Care Alliance Ireland

'Guiding support for family carers'

Care Alliance Ireland Submission on the Review of the Mental Health Act 2001

April 2021

Care Alliance Ireland are pleased to make this short submission on the review of the Mental Health Act 2001. As requested, we have limited our submission on the relevant theme to 300 words. However, we are open to further discussing the issues raised herein with the relevant stakeholders as appropriate.

Theme 4.5: Interdisciplinary approach to care and treatment.

In accordance with the most recent Census a family carer is a person who provides care and support to a person with a mental health difficulty (and other health concerns)[1]. While we understand and support the spirit of this legislation to ensure that people with a mental health difficulty are seen as the person who has primary agency and autonomy over of their own life and care, this should not override acknowledgement and support for family carers of that person.

The care and support that family carers of people with mental health difficulties provide can vary significantly between situations – diversity within caring is wide[2]. Therefore, many people with mental health difficulties are supported by a wide range of professionals. Acknowledging that an interdisciplinary and systemic approach is the most favourable when supporting a person with a mental health difficulty, we firmly believe that family carers MUST be viewed as a core member of this team, where appropriate. This is in keeping with the 2012 National Carers Strategy[3].

[1] Central Statistics Office, 'Census 2016 Summary Results - Part 1' (Central Statistics Office, 2017).
[2] Kerry Cuskelly and Roisin Higgins, 'Caring For Carers: A Peer Support Group for Families and Carers of People with Mental Health Difficulties' (20 Years of Family Carer Research in Ireland, Dublin: Care Alliance Ireland, 2015); Jacqui O'Riordan and Carol Kelleher, 'A Fine Balance: Mental Health and Family Caring', 2016.
[3] Department of Health, 'The National Carers' Strategy' (Department of Health, 2012).

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Directors ; B Barrett, P Dunne, D McKenna, H Mulligan, T Nyamakope, L Reid, E Ring, M Ryan, M Shovlin

We have received feedback from some of our membership (not for profit organisations), and family carers, that they often do not feel included as a key member of the support team for the person they care for[4]. This is in direct opposition to the overarching aim of the National Carers Strategy to ensure that family carers are seen as 'key care partners'[5].

Therefore, Care Alliance Ireland recommend that within this theme of the proposed legislation, there is specific acknowledgment of family carers as a key member of the interdisciplinary support team. This may be best delivered through a social worker with a dual responsibility to connect with the family along with the person with a mental health difficulty themselves.

This submission was prepared by Elizabeth Croker and Zoe Hughes, Care Alliance Ireland.

Submitted by:

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April 2021.

About Care Alliance Ireland

Care Alliance Ireland is the National Network of Voluntary Organisations supporting family carers. Our vision is that the role of family carers is fully recognised and valued by society in Ireland.

[4] O'Riordan and Kelleher, 'A Fine Balance: Mental Health and Family Caring', 2016.
[5] Department of Health, 'The National Carers' Strategy'.

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We exist to enhance the quality of life for family carers. We achieve this by supporting our member organisations in their direct work with family carers through the provision of information, developing research and policy, sharing resources, and instigating opportunities for collaboration.

There are in the region of 500,000 Family Carers in the Republic of Ireland. Family carer support is provided by a number of organisations, including those dedicated solely to carer support and others who support carers as part of their response to individuals with specific conditions. We work with our 95 member organisations and other agencies to support them in their work with family carers.

Our legitimacy derives in part from our membership base which includes a wide range of organisations currently providing services to Ireland's family carers. Our membership is comprised of both large and small, regional and national organisations.

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