



Cumann Síceolaithe Éireann

The Psychological Society of Ireland

Pre-Budget Submission
for Budget 2025



The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), *Cumann Síceolaithe Éireann*, is the learned and professional body for psychology and psychologists in the Republic of Ireland, representing over 4,600 members. Our vision is for a society that appreciates and pursues the psychological wellbeing of individuals, communities and organisations and an engaged, diverse and well-supported psychological community.

Executive Summary

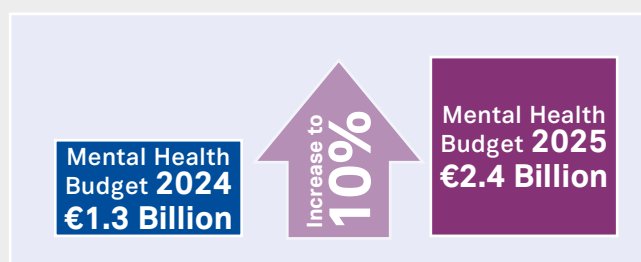
The Psychological Society of Ireland's Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2025 outlines three key proposals aimed at improving mental health services in Ireland. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), "mental health and mental illness by and large are viewed as residing outside the public health tradition with its fundamental concepts of health and illness as multi-factorial in origin and of there being a continuum between health and illness. The consequences are [...] the opportunities for improving mental health in a community are not fully exploited [and], organised efforts in countries to reduce the social and economic burden of mental illnesses tend to depend mostly on the treatment of ill individuals¹."

1. Increase the Mental Health Budget to 10% of the Health Budget

Investing in mental health is a social and economic imperative if Ireland is to have an effective and comprehensive healthcare strategy that meets the growing needs of the population. International best practice recommends this investment be 10-12% of the total health budget.

By prioritising mental health funding, with **a time-lined plan that works towards 10% investment**, the Government will be able to support services, from preventive care to advanced therapeutic interventions, to address the increasing demand for mental

health services. This investment is vital for improving access, reducing wait times, and enhancing the quality of care provided to individuals with mental health conditions, as well as potentially in the longer term, de-escalating the severity of need through well-resourced improved prevention strategies.



2. Full Implementation of Sharing the Vision National Mental Health Strategy

The Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone strategy provides a comprehensive framework for improving mental health services across Ireland, yet the recent Implementation Status Report finds that out of 100 policy recommendations, only 48 are on track and 3 are complete². We urge the Government to provide **dedicated funds and to prioritise the full implementation of the Sharing the Vision strategy**.

Full implementation of this strategy is crucial for realising its objectives, which include enhancing service quality, developing person-centered care, and integrating mental health care into broader health and social services.

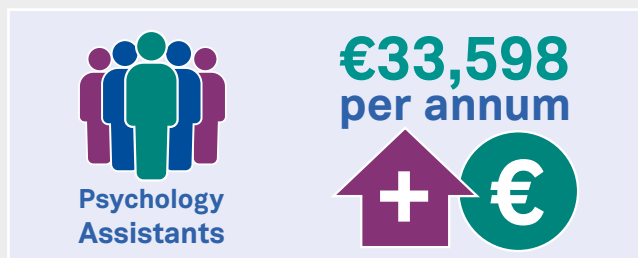
¹ WHO. (2004). Promoting mental health : concepts, emerging evidence, practice. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

² Health Service Executive (HSE) (2023, October). *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone – Policy Implementation Status Report Quarter 4, 2023*. Retrieved from www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/289379/2faab0b6-d849-4a7a-a5cb-4c14916bd87e.pdf#page=nu



By fully implementing *Sharing the Vision*, the Government will strengthen its commitment to a more inclusive health environment and ensure that all individuals have access to high-quality mental health care.

sustainability and effectiveness of mental health services. By investing in Psychology Assistants now through competitive compensation and support, the HSE is effectively nurturing its future workforce.



