



**mhc**  
coimisiún meabhair - shláinte  
mental health commission



# Mental Health Commission

Supporting Change  
Strategic Plan 2023-2027





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# Foreword from the Chairperson and Chief Executive

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**Welcome to the Mental Health Commission’s Strategy - “Supporting Change” - for 2023-2027<sup>1</sup>. This is the seventh Strategy for the Mental Health Commission (MHC) since our establishment in 2002. This Strategy builds on the significant work undertaken by the MHC since the full commencement of our functions in 2006. It charts an ambitious course for the next five years to realise our vision of an Ireland with equity of access to person-centred mental health services and decision support services that deliver high-quality care and support.**

As part of developing this Strategy, we reviewed our mission to ensure that we focus our resources on promoting and vindicating the human rights of people who use mental health services and people who may need support with decision making. The priorities set out in this Strategy enhance our core objective to drive standards, improve quality and safeguard persons by working with all stakeholders.

Over the next five years, on behalf of the Irish State, we will operationalise a best-in-class Decision Support Service. This will maximise autonomy for all persons requiring support to make decisions about their personal welfare, property and financial affairs. We will also monitor and supervise individuals who are providing these supports. This strategy is also aligned to and supports the roll out of “Sharing the Vision”, Ireland’s Mental Health Strategy. We will work with the Government, the people using the services, clinicians and service providers to strengthen the standards, quality and regulatory infrastructure, which protect human rights and continually improve service quality.

To implement these important priorities, the MHC will further develop our corporate functions to ensure that we are an effective, cohesive, transparently governed and agile organisation. Key to this is a strong corporate spine providing shared services and a modern ICT infrastructure to support person-centred delivery whilst seeking to reduce red tape and regulatory burden.

We would like to sincerely thank our stakeholders who engaged in our strategy development process, in particular professionals and people using services and their representatives, whose valuable contributions cannot be overstated. We look forward to working closely with the Department of Health, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, other State agencies, service providers and people using services, as we deliver on our new strategic priorities.

**Dr John Hillery | Chairperson**  
**Mr John Farrelly | Chief Executive**

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<sup>1</sup> In the Strategy when it refers to ‘the Board’ this is a reference to the Board of the Commission. All references to MHC are to the organisation.



# Who We Are

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The MHC is an independent statutory body established under the provisions of the Mental Health Acts 2001-2018 (2001 Act). The remit of the MHC was extended by the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (as amended) (2015 Act).

The operative provisions of the 2001 Act came into effect on 1 November 2006 and it is expected that there will be further legislative changes in the next few years. The operative provisions of the 2015 Act shall come to come into effect in April 2023.

This is the Board of the Commission's (the Board) seventh Strategic Plan and the priorities set out in the Plan cover the period 2023-2027.

## Our Mandate

The MHC's principal functions are as set out below.

- Mental Health Acts 2001-2018:
  - Registration of approved centres;
  - Regulation of approved centres (monitoring and enforcement);
  - Inspection of all mental health facilities;
  - The establishment and operation of mental health tribunals for those involuntarily detained in approved centres; and
  - The development of standards for mental health services.
- Under the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 (as amended):
  - Promote public awareness and confidence in the 2015 Act and provide information to persons who require or may shortly require assistance in exercising their capacity and decision supports;
  - Provide information and guidance to organisations and bodies about their interaction with persons who require or may shortly require assistance in exercising their capacity and decision supports;
  - Register decision support arrangements and supervise the actions of decision supporters to include receiving and investigating complaints;
  - Establish and maintain panels of suitable persons to assist in the delivery of statutory functions; and
  - Act as the Central Authority for matters relating to the Hague Convention on the International Protection of Adults.

Upholding human rights in relation to mental health services and people who may need support with decision-making for the people of Ireland is the foundation for the fulfilment of our mandate.

## Who We Are Continued

### Our Vision

Equity of access to person-centred mental health services and decision support services that deliver high-quality care and support.

### Our Mission

Promotion and vindication of human rights in relation to mental health services and decision support services.

