



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

ALONE Submission to UN Convention on the Rights of
Persons with Disability (UNCRPD) Review 2025
Mental Health Reform

29 May 2025



ALONE, as a member of Mental Health Reform, submitted a brief survey regarding insights into the existing disability policy in Ireland ahead of the 2025 review of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disability (UNCRPD).

In this survey, ALONE stressed the importance of three major policy areas that should be prioritised in Mental Health Reform's submission to the UNCRPD.

1. Progress the Mental Health Bill 2024 into law
2. Deliver mental health services equitably across the country
3. Fund and implement existing mental health policies – *Sharing the Vision* & the National Framework for Recovery in Mental Health 2024-2028.

This submission outlines the lack of implementation of policies to support older people's mental health. While *Sharing the Vision* contains several relevant actions, including a 'commitment to the development and implementation of a range of actions to achieve the goals of the National Positive Ageing Strategy', at the time of this letter this list of actions had not been published.

Additionally, this submission outlines a lack of equitable service around the country, a lack of acute mental health beds for older people (as of 2020 there were only 50% of the beds recommended in *A Vision for Change*), and a lack of staffing of specialist psychiatric services leading to long wait lists and less equitable services.

Finally, this submission outlines the high prevalence of loneliness amongst older people in Ireland and the significant gap in research on mental health literacy in Ireland in understanding the needs of older people and help seeking behaviours.

ALONE recommends 10 major policy recommendations for the Government, which is outlined in further detail in the submission below.

1. **Below is a list of changes that could be made to align Irish Policy with the UNCRPD. Please select the 3 changes that you would most like to see prioritised in our submission.**

In no particular order, ALONE recommends the following **three changes** to be prioritised

Progress the Mental Health Bill 2024 into law
Deliver mental health services equitably across the country
Fund and implement existing mental health policies - <i>Sharing The Vision</i> & the National Framework for Recovery in Mental Health 2024-8

Options:

Progress the Mental Health Bill 2024 into law

Implement a 'zero restraint, zero seclusion' policy in mental health services

Deliver mental health services equitably across the country

Introduce a statutory advocacy body for mental health service users

Improve the provision of employment supports and disability allowance

Gather reliable, complete, and standardised data to monitor mental health services and delivery

Provide age-appropriate services to children rather than admitting them to adult psychiatric services

Create an independent complaints mechanism for mental health service users

Provide accessible and specialised mental health care to priority groups

Fund and implement existing mental health policies - *Sharing The Vision* & the National Framework for Recovery in Mental Health 2024-8

Provide children with educational and developmental supports at point of need

2. Based on the work done by your organisation, please share any further issues that people with mental health difficulties may face 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.

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.***

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>>

3. Please specify any policy changes that could be implemented to address the issues you listed above.

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.*