3. Commit to Parity Between General and Mental Health by Increasing Pay for Psychology Assistants to €33,598 Per Annum

Psychology Assistants play a pivotal role in the delivery of mental health services, providing critical support to senior psychologists and contributing significantly to patient care. However, their pay is less than other equivalent 'Assistant' roles in the Health Service Executive (HSE), namely Audiology Assistant, Occupational Therapy Assistant, Physiotherapy Assistant, Speech and Language Therapy Assistant, and Radiography Assistant³. The HSE must demonstrate its commitment to parity between general and mental health, and **investing in Psychology Assistants is a key way to show this support.**

The PSI proposes increasing the base pay for Psychology Assistants to €33,598 per annum. These individuals will gain training to eventually fill critical roles as registered psychologists under CORU, contributing to the long-term

Conclusion

The Psychological Society of Ireland urges the Government to take decisive action in the upcoming budget to advance mental health care across the nation. By increasing the mental health budget to 10% of the total health budget, the growing demand for mental health services can be better addressed, ensuring a broad spectrum of care, from prevention to advanced treatments. The full implementation of the *Sharing the Vision* strategy will enhance service quality, ensure equitable access, and integrate mental health care into broader health and social services. Finally, increasing the base pay for Psychology Assistants to €33,598 per annum will rectify existing pay disparities, build a stable and effective workforce, and ensure parity between general health and mental health in the HSE.

By prioritising these initiatives, the Government will reaffirm its commitment to a robust, equitable, and effective mental health system, ensuring the wellbeing of all citizens and the long-term sustainability of mental health services.

³ Health Service Executive (HSE) (2024). *CONSOLIDATED SALARY SCALES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FEMP ACTS, THE PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENTS AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE PAY AND PENSIONS ACT 2017*. Retrieved from <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/hr-circulars/final-1-january-2024-pay-scales-v3.pdf>.

Proposal 1

Increase the Mental Health Budget to 10% of the Health Budget

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) recommends that countries should allocate approximately 10% to 12% of their total health spending to mental health services⁴.

In Budget 2024, the total spend on health in Ireland was €22.5 billion, €1 billion less than Budget 2023. As Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly stated following the publication of Budget 2024, the Department of Health “received only one-third of what it needed in the Budget to run existing services and provide for new measures” and had a €2 billion shortfall⁵.

In Budget 2024, the total spend on mental health in Ireland was €1.3 billion⁶. This equated to approximately 5.7% of the total health budget. As per Minister Donnelly’s comments, the required total health spend should be increased at a minimum to €24.5 billion. Therefore, the actual required spend for mental health should be €2.45 billion, almost double the current allocation.

On 11 October 2023, the day after the announcement of Budget 2024, the HSE introduced a recruitment freeze. The freeze led to staffing shortages, increased workloads, and burnout among existing staff, and fundamentally compromised the quality of mental health services. The recruitment freeze is one of the key consequences of the severe lack of investment in mental health in the previous Budget.

One example of the consequences of this underspend is evident where the OECD reported that in Ireland, over 80% of working-age adults with mental distress who wanted mental health support but could not get it due to financial or wait times or transport (p. 86)⁷. The OECD Health at a Glance Report reported that Ireland has one of the highest rates (3/36 countries) of mental health illness in Europe with 18.5% of the Irish population recorded as having a mental health illness⁸.

The demand for mental health services in Ireland is well documented and reported as having risen significantly in recent years⁹, increasing awareness of mental health issues, higher prevalence rates of mental health conditions, and the impacts of socio-economic factors and global crises. Following COVID-19, it was found that approximately one person in every five in the general population in Ireland and elsewhere has significantly increased psychological distress (e.g., anxiety, depression)¹⁰. Conversely, the mental health budget has remained insufficiently funded to effectively meet the population’s needs.

Lack of parity in mental and physical health budgets results in inequitable access to mental health services – evidenced across different regions and constituencies. This is contrary to the fundamental principles of a fair healthcare system, and to the Government of Ireland’s mental health policy, *Sharing the Vision*¹¹, which emphasises the importance of adequately resourced mental health services as a cornerstone of a comprehensive mental health strategy, and that person-centred care is a policy-making priority in Ireland’s healthcare services¹².

