

C/O Mr. John O'Connor, Chair of the Housing Commission and Ms. Ailbhe O'Neill BL, Chair of the Commission's Referendum Subcommittee
Housing Commission
Custom House
D01 W6XO

7 September 2022

Re: Public Consultation on a Referendum on Housing in Ireland.

Dear Mr. O'Connor and Ms. O'Neill,

SWAMH, Social Workers in Adult Mental Health, are a special interest group of the IASW, Irish Association of Social Workers. We are committed to the development of the profession of Social Work in Mental Health. SWAMH aims to support colleagues, advocate for our profession and service users and to promote best practice.

We recently conducted a survey to understand and capture information into current practices by Mental Health Social Workers engaged with clients around the issue of access to housing and housing needs and to assess barriers to this process. The data gathered from this survey will form part of a position paper on mental health social work and housing needs.

We are keen to contribute to the public consultation on a referendum on Housing in Ireland. Unfortunately, the report is not fully complete, however we would like to share some of the preliminary findings with you.

Regarding the definition of a housing need for this survey. We interpreted a housing need as a subjective construct, currently the official Irish definition is measured by being accepted onto local authority housing list, for the purpose of our survey we accepted a wider definition by that outlined by local authorities. We referenced the operational categories of homelessness and housing exclusion as outlined by ETHOS (European Typology of Homelessness and Housing Exclusion)

The survey was completed by a representative sample of adult mental health social workers. 113 contributors from across a range of services in Ireland responded. 66% of the respondents are in practice for the past 10+ years. 93% of the sample report that the housing crisis has worsened over time.

Current housing supports are not meeting the needs of this vulnerable client group.

- 54.8% reported that clients have great difficulty understanding the housing application process
- 78.7% reported that HAP levels were inadequate and left those with enduring mental health problems at risk of homelessness
- 52% noted that HAP information was difficult to understand for clients
- 46.9 % stated that long term supported accommodation was difficult to access and not readily available

Social housing, tenancy sustainment work and ongoing mental health support are crucial to ensuring our clients do not end up homeless. The general consensus was that private rental and hap properties are overwhelmingly difficult to find and are generally a transient solution.

33% of social workers reported that they too had been personally impacted by the housing crisis. We are concerned that if this trend continues, it will be difficult to fill social work posts. This trend will also impact on those seeking to enter the profession as it is challenging for students to access housing.

We would welcome an opportunity to provide the consultation with a more thorough update on our findings.

Should you require any further information, please contact me via the IASW Office Manager, Danielle McGoldrick via email officemanager@iasw.ie or Tel. 087 7392420.

Sincerely,

Linda Curran
Chair of the IASW Social Workers in Adult Mental Health Special Interest Group