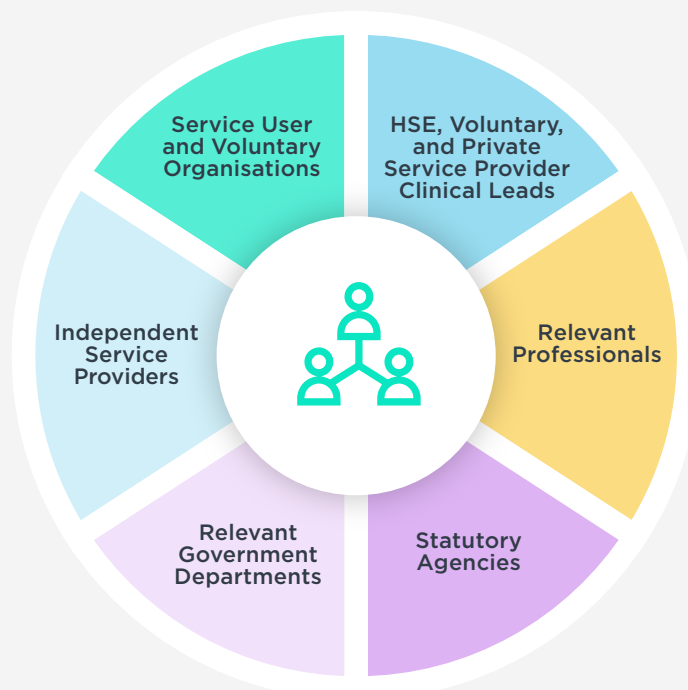
### Strategy Development Process

The Strategy was developed collaboratively with all our stakeholders by undertaking the following core activities. These are outlined in more detail in Appendix 1.



### Our Stakeholders

The work of the MHC benefits from the engagement, support and input of many valued stakeholders. A summary of stakeholders that participated in the strategy development process is illustrated here with a complete list in Appendix 2.





## Values

The MHC is guided by the following core values, centred around the value of person-centred support and care.



# Strategic Priorities

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This Strategy has five key Strategic Priorities. Each Priority sets out key Actions through which the Strategic Priority will be delivered by 2027.



## Strategic Priority 1:

Continue to be a leading voice in relation to mental health services and assisted decision-making.



## Strategic Priority 2:

Effective and accessible communication and engagement, emphasising and promoting the voice of the person.



## Strategic Priority 3:

Continue to drive standards, improve quality and safeguard persons in relation to mental health services that are regulated by the MHC.



## Strategic Priority 4:

Promote and support assisted decision-making in society by embedding the Decision Support Service as a respected public service.



## Strategic Priority 5:

Be an effective, cohesive, transparently governed and agile organisation acting in the public interest.

For the purpose of structuring the Strategy, each of the five Strategic Priorities in this Strategy is accompanied by distinct Actions that will allow us to measure our progress and evaluate whether we have been successful in delivering this Strategy in 2027. Furthermore, we consider each of the

Strategic Priorities and accompanying Actions to be intrinsically connected, with interdependencies and synergies such that delivery of some of the Actions may progress more than one Strategic Priority and support the MHC in delivering other Actions effectively.





## Strategic Priority 1

**Continue to be a leading voice in relation to mental health services and assisted decision-making.**

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### Actions

- 1.1 Provide independent evidenced-based thinking.
  - 1.2 Provide data-driven insight to influence the progression of policy and service development.
  - 1.3 Implement the MHC's legislative mandates and pursue appropriate changes to the Mental Health Acts, the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act and other relevant national and international human rights instruments.
  - 1.4 Develop standards and guidance in relation to the wider determinants and issues relating to mental health and assisted decision making.
  - 1.5 Continue to position the MHC as a thought leader and a key influencer in the development of policy and practice in the areas we regulate.
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### Anticipated Outcomes

The MHC is recognised as a leading voice related to mental health services and assisted decision-making.