Person-centred care is a policy-making priority in Ireland’s healthcare services¹³, and by committing to a 10% allocation of the health budget to mental health, Ireland can demonstrate leadership in addressing mental health issues and align with best practices.

Alignment with Government Priorities

The Government’s focus on economic efficiency and sustainability in healthcare is reflected in initiatives aimed at reducing long-term costs and improving value for money. Investing in a significant increase in mental health provision in Budget 2025 can lead to significant cost savings in the long term. By addressing these issues proactively, the Government can avoid higher costs associated with the rising need for mental health care in the population and increased pressure on the HSE.

⁴ OECD (2021). *A New Benchmark for Mental Health Systems: Tackling the Social and Economic Costs of Mental Ill Health*. OECD Health Policy Studies. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/a-new-benchmark-for-mental-health-systems_4ed890f6-en.html

⁵ Cullen, P. (2023, October 13). HSE freezes recruitment of junior doctors and other support staff due to a shortfall in budget funding. *The Irish Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.irishtimes.com/health/2023/10/13/hse-freezes-recruitment-of-junior-doctors-and-other-support-staff-due-to-shortfall-in-budget-funding/>.

⁶ Department of Health. (2024, May 1). *Minister for Mental Health and Older People launches HSE Digital, My Mental Health Plan*. Press Release. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/ae213-minister-for-mental-health-and-older-people-launches-hse-digital-my-mental-health-plan>.

⁷ OECD (2021). Ibid.

⁸ Mental Health Ireland. (2024). *Research - Prevalence of Mental Health Illness*. Retrieved from <https://www.mentalhealthireland.ie/research/>

⁹ MacNamee, G. (2020, April 26) Number of people accessing mental health supports dramatically increases. *The Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.thejournal.ie/simon-harris-mental-health-5084275-Apr2020/>.

¹⁰ Kelly, B. D. (2020). Impact of Covid-19 on Mental Health in Ireland: Evidence to Date. *Irish Medical Journal*, 113(10). <https://imj.ie/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Impact-of-Covid-19-on-Mental-Health-in-Ireland-Evidence-to-Date.pdf>.

¹¹ Department of Health (2020; 2024) *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone*. Retrieved from:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2e46f-sharing-the-vision-a-mental-health-policy-for-everyone/>

¹² OECD (2021). Ibid.

¹³ OECD (2021). Ibid.

Proposal 2

Full Implementation of Sharing the Vision National Mental Health Strategy

*Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone*¹⁴ (hereby referred to as *Sharing the Vision*) is Ireland's national mental health strategy, launched in 2020, which outlines a 10-year roadmap for mental health services. It aims to build on the progress made by its predecessor, *A Vision for Change*, and addresses the evolving needs of the population with a renewed focus on a person-centered, recovery-oriented, and community-based approach to mental health care.

The Quarter Four *Sharing the Vision Policy Implementation Status Report* finds that out of 100 policy recommendations, only 48 are on track, with 31 experiencing minor delivery issues, 7 having major delivery issues, 11 either paused or not started yet, and only 3 completed¹⁵.

This incomplete implementation results in persistent gaps in mental health care accessibility, continuity, and quality, adversely affecting individuals, families, and communities across Ireland. The fact that the majority of initiatives are not progressing as planned highlights lost opportunities to improve care for those who need it most. The Quarter Two Implementation Status Report found that, "there needs to be evidence of more critical use of budget and financial resources in implementing [*Sharing the Vision*]"¹⁶.

The full implementation of *Sharing the Vision* is crucial for addressing Ireland's escalating mental health crisis, which has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions. Adequate funding is essential to create an integrated mental health system that can respond effectively to these challenges.

