Joint Statement

College of Psychiatrists of Ireland
Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy
Psychological Society of Ireland

Healthcare bodies demand immediate ban on AI 'therapy'

- **'We cannot allow a regulatory framework built for yesterday's technology to govern tomorrow's mental health'**
- **Legislation urgently needed to protect all in Ireland**
- **AI 'therapy' has already been noted in several high-profile tragedies involving suicide**

Thursday March 26, 2026. Three Irish healthcare bodies, together representing 14,300 mental health professionals, have today (Thursday) called for a ban on artificial intelligence (AI) 'therapy'.

The **College of Psychiatrists of Ireland**, together with the **Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy,** and the **Psychological Society of Ireland**, said that 'therapy' as prescribed through AI could never be viewed as an adequate substitute for a human therapist.

They added that legislation was "urgently needed to protect all in Ireland" from the risks that are associated with AI 'therapy' (*see editors' notes for link to joint position*).

They noted that interactions with AI 'therapy' (or programmes mimicking therapy) have been reported in relation to several recent high-profile tragedies, with particular focus on AI's agreeability towards a user's beliefs and emotions.

The healthcare bodies have written to Minister for Mental Health, Ms Mary Butler, outlining their position, concerns and the need to implement a ban.

<u>Some of their major concerns regarding AI 'therapy' include:</u>

- AI 'therapy' does not have the legal or ethical obligation to alert others of risk, nor does it have the ability to do so.

- Those suffering from delusions or paranoia may have their erroneous beliefs confirmed or elaborated upon by an AI ‘therapist’ which could lead to harm to themselves or others.
- A person using an AI ‘therapist’ is not trained to know what good process is and what it is not. This makes them extremely vulnerable at a time when they need genuine human connection.
- Replacing human therapy with AI ‘therapy’ can deepen a dependency on artificial interaction and undermine opportunities to build real and valid relationships.

Of particular concern for all three groups is the advent and consumption of AI companions and chatbots which can impersonate therapists and provide emotional advice. Such programs threaten to sever the therapeutic alliance, the human relationship between therapist and client. Replacing human-to-human contact risks normalising the facade of artificial relationships.

Speaking today**, Dr Lorcan Martin, President of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland and a consultant in general adult psychiatry,** said**:** “At a time when loneliness is recognised as a public health crisis, policy must strengthen human connection rather than replace it with a simulation. We live in a society that currently allows AI programmes, which operate by generating plausible-sounding text rather than verified fact, to be used in unsupervised therapeutic contexts.

“The consequences of such a decision are not theoretical. Evidence has shown that AI ‘therapy’ use has been linked to worsened delusions, mania, and suicidal ideation. Ireland should look to explicitly prohibit unregulated AI ‘therapy’ and establish clear clinical standards for any AI tool used in a psychological context.

“We cannot allow a regulatory framework built for yesterday's technology to govern tomorrow's mental health.”

Jade Lawless, accredited member of the IACP, a Chartered Counselling Psychologist, Cathaoirleach of the IACP Board of Directors, Academic Director in PCI College and Counsellor/Therapist in the National Counselling Service, said: “While innovations in artificial intelligence may offer useful tools to support wellbeing, the IACP is deeply concerned about the growing use of AI programmes as substitutes for therapy. These technologies lack the clinical judgment, ethical accountability, and human understanding that are essential in responding to complex and high-risk mental health needs.

“Presenting AI as a ‘therapist’ risks misleading vulnerable individuals into trusting systems that are not equipped to safeguard their wellbeing, particularly in moments of crisis. We urgently call for a ban on AI ‘therapy’ in Ireland as it cannot and should not be used as an alternative to a qualified mental health professional.”

Dr Ger McNamara, Council Member of the Psychological Society of Ireland, a Senior Clinical Psychologist in adult mental health and Honorary Tutor of the school of Psychology in Trinity College, said: "It's very brave when people choose to ask for help and attend therapy. Therapy requires genuine human connection, empathy, congruence and emotional tolerance. It provides a space to understand and change relational patterns that are causing problems. It requires the therapist to challenge the client in a safe space. This work needs extensive and high quality training.

"AI 'therapy' has demonstrated that it lacks the skill to understand the complexity in mental health and sadly in some cases this has led to fatalities. One of the aims of AI can be to keep you engaged by supporting what you say, even when this is potentially harmful to you. A vulnerable person can easily believe that the AI 'therapist' they are using knows what it's doing. With no training, how do you know that it lacks the required ethical standards, professional accountability, or genuine empathy for you and your experiences?

"It has already been demonstrated to do great harm to individuals. We need to intervene for the safety of humanity and ban AI 'therapy'."

Editors' notes:

Read the joint position here.

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland *is the professional and training body for psychiatrists in Ireland and represents 1,500 professional psychiatrists (both specialists and trainees) across the country. To become a specialist doctor in psychiatry (specialist consultant psychiatrist) a doctor must complete between six to seven years of the College training programme. See more at www.irishpsychiatry.ie*

The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (IACP) *was established in 1981 to identify, develop, and maintain professional standards of excellence in counselling and psychotherapy. Our work promotes best practice and the development of the profession. The IACP represents more than 7,000 members and is the largest counselling and psychotherapy association in Ireland. The IACP is dedicated to promoting the value of professional therapy and enhancing mental health throughout Ireland. See more at www.iacp.ie*

The Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI), *with over 5,800 members, is the learned and professional body for psychology and psychologists in the Republic of Ireland, with the primary object of advancing psychology as an applied science in Ireland and elsewhere. See more at* ***www.psychologicalsociety.ie***

ENDS

Issued by Gordon MRM on behalf of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland, Psychological Society of Ireland, and Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy

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