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College of Psychiatrists of Ireland warns of 'perilous' resourcing for eating disorders

- **Calls for full implementation of HSE's proposed model of care from 2018**
- **There are only three HSE adult eating disorder inpatient beds in the entire country, with no access to specialist treatment in some areas**
- **'It is now over six years since the HSE published its proposed model of care for eating disorders, but it has fallen short of its targets, leaving patients and their families suffering'**

Thursday December 12, 2024. The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland has warned that resourcing for eating disorders in Ireland is in a "perilous state" and has called for the immediate and full implementation of a model of care for eating disorders developed by the HSE six years ago.

Eating disorders, including Anorexia Nervosa, Bulimia Nervosa, and Binge Eating Disorder, affect people across all demographics. Data from 2016 estimates that almost 200,000 people in Ireland will develop an eating disorder during their lifetime. This figure has certainly risen given our increasing population and evidence suggesting rates and severity of disorders have also grown. According to the Health Research Board, 25% of under-18 admissions to Irish hospitals in 2023 were for eating disorders.

The HSE model of care for eating disorders, published in 2018, envisaged the formation of 16 specialist teams, 23 specialist adult inpatient beds, and eight inpatient beds for children and adolescents.

The College said that there are currently only three adult eating disorder inpatient beds in the entire country, with none provided since 2018. Many people have no access to specialist treatment depending on where they live and may be forced to travel abroad for treatment. While new specialist teams have been created, these have often been understaffed, under-resourced and underfunded.

The College is calling for:

- Full implementation of the HSE model of care for eating disorders, including the funding and recruitment of teams in areas with no current service, and provision of day program services throughout the country.
- Review and implement a national strategy for inpatient care for adults, identifying plausible sites for developing these services.
- Reversal of the restrictive hiring practices which stifle the ability of mental health services to recruit essential staff.

Speaking today, **Dr Art Malone, co-Chair of the Eating Disorder Special Interest Group of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland**, said: "The consequences of untreated eating disorders can be devastating, leading to severe physical and psychological health issues which can be life-threatening, as well as significantly damaging to social and occupational wellbeing. It is now over six years since the HSE published its proposed model of care for eating disorders but it has fallen

short of its targets, leaving patients and their families suffering. We note that outgoing Minister for Mental Health Mary Butler has ordered a review into the model of care, a process which must be completed with haste as resourcing of eating disorders in Ireland is now in a perilous state. It is of critical importance that our proposed national strategy is implemented in full, with the requisite funding and resourcing provided."

Editors' note:

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland is the professional and training body for psychiatrists in Ireland and represents 1,300 professional psychiatrists (both specialists and trainees) across the country. To become a specialist (consultant) psychiatrist, a candidate requires six years of medical school study, as well as a minimum of seven years of specialist training with the College.

ENDS

Issued on behalf of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland by Gordon MRM

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