A core objective of the strategy is to enhance community-based mental health services, providing accessible and localised care, reducing reliance on inpatient facilities, and promoting recovery within the community¹⁷. Full funding will enable the expansion of community mental health teams, the establishment of additional primary care-based mental health services, and the development of innovative models of care that prioritise early intervention and prevention.

Sharing the Vision emphasises involving service users and their families in the design and delivery of mental health services. This person-centered approach ensures services are responsive to the needs and preferences of those they serve. Full funding supports initiatives facilitating meaningful engagement and collaboration with service users and families, including establishing peer support networks and developing user-led services.

The incomplete implementation of *Sharing the Vision* undermines Ireland's commitment to its national mental health goals. Fully funding the strategy is essential to address longstanding issues within the mental health system and to promote a more integrated, person-centered approach to care. This funding will demonstrate the Government's dedication to improving mental health services and upholding its commitments to service users, families, and mental health professionals.

Alignment with Government Priorities

The Government's commitment to reducing health disparities and ensuring equitable access to healthcare is evident in various policy documents, including the *Sláintecare*¹⁸ strategy. This strategy highlights the importance of equal access to health services for every citizen. Fully implementing *Sharing the Vision* will enable equitable access and delivery of mental health care across the HSE. This aligns with the Government's priority of creating a more equitable and inclusive healthcare system.

¹⁴ Health Service Executive (HSE) (2020). *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone*. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2e46f-sharing-the-vision-a-mental-health-policy-for-everyone/>

¹⁵ Health Service Executive (HSE) (2023, October). *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone – Policy Implementation Status Report Quarter 4, 2023*. Retrieved from ts.gov.ie/289379/2faab0b6-d849-4a7a-a5cb-4c14916bd87e.pdf

¹⁶ Mulholland, P. (2023, November 19). *Sharing the Vision roll-out facing delays*. *The Medical Independent*. Retrieved from <https://www.medicalindependent.ie/in-the-news/news-features/sharing-the-vision-roll-out-facing-delays/>

¹⁷ Department of Health. (2022, March 23). *Minister for Mental Health and Older People launch Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone Implementation Plan 2022 – 2024*. Press Release. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/275c4-minister-for-mental-health-and-older-people-launch-sharing-the-vision-a-mental-health-policy-for-everyone-implementation-plan-2022-2024/>

¹⁸ Health Service Executive (HSE) (2023). *Sláintecare – our strategy for improving Ireland's healthcare system*. Retrieved from: <https://about.hse.ie/our-work/slaintecare-our-strategy-for-improving-irelands-healthcare-system/>

Proposal 3

Commit to Parity Between General and Mental Health by Increasing Pay for Psychology Assistants to €33,598 Per Annum

Psychology Assistants are integral to the mental health care delivery system, providing critical support in assessment, treatment planning, and therapeutic interventions to registered psychologists. In January 2022, the Minister of State for Mental Health and Older People recognised “Psychology Assistant” as a Permanent Grade in the HSE¹⁹.

According to the HSE *Consolidated Salary Scales*²⁰ published on 1 January 2024, the base pay for Psychology Assistant is €31,423 (p. 27). Similar positions requiring comparable qualifications, such as Audiology Assistant, Occupational Therapy Assistant, Physiotherapy Assistant, Speech and Language Therapy Assistant, and Radiography Assistant are all paid at a base pay of €33,598, a higher-level pay than Psychology Assistant.

The Department of Health must commit to the recognition of mental health as equal to general health. By aligning Psychology Assistant pay with that of comparable positions, the HSE would recognise the importance of mental health services and the need for parity in the compensation of healthcare professionals.

From December 2022 to May 2024, there was a 10.6% increase in Whole-time Equivalent (WTE) Psychologists working in the HSE, a total of 1,385²¹. Demand for psychologists in the HSE is increasing every year. Supporting Psychology Assistants adequately now ensures that they are well-prepared and motivated to continue their careers within the HSE, ultimately reducing turnover and fostering continuity of care.

