

Pre-Draft Submission from Mental Health Reform on Clare County Development Plan 2022 – 2028: Making Mental Health a priority in Clare



Information on Mental Health Reform

Mental Health Reform is the leading national coalition on mental health in Ireland. We have over 70 member organisations, representing a broad range of interests, like housing, disability, children’s rights, human rights, ethnic minorities and many others. Mental Health Reform provides a unified voice campaigning to drive progressive reform of mental health services and supports in Ireland. Since 2019, Mental Health Reform have a Community Development Officer based in CHO Area 3 covering Tipperary, Limerick and Clare. This submission is based on the feedback and ongoing consultation we have with our members in Clare.

We have an opportunity moment in Clare as we enter the first stages of the Development Plan now in September 2020. We must look to rebuilding Clare after COVID-19 and placing the health of citizens at the core of County policy. The pandemic, with its resultant lockdowns and isolation, is having a huge impact not only on the economy of the region, but on the mental health and wellbeing of Clare people. There was a mental health crisis in the Mid-West before COVID-19, it is imperative that we make addressing the health and wellbeing of people in Clare a core priority of the Development Plan.

The Clare Development Plan Pre-Draft highlights Social, Community and Cultural Development as central themes. Good mental health is associated with higher life satisfaction and better health outcomes. Indeed, “Healthy Clare Strategic Plan 2019-20201” highlights positive mental health and wellbeing as a core principle for a healthy Clare. Under this strategy, “strengthened information systems, evidence and research”, has been set down as one of the key goals.

In order to obtain a balanced view of positive mental health, we need a comprehensive measure of well-being. By measuring the well-being of Clare citizens, we can explore opportunities to embed a mental-health approach to policy and practice. We need to start measuring Clare’s progress, not just by economic factors, but by how our lives are improving, not just by our standard of living, but by our quality of life. Developing a robust set of wellbeing indicators will provide a

framework from which policy decisions can be assessed in terms of how they will impact people's quality of life. By measuring well-being, it will help us plan the resources we need to sustain positive mental health into the future. Better policies for better lives should be the ultimate goal of policymaking.

The importance of well-being is increasingly being recognised by local governments, several of which have designed well-being frameworks. Some OECD governments have also started to develop tools for integrating people's well-being into their strategic objectives and agenda setting, policy analysis and budgetary processes. For well-being measures to start making a real difference to people's lives, they have to be explicitly brought into the policy-making process. An OECD wellness report, published in March of this year, shows that one of the biggest issues is the lack of connection with people, community, and local government. Clare Council have an opportunity to change this by ensuring well-being is measured and that mental health is explicitly stated and central to the County Development Plan.

This submission was prepared by Elisa O'Donovan, Community development Worker CHO Area 3, Mental Health Reform.