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### We will know that we have been successful in 2027 by having:

- 1.1 Ensured a rights-based approach to service provision.
- 1.2 Provided stakeholders, especially people using services, with the means to express their views and to provide the MHC with valuable input and feedback.
- 1.3 Broadened our role to include community mental health services<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.4 Developed and published standards, guidance and data-driven insights.
- 1.5 Took action and reported where we found the rights of people who use services were being infringed upon or threatened.

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<sup>2</sup> The MHC's expectation is that "community mental health services" shall include specialist mental health services.

## Strategic Priorities Continued

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### **Strategic Priority 2**

**Effective and accessible communication and engagement, emphasising and promoting the voice of the person.**

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#### **Actions**

- 1.1 Identify and target gaps in public, person and service provider awareness with bespoke and accessible communication initiatives.
  - 1.2 Deliver national awareness campaigns to inform the population about the remit of the MHC including the promotion of the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act.
  - 1.3 Meet and speak with persons using the services and professionals during the course of work and include their opinions and experiences when designing programmes and informing national policy.
  - 1.4 Work with partner organisations to develop and implement a National Care Experience Programme<sup>3</sup> to achieve measurable improvements for people using our mental health system.
  - 1.5 Communicate widely our experience and learnings from the regulation of mental health and assisted decision-making services.
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#### **Anticipated Outcomes**

Our approach to regulating Irish mental health services and regulating and providing decision support services will be informed through clear communication and by engaging with stakeholders.

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#### **We will know that we have been successful in 2027 by having:**

- 1.1 Evidence of continuous improvement in stakeholder satisfaction with their level and quality of engagement with the MHC.
- 1.2 Evidence that the voice of the person has been recognised and promoted.
- 1.3 Included the experiences of people who use mental health and assisted decision-making services in our documents and reports.
- 1.4 Increased our engagement with persons using the services across all of our work programmes.
- 1.5 Measured people's experiences of mental health services through the National Care Experience Programme.

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<sup>3</sup> The National Care Experience Programme is a joint initiative from the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Department of Health, to ask people about their experiences of care in order to improve the quality of health and social care services in Ireland.



## **Strategic Priority 3**

**Continue to drive standards, improve quality and safeguard persons in relation to mental health services that are regulated by the MHC.**

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### **Actions**

- 1.1 Set evidence-based standards for high quality and good practice and develop guidance to improve service delivery and person experience.
- 1.2 Provide an inspectorate that is independent, professional and transparent in its functions.
- 1.3 Foster an environment of continuous improvement of approved inpatient mental health centres by way of independent regulation.
- 1.4 Advocate for the role of the MHC as a regulator to be broadened into community mental health services.
- 1.5 Administer independent, fair, efficient and effective mental health tribunals, which vindicate the rights of affected persons.

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### **Anticipated Outcomes**

Services strive for high standards and are focussed on achieving high quality and are not limited to achieving compliance with regulations.

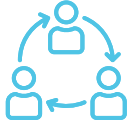
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### **We will know that we have been successful in 2027 by having:**

- 1.1 Identified and communicated key areas for action and improvement to relevant government departments, the Oireachtas and the wider public.
- 1.2 Developed and presented papers/reports based on our evidence and supported by international experience across the MHC's areas of expertise.
- 1.3 Evidence of an improvement in the quality of the services regulated by the MHC.
- 1.4 Established effective working relationships with stakeholders, including professional service providers and advocacy groups, to monitor and review issues relating to the safeguarding of persons.
- 1.5 Supported the Department of Health in the expansion of the regulatory function of the MHC into community mental health services.

## Strategic Priorities Continued

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### **Strategic Priority 4**

**Promote and support assisted decision-making in society by embedding the Decision Support Service as a respected public service.**

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#### **Actions**

- 1.1 Establish and maintain the Decision Support Service as a division of the MHC, delivering its full range of statutory functions to the public.
  - 1.2 Uphold and protect the rights of people who may need support with decision-making about their personal welfare, property and affairs.
  - 1.3 Provide information, guidance and accessible resources to support individuals and relevant organisations and bodies.
  - 1.4 Promote public awareness and confidence in the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act and the support framework.
  - 1.5 Consult with users of services and experts by experience to ensure that information is reaching those who require it.
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#### **Anticipated Outcomes**

The Decision Support Service is fully operationalised and widely known by the general population.