Psychology Assistant is a necessary stepping stone to further education and, eventually, regulation of the profession of psychology under CORU. In order to receive a place on a doctorate programme, prospective clinical psychologists need the experience as assistants “desperately”²².

Psychology Assistants are not temporary roles within the healthcare system; they represent the future of the psychology profession. Psychology Assistants are in the early stages of their careers, gaining valuable experience and expertise that will prepare them to become full-time psychologists within the HSE.

Assistant Psychologists play a crucial role in the delivery of mental health services, providing essential support to qualified psychologists and contributing significantly to patient care. Despite requiring comparable qualifications and competencies, Assistant Psychologists are remunerated at a lower rate than their counterparts in other allied health professions – ones that do not focus on mental health care.

By investing in Psychology Assistants now through competitive compensation and support, the HSE is effectively nurturing its future workforce. These individuals will eventually fill critical roles as registered psychologists, contributing to the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of mental health services.

Increasing the base pay for Psychology Assistants in the HSE is crucial for enhancing the overall quality of mental health services and ensuring parity between general and mental health. By aligning the base pay of Assistant Psychologists with that of comparable positions, the Government would demonstrate a commitment to fair compensation and the recognition of the vital role that mental health professionals play in the healthcare system.

Alignment with Government Priorities

The *HSE National Service Plan 2024*²³ emphasises the critical importance of developing a skilled and sustainable healthcare workforce. The Plan outlines several initiatives to address workforce shortages and improve staff retention. Increasing base pay for Psychology Assistants is essential to achieving these objectives. This aligns with the Plan's focus on ensuring that the healthcare workforce is equipped to meet current and future demands, ultimately improving service delivery and patient care.

¹⁹ Department of Health. (2022, January 11). *Minister for Health and Minister for Mental Health and Older People confirm the permanent establishment of the Psychology Assistant Grade*. Press Release. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/8b657-minister-for-health-and-minister-for-mental-health-and-older-people-confirm-the-permanent-establishment-of-the-psychology-assistant-grade/>

²⁰ Health Service Executive (HSE) (2024). *CONSOLIDATED SALARY SCALES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE FEMP ACTS, THE PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENTS AND THE PUBLIC SERVICE PAY AND PENSIONS ACT 2017*. Retrieved from <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/hr-circulars/final-1-january-2024-pay-scales-v3.pdf>.

²¹ Health Service Executive (HSE) (2024). *Health Sector Employment Report MAY 2024*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/our-workforce/workforce-reporting/health-services-employment-report-may-2024.pdf>

²² Boland, L. (2023, December 3). Assistant psychologist hopefuls 'left in the dark' by HSE recruitment freeze. *The Journal*. Retrieved from: <https://www.thejournal.ie/hse-hiring-freeze-assistant-psychologists-6233891-Dec2023/>

²³ Health Service Executive (HSE) (2024). *HSE National Service Plan 2024*. Retrieved from: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/Services/publications/Serviceplans/hse-national-service-plan-2024.pdf>



Proposal 1

Increase the Mental Health Budget to 10% of the Health Budget

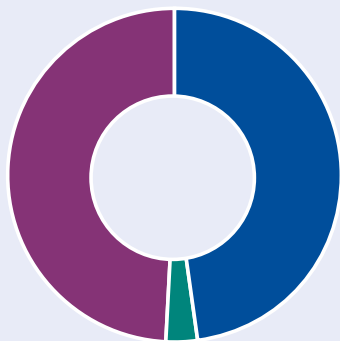
Mental Health
Budget 2024
€1.3 Billion



Mental Health
Budget 2025
€2.4 Billion

Proposal 2

Full Implementation of Sharing the Vision National Mental Health Strategy



100 policy
recommendations

48 on track

3 complete

51 need implementation

Proposal 3

Commit to Parity Between General and Mental Health by Increasing Pay for Psychology Assistants to €33,598 Per Annum



Psychology
Assistants

€33,598
per annum





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The Psychological Society of Ireland
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