16-Worlds-of-Influence-child-wellbeing.pdf>