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#### **We will know that we have been successful in 2027 by having:**

- 1.1 Improved awareness of assisted decision-making among the general population.
- 1.2 Successfully managed change resulting from new legislation or policy development impacting on our remit.
- 1.3 Maintained capacity to respond appropriately to unexpected issues that will have arisen and required interventions from the MHC.
- 1.4 Increased and consolidated our capability to manage and learn from the data that we generate in order to promote continuous improvement in our service.
- 1.5 Developed productive relationships, based on openness and transparency, with all relevant organisations and bodies to advance delivery of our statutory functions.



## Strategic Priority 5

**Be an effective, cohesive, transparently governed and agile organisation acting in the public interest.**

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### Actions

- 1.1 Advocate for sufficient resources to enable the MHC to have the required support and services for our staff, stakeholders and persons using the services, in response to any changes to its remit arising from legislative or changes to policy.
- 1.2 Remain responsive to relevant issues and challenges in the mental health and assisted decision making environment.
- 1.3 Expand and consolidate the capacity to conduct and use data, evidence and knowledge generation both internally and across the sectors we regulate.
- 1.4 Demonstrate accessibility and inclusivity as an organisation that is reflective and responsive to the evolving needs of the Irish population.
- 1.5 Regularly review our governance and operational structures to ensure ongoing fitness-for-purpose to deliver on our legislative mandates and be responsive to the voice of stakeholders.

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### Anticipated Outcomes

The MHC has the resources and governance structures it needs to be an effective, cohesive, well-governed and agile organisation.

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### We will know that we have been successful in 2027 by having:

- 1.1 Ensured that standards in accessibility and inclusivity, in all our activities, are met and regularly reviewed by the MHC.
- 1.2 Independently evaluated the delivery of value for money in relation to funds received from the Government.
- 1.3 Secured the required capability to manage our data and promote knowledge generation across the MHC.
- 1.4 Conducted periodic reviews of the Board's Governance arrangements and the organisation's operational structures.
- 1.5 Ensured that the voice of persons is represented and heard at all levels of the organisation including the Board.

# Strategic Priorities Continued

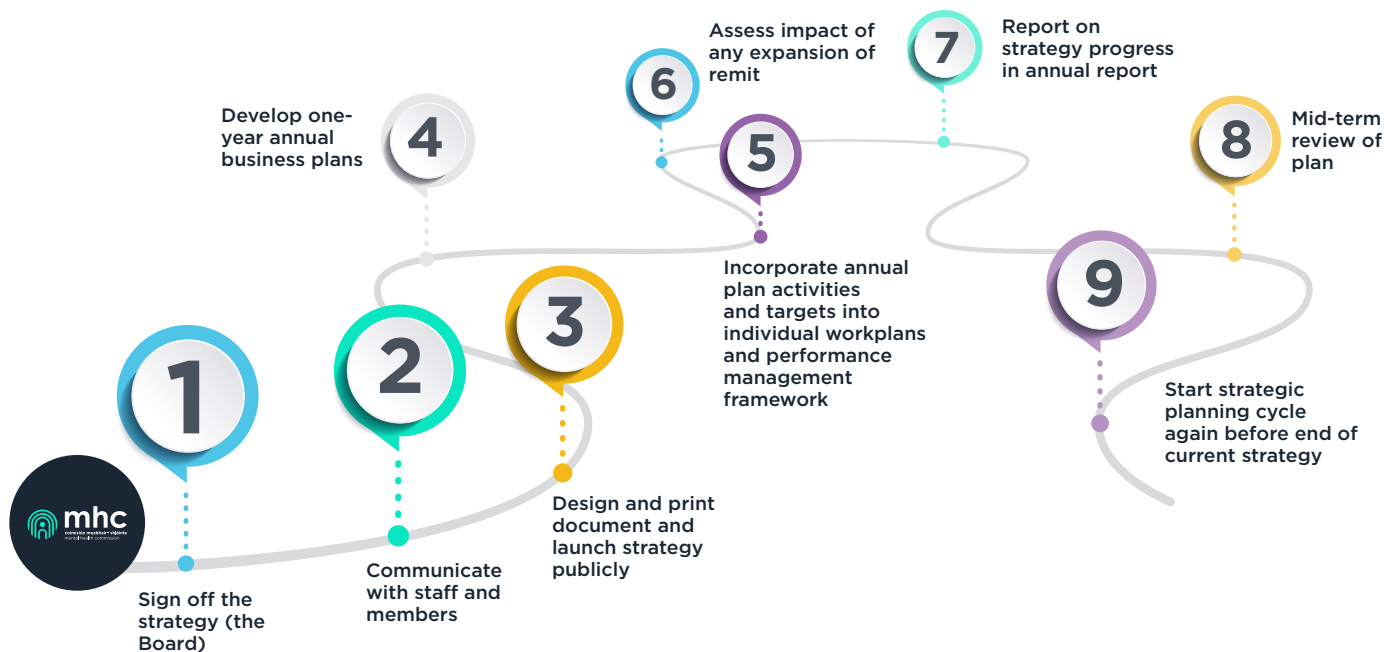
## Our Commitment to Implementing this Strategy

