Manifesto for the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly election

‘No health without mental health’
One in four voters, at some point in their life, will be affected by a mental health problem. Add to this the fact that the legacy of the Troubles has had a significant impact on the mental health of our population.

We therefore call on you to:

- **appoint a Champion for Mental Health**, tasked with developing modern and safe mental health services that promote positive mental health.
- **insist on respect and dignity** of people with mental illness and learning disability by bringing the process of **mental capacity legislative reform** to a comprehensive conclusion.
- **fund the physical health needs** of people with mental illness and learning disability.
- **ensure that all our citizens who are vulnerable to severe mental illness, and their carers, are offered ongoing multidisciplinary evidence-based care**.
- **introduce a minimum price for alcohol** of 50p per unit.

And we commend to you Sir Liam Donaldson’s vision that:

‘[Our] leaders... should be clear in their ambition... of making Northern Ireland a world leader in the quality and safety of its care. Northern Ireland is the right place for such a transformation, and now is the right time.’

The Donaldson report, 2014

**Mental Health Champion**

It is estimated that the prevalence of mental health problems in Northern Ireland is 25% higher than in England and we also have the highest general population suicide rate within the UK. Over 213,000 people in Northern Ireland are believed to be experiencing significant mental health problems as a result of the Troubles and this also has an impact on their families. Access to emergency treatment and effective long-term treatments for our citizens with mental illness is currently at pressure point. These shocking facts reflect real human suffering. Priorities should lie in strengthening our community’s infrastructure, improving access to the well-established evidence-based treatments and promoting recovery. Resilience must be embedded as a fundamental principle in our society. It is imperative that mental illness is given a specific political focus. A **Mental Health Champion** (following precedents in Scotland and Ireland) should be tasked with developing a fit-for-purpose, comprehensive mental health service across Northern Ireland, building on the successes of mental health initiatives of recent years. There is a stark need for this commitment in the next Programme for Government – the Bamford and Donaldson visions must happen.
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Dignity and mental capacity legislation

We commend the Northern Ireland Assembly for supporting the innovative rights-based mental capacity legislation which respects the dignity of all citizens with mental illness and learning disability. Clear, unambiguous guidelines in the Code of Practice, along with comprehensive training, support and adequate resources are essential if the Bill is to succeed in its worthy aims. The next Programme for Government must incorporate this.

Commissioning physical healthcare

It is a scandal that people with serious mental illness have a 15- to 20-year shorter lifespan because of potentially preventable and treatable illness such as cardiac disease, stroke and cancer. Mental health services need to be resourced to monitor these risk factors and to facilitate appropriate intervention. Our citizens with a mental illness deserve the same level of physical well-being as those without. This scandal must be eliminated by making funding available to mental health services to address these unmet physical health needs. We urgently appeal for this commitment to be embedded in the next Programme for Government.

Severe and enduring mental illness

The needs of a small group of patients with severe and enduring mental illness cannot be met by standard services – they require longer treatment and intensive intervention to enable recovery. Early intervention services will help prevent their illness becoming so severe. Rehabilitation is the specialist service which can meet their particular needs but it is underdeveloped and not included in the mental health strategy. Prioritising these rehabilitation services will enable us to end institutional care and address the right of patients with severe and enduring mental illness to access opportunities to recover and lead meaningful lives. Will you help us end institutional care once and for all in Northern Ireland, as Bamford envisaged in 2005, by ensuring that both early intervention and rehabilitation for severe and enduring mental illness are included in the next Programme for Government?
Alcohol

Alcohol misuse costs Northern Ireland around £900 million a year⁶ (health, policing and justice spending) and is involved in at least 50% of suicide and self-harm.⁸ The ready availability of cheap alcohol products is a core problem. A minimum 50p unit price would reduce their use, which would lead to fewer hospital admissions, annual savings to the local budget and saved lives, with only negligible impact on those who drink in moderation. This must be retained as a priority in the next Programme for Government.

References


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