



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

ALONE Submission to Mental Health Reform's Pre-
Budget 2026 Report
Mental Health Reform

10 April 2025



18 April 2025

ALONE, as a member of Mental Health Reform (MHR), submitted a survey to inform MHR's upcoming Pre-Budget 2026 submission. In this survey, ALONE highlighted three major areas for mental health reform that we believe should be prioritised in Budget 2026

1. Waiting List Reductions
2. Recruitment/Staffing
3. Funding for Voluntary and Community Mental Health Sector Organisations

In this submission, ALONE highlighted what we believe is working well in Ireland in regards to mental health provision such as the existence of *Sharing a Vision*, and the latest *Sharing a Vision Implementation Plan 2025-2027* which outlines commitments to improving mental health services. Other policies such as *Connecting for Life- Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide* and *Pathways to Wellbeing, the National Mental Health Promotion Plan 2024-2030* are also a positive step in the right direction.

However, we acknowledge that older people are facing major challenges in terms of mental health services in Ireland such as a lack of implementation of the aforementioned policies. Additionally, ALONE cites a lack of equitable service around the country, a lack of acute mental health beds for older people, and long waiting lists and less equitable services for specialist psychiatric services for older people.

In additional comments, ALONE highlights the concerning prevalence of loneliness in older people across the country, and the significant toll this has on mental health difficulties. Finally, this submission outlines 10 policy recommendations to combat mental health issues for older people, as outlined in further depth below.

Mental Health Reform Pre-Budget 2026 Public Survey

1. What county do you live in?

Dublin

2. What best describes your interest in Budget 2026 and mental health services?

- a) I have accessed mental health services in Ireland
- b) I am a friend, family member, carer or supporter of someone who has accessed mental health services
- c) I am a mental health professional
- d) *Academic / research e. Policy / advocacy*
- e) Other (please specify)

3. What do you think the Government should prioritise for mental health in Budget 2026?

Please select your top 3

- 1. Waiting list reduction
- 2. Recruitment/Staffing
- 3. Funding for Voluntary and Community Mental Health Sector Organisations

Options

Counselling/psychotherapy/talk-based therapies

Waiting list reduction

Recruitment/staffing

Out-of-hours mental healthcare

Independent advocacy service

Funding for voluntary and community mental health sector organisations

Other (please specify)

4. How has your experience with mental health services in Ireland been, if any?

Very Positive

Mostly Positive

Mixed (Positive and Negative)

Mostly Negative

Very Negative

Other (please specify)

5. What is working *well* in terms of the provision of mental health services?

Sharing a Vision: Mental Health Policy for Everyone (2020) exists, and the latest *Sharing the Vision Implementation Plan 2025–2027* outlines commitments to improving mental health services. Additional policies such as *Connecting for Life – Ireland’s National Strategy to Reduce Suicide* and *Pathways to Wellbeing, the National Mental Health Promotion Plan 2024-2030* also exist. The 2025 Programme for Government commits to “Fund mental health supports across all Integrated Care Programme for Older People (ICPOP) teams”.

6. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges in terms of mental health services in Ireland?

A lack of implementation of policies to support older people’s mental health: *Sharing the Vision* contains several actions relevant to older persons’ mental health. This includes a commitment to ‘the development and implementation of a range of actions designed to achieve the goals of the National Positive Ageing Strategy for the mental health of older people’. However, the list of actions has not been published. A new implementation plan published in April 2025 cites only the work of the Commission on Care as providing outputs for this recommendation. Although the population of older people in Ireland is growing rapidly, there is no specialist workstream to drive the actions specific to older people under *Sharing the Vision*.

A lack of equitable service around the country: In 2020, the Mental Health Commission noted that Ireland is “currently not providing a nationwide, comprehensive mental health service for older people” Mental health services are available only in very specific areas, usually Dublin-focused, and are often not replicated models throughout the country, and in particular rural communities.

A lack of acute mental health beds for older people: The Mental Health Commission has reported that Ireland has an alarming under-provision of acute mental health beds for older people. In 2020 it reported that there were only 50% of the beds recommended in *A Vision for Change*. The HSE does not maintain a real-time, accessible system for viewing the status of mental health beds, and data on this topic can be outdated.

Specialist psychiatric services specifically for older people are not staffed well, causing long wait lists and less equitable services: Many people become mentally ill for the first time over the age of 65 due to bereavement, the onset of disability and declining physical health, or due to pathological changes in the brain such as those reflected in dementia. The Model of Care for Specialist Mental Health Services for Older People Part 2 was launched in 2019. It outlines the key role of specialist mental health services for older people, care pathways and interfaces with other services, the role of multi-disciplinary team members, training and education, research, governance, and performance management. It recommends community staffing levels, training requirements, and governance. However, the model of care has not yet been implemented.

Finnerty, Susan. *Mental Health Services for Older People*. Mental Health Commission. Dec 2020. Accessed April 2025. <<https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2021-01/Mental-Health-Services-for-Older-People-Report-2020.pdf>>

Peamount Health Care Strategic Plan 2020-2030. 2023. Accessed April 2025.< <https://www.peamount.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/PeamountHealthcareStrategicPlan2020-2023.pdf>>

7. Do you have any other comments about mental health in Ireland?

ALONE has found that loneliness is prevalent amongst older people in Ireland. About half of older people seek support from ALONE due to loneliness, while 6% report long-term social isolation. We know from research, and our experience, that loneliness has significant physical and mental health difficulties. For example, multiple studies have demonstrated loneliness increases the likelihood of depression, physical health issues and dementia.

There is a significant gap in research on mental health literacy in Ireland, an understanding of mental health needs among older people, and/or their help-seeking behaviours (mental health literacy refers to the knowledge and beliefs about mental health difficulties which aid their recognition, management and prevention).

In Ireland, TILDA research has shown that 78% of older adults who have evidence of depression, and 85% who have evidence of anxiety, do not have a doctor's diagnosis. Research published by Aware and supported by ALONE in 2021 describes the experiences of 288 participants aged 65 and over, and highlights significant mental health challenges within this group.

Additionally, 2021 research by TILDA showed that almost 4% of people they surveyed, who were over the age of 50, expressed a wish to die. Of these, almost three quarters were also lonely. The CSO's most recent suicide statistics from 2021 (published in November 2024) show 12.7% of people who died by suicide in 2021 were those aged 65 years and older, which has remained broadly similar over the 5 year period 2017-2021. **Although rates of suicide and self-harm in Ireland are lower among older people, suicide rates among older adults are high in other countries and are rising.**

There is a serious need for mental health services across Ireland for older people. ALONE has specified the following policy recommendations for Governments:

1. *Develop and implement an action plan to combat loneliness, with a government department responsible for delivering it*
2. *Establish a 5 million Loneliness Fund to ensure investment is made in interventions that are proven to reduce loneliness*
3. *Develop a nationwide public awareness campaign that highlights loneliness and social isolation, which portrays a diverse range of populations and directs people to relevant supports*
4. *Commission research to explore the wellbeing, health and work productivity cost of loneliness in Ireland.*
5. *Triple the number of acute mental health beds available for people 65+*
6. *Implement the Model of Care for Specialist Mental Health Services for Older People*
7. *Commit to staffing mental health services equitably to ensure older people have access to the same services rurally as are found in urban settings*

8. *Establish a specialist workstream to drive the actions specific to older people under Sharing the Vision*
9. *Advocate and fund a national stigma reduction programme and campaign to increase awareness and education around mental health for older people, implemented as part of Sharing the Vision.*
10. *Commission research into the barriers that older adults face in accessing mental health care, which could be due to stigma, lack of awareness, and systemic obstacles.*