This Strategy charts an ambitious course for the MHC, setting Strategic Priorities and Actions, which will be challenging and rewarding. Implementation of the “Supporting Change” Strategy 2023-2027 is a shared responsibility between the Board, the Chief Executive (CE), the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and all staff in the organisation. The Board’s role is to set the strategy and monitor its implementation through reports from the CE and the SLT. The Strategy, combined with the annual business plans, will form the roadmap for the organisation for the next five years, documenting the detail of how the MHC will deliver all the Strategic Priorities.

In setting out the Strategic Priorities, the Board has determined the key Actions that are required to achieve the Priorities and what we consider to be our key success criteria. These Actions will be clearly aligned to those in the annual business plans over the course of the Strategy. Each Business Plan will have well-defined and measurable key performance indicators (KPIs) designed to help us achieve the Strategic Priorities.

## Implementation Process

The roadmap to implementation is illustrated below.





# Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

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Under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014, every public body is required to set out in its Strategic Plan an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to its functions and purpose, and the actions it is taking, or proposes to take, to address those issues. All public bodies have an obligation to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and promote the human rights of the public and their staff.

The promotion, championing, and vindication of the human rights of people who use mental health services and decision support services are the foundation of the MHC's work. We ensure the promotion and protection of human rights by fulfilling our statutory obligations. These activities are reported on regularly, with data-informed leadership ensuring that we continue to set, meet and improve standards across all aspects of our statutory mandates.

## Vision, Mission and Values

Our vision and mission statements as adopted in this Strategic Plan have human rights at the centre of our activities and this will govern how we work and how we oversee our activities over the course of the next five years. The value of "Human Rights" is restated as a guiding principle which will underpin our work over the course of this Strategic Plan. We believe in person-centred support; empowering individuals and their supporters to be co-creators in their care, recovery and decision-making, rather than receivers of, or passive participants in, their care and support.

## Strategic Priorities

As an independent state body, the MHC is committed to being a leading voice in relation to mental health services and assisted decision making in the public domain. We can most effectively champion the continuous improvement in mental health and decision support services by being vocal and visible in setting standards and providing guidance to all providers – supported by data and expert insight. Effective and accessible communications are essential. We recognise that it will be particularly important in this strategic period to inform the public on the legislative and regulatory changes associated with the full implementation of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act.

Driving standards and ensuring the continual improvement of quality in mental health services underpin our daily work, informed and guided by human rights' principles. Our work in this area will be evidence-based, with standards and quality guidance set by experts and will be championed and enforced by an independent and professional inspectorate of mental health services. Mental Health Tribunals will be independent, fair, efficient and effective in vindicating the rights of persons affected. The Decision Support Service will be embedded as a respected and trusted public service over the course of this strategy, responsible for marking a paradigm shift in upholding and protecting human rights in relation to assisted decision making.

