

**An open letter to An Taoiseach, Brian Cowen; Minister for Health and Children, Mary Harney; Minister of State with Responsibility for Disability and Mental Health, John Moloney and Minister for Finance, Brian Lenihan.**

We, the undersigned, call on the Irish Government to respond to the crisis in our mental health services.

Mental health services simply cannot be maintained at humane levels if there are further cuts in Budget 2011. They have already been cut unfairly and disproportionately. Spending is down 9.2 per cent since 2006, and at 5.3 per cent of the overall health budget, is now at its lowest level in modern history. More than half of all staff cut from the HSE in 2009 came from the mental health services, despite the fact they only represent 9 per cent of the HSE's workforce.

The Government's 2006 much lauded and enlightened policy *A Vision for Change* promised to end institutionalisation and provide modern community-based services. Yet progress in developing community services has ground to a halt. We still have the shameful situation of people living in conditions described by the Inspector as "entirely unacceptable and inhumane", 200 admissions of children into adult inpatient mental health units in the last year; and large numbers of people with intellectual disability in psychiatric institutions who should not be there in the first place

We know there is a financial crisis - and that it is making the mental health crisis worse. Financial stress, debt and unemployment are putting a massive burden on people's mental health. Demand for services are growing as people look for support, and suicide and self-harm levels rose sharply last year.

Any further cuts in Budget 2011 will signal the death knell of *A Vision for Change* and condemn another generation of Irish people to a mental health system left over from the Victorian age of asylums.

Yours,