## Oversight, Governance and Internal Practices

This Strategic Plan sets out how we will work as an effective, cohesive, transparently governed and agile organisation. We will aim to be at the cutting edge in ensuring accessibility and inclusivity in our communications and service provision.

Our governance structures will be regularly reviewed and supported appropriately to ensure that we provide a professional and fit-for-purpose public service, which delivers on our legislative mandates while inspiring trust and the confidence of the public. We have identified a need to review our working structures, resourcing and staff support model to ensure that the MHC is a safe, inclusive and supportive place to work which is free from discrimination.

We will report on Actions taken and progress made on each of these points in our Annual Reports, commencing with the 2023 publication.

At its meeting in February 2023, the Board approved this Strategy and the Chief Executive delegated to the Chief Operations Officer, supported by the General Counsel, to take leading responsibility for ensuring that our public service equality and human rights commitments under the 2014 Act are fulfilled.

# Appendix 1: Strategy Development Process

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The MHC engaged the consultancy support of Crowe Ireland to develop an inclusive, informed and evidence-directed Strategy covering the period 2023–2027.

The Strategy was developed by undertaking the following core activities:

- Evaluating the current MHC Strategy 2019–2022
- Analysis of the strategic and operational context for the MHC
- Stakeholder consultation and engagement
- Mission, Vision and Values Workshops
- Development of a strategy document including analysis of strategic goals and priorities.

## Evaluating the Current MHC Strategy 2019–2022

The Board and the Senior Leadership Team reviewed the previous Strategic Plan 2019–2022 as part of their preparation to develop a new strategy. They identified key learnings arising from implementing the strategic plans through the annual business planning process. These lessons went on to inform discussions for the new strategy.

## Analysis of the Strategic and Operational Context for the MHC

As part of the strategy development process, it was important to consider the wider operating environment of the MHC and identify the external influencers and drivers which impact on the capacity of the organisation to develop and implement a robust strategy. This includes consideration of activities under both the Mental Health Acts 2001–2018, the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 and the expanding remit for the MHC.

A number of contextual areas were considered in developing the current strategy, while benchmarking with best practice. Some of these include:

- Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone – Ireland’s national mental health policy published in 2020, the successor to “A Vision for Change”, which was launched in 2006.
- Sláintecare: The Sláintecare Action Plan 2022 sets out the ongoing reform priorities aligned with the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2021–2023.
- The establishment of the Decision Support Service within the MHC, which will be fully realised during the lifecycle of this strategy.
- Wider impact and public sector context: Public sector drivers such as Making Innovation Real (outlining the Government’s ambitions and commitment to grow innovation across Ireland’s public sector) and People Strategy 2020–2023.
- Increased level of awareness of the public, and changing expectations of professionals, in relation to mental healthcare service provision.

The MHC continuously benchmarks itself against mental health regulators and supporting decision-making frameworks in other jurisdictions including England and Wales, Scotland, Canada and New Zealand. Primary research is regularly undertaken by the MHC, to ensure practice is continuously evolving in line with best practice and the needs of our stakeholders.

The MHC and its Board are committed to working with legislators to ensure that human rights principles are upheld, and that their practices are aligned to international best practice.





## Stakeholder Consultation and Workshops

Listening to all stakeholder voices has been of critical importance to the strategy development process, ensuring that all perspectives are sought. This includes the voices of persons using the services and front-line staff delivering essential services.

Stakeholder engagement involved a large volume of both one-to-one and group meetings and multi-strand survey processes. A list of external stakeholders was developed, and a schedule of participation was established, including:

- One-to-one and group meetings with key stakeholders across the HSE, independent service providers, relevant professionals and person and voluntary organisations;
- Over 1,300 participants engaging with one of four individual surveys with:
  - Mental Health Tribunal and Assisted Decision-Making Panel Members
  - External stakeholders
  - Staff of the MHC
  - The Public
- One-to-one meetings with the Board and Senior Leadership Team; and
- Group Meetings with staff across each of the MHC's operational divisions.

Stakeholder engagement summary reports were developed, capturing and synthesising key insights across quantitative and qualitative data gathered during this engagement. These included a summary of findings across engagement, and an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the implementation of the MHC's mission as viewed by stakeholders. The core themes provided the foundation of outcomes-focused workshops with the Board and Senior Leadership Team.

Great care was taken to ensure that stakeholder feedback directly influenced the development of the strategy, particularly evident in the finalisation of the Strategic Priorities and Values, which strongly correspond with the emergent priorities of this engagement.

## Appendix 2: External Stakeholders

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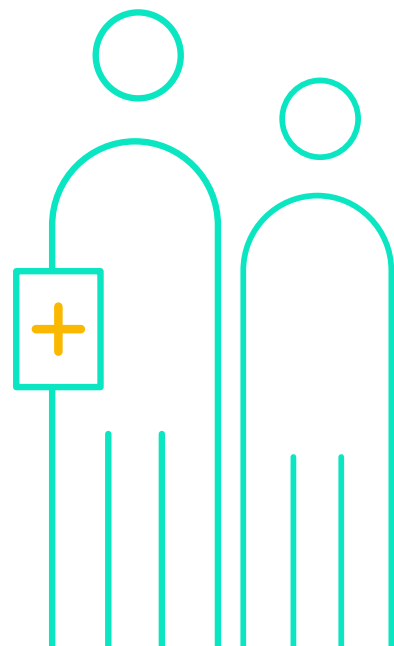
This appendix provides a broad representation of the diverse stakeholder backgrounds that participated in the engagement process through direct meetings or survey participation, based on details obtained predominantly in written submissions. We are grateful to all stakeholders for taking time to participate and shape the future strategy of the MHC, with over 1,300 contributions made through various formats of stakeholder engagement throughout the strategy development process.

Stakeholders are listed in alphabetical order and presented as submitted including, but not limited to, the following:

- Alliance of Healthcare Assistants in Ireland
- An Garda Síochána
- Ardu SMT
- Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland (AOTI)
- Ballina Training Centre
- Cairde
- Carlow PPN
- Cheeverstown House
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- College of Psychiatrists of Ireland
- Cork Parkinson's Association
- Critical Voices Network Ireland
- DCA Warriors
- Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY)
- Department of Health
- Disability Federation of Ireland
- Down Syndrome Ireland
- Dublin 15 mental health forum
- Exchange House Ireland National Traveller Service
- Family Carers Ireland
- Focus Ireland
- Getting There
- GROW
- Health Information and Quality Authority
- Health Service Executive (HSE)
- Inclusion Ireland
- Independent Living Movement
- Irish College of General Practitioners
- Irish Hospice Foundation
- Irish Hospital Consultants Association (IHCA)
- Jigsaw
- Law Society of Ireland
- Legal Services Regulatory Authority
- Limerick Mental Health Association
- Mental Health Ireland
- Mental Health Reform
- Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI)
- Moy Innovations CLG
- National Disability Authority
- National Office for Suicide Prevention
- National Platform of Self Advocates
- Neurological Alliance of Ireland (to include but not limited to Epilepsy Ireland, Alzheimer Association of Ireland, Huntington's Disease Association of Ireland, Cheshire Ireland, Acquired Brain Injury Ireland)
- Nursing Homes Ireland



- 
- Ombudsman for Children
  - One in Four Ireland
  - Patient Advocacy Service
  - Peer Advocacy Ireland
  - Prader Willi Syndrome Association Ireland (PWSAI)
  - Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council
  - Psychiatric Nurses Association
  - Safeguarding Ireland
  - Shine
  - SilverCloud Health
  - SpunOut.ie
  - St John of God Services
  - St Patrick's Mental Health Services
  - The Anne Sullivan Foundation
  - The Bar of Ireland
  - The Courts Service of Ireland
  - The Office of the Wards of Court Office
  - Trinity College Dublin
  - Tusla
  - Youth Advocate Programmes (YAP) Ireland





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