

Mind Wise

**“Making Mental Health
Everyone’s Business”**

Manifesto – May 2023





MindWise is a leading membership based mental health charity in Northern Ireland. We have been working with and for people of all ages directly affected by mental health issues as well as families, carers, employers and teachers for over 50 years.

Our vision is a world where mental health and wellbeing is everyone's business.



MindWise supports and empowers people experiencing mental health issues to live their best lives

As we approach the local government elections of May 2023 MindWise is concerned by the ongoing political stalemate at Stormont.

The deleterious effect of having no Ministers in place to make decisions on behalf of the people of Northern Ireland was underlined by the recent announcement by the Secretary of State regarding new budget measures.

While financially little has changed in terms of the allocation of funds to the Department of Health, it doesn't match the current rate of inflation.

This means that devastating spending cuts on early intervention into children and young people's mental health and resilience-building capabilities will likely continue.

While the Department of Health Mental Health Strategy 2021-2031 has been a positive development in that it outlined the state of mental health in Northern Ireland, little can be done to implement a huge number of the action points and recommendations due to the lack of a functioning Executive.

Without a government future budgets will continue to shrink and decision-making will be restricted.

This state of affairs impacts people's lives.

According to research carried out by FactCheckNI, '... between 2 December 1999 and 2 December 2004, the Executive was in operation for 937 days and down for 890 (48.7 per cent). And between 8 November 2017 and 8 November 2022, the Executive has been up for 755 days and suspended for 1071 days (58.7 per cent). So the most recent five years of Executive operation has in fact been worse than the first five years of its existence.'

Given that over half a year has elapsed since these calculations were produced the statistics make for increasingly grim reading. This is especially true for the most vulnerable in society, including those with severe mental illnesses, who will be cruelly impacted by the lack of an Executive.

MindWise also notes that there remain significant gaps in research and data gathering on our mental health needs and without this, we, as a society, are unable to fully determine and subsequently deliver services effectively to meet those needs.

According to research carried out by the Mental Health Foundation there is an expectation that '... the effects of the cost-of-living crisis on public mental health will be on a scale similar to the COVID-19 pandemic.'

Cuts to funding might deal with short-term financial deficits and the overspend but will only lead to an increased need for substantial spending in the future as the mental health impact of the cost of living crisis, Covid-19 and the withdrawal of funding of some early mental health intervention in education settings reveals itself among the next generation in Northern Ireland.

We are facing a perfect storm and have little in the way of protection for those who will be hardest hit. This will have devastating consequences for the children of today and the adults of tomorrow.

While our mental health charity partners in England and the respective devolved governments in Scotland and Wales can campaign and lobby their governments, mental health charities in Northern Ireland cannot hold their devolved Ministers and politicians to account. It is unfair to place the onus for decision-making on the shoulders of civil servants in the absence of Ministers.

Without a government, there is no opportunity for scrutiny.

MindWise appreciates that local councils have limited powers and while we acknowledge that there is a will to improve mental health services among many councillors we also note that they have neither the financial or legislative powers to take the responsibility that the government is elected to control. We understand that they find this frustrating, but by working together we can make some improvements as outlined in our manifesto.

We are calling on local councils to continue their solidarity with MindWise and other mental health and suicide prevention charities to drive positive change for the most vulnerable in our society.

In addition, MindWise believes that proper funding for mental health services is a basic human right. We were a signatory of a recent public letter written by the Human Rights Consortium which called on the Prime Minister, the leader of the opposition and the Taoiseach to help deliver the outstanding human rights commitments that the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement originally envisioned a quarter of a century ago.

We are now experiencing an unsustainable process of removing essential funding from those who need it most. Early mental health intervention in schools is a crucial approach through which government can be proactive in ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to understand and cope with their mental health.

Mental health problems currently cost the Northern Ireland economy £3.4 billion each year. This cost will only increase in the future if we don't put the proper framework in place to help people in the present.

The clinical psychologist Dr. Sanah Ahsan observed 'If a plant were wilting we wouldn't diagnose it with "wilting-plant-syndrome" – we would change its conditions. Yet when humans are suffering under unliveable conditions, we're told something is wrong with us, and expected to keep pushing through. To keep working and producing, without acknowledging our hurt.'

A functioning government where the politicians who were elected by the people of Northern Ireland are making decisions is the only way to ensure that conditions change for the better in the long-term.

Don't play politics with mental health.

www.mindwisenv.org



Our strategy for 2022 – 2027 is available [here](#). Over the next four years we are going to highlight a number of issues relating to mental health and access to services in Northern Ireland.

For this council election, however, we are asking you as candidates, politicians and political parties to make commitments to MindWise on two key issues at a council level.

We believe that by making these commitments you will help support recovery and discover new ways of being. We will do this Together because mental health is everyone's business.

MindWise are calling on the candidates and political parties standing for election to council to work with us to:

Remove the shadow of stigma around mental health

Discrimination (often referred to as stigma) still shadows mental health. The Time to Change campaign had little to no effect in NI. Individuals with severe mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, psychosis and bipolar affective disorder still tell us that the impact of discrimination is worse than the illness itself.

Discrimination often results in loss of family, friends, social connectedness, isolation, as well as unemployment, homelessness and loss of life.

In tackling discrimination, MindWise believe that public health policy must accept that **mental health is everyone's business**. We must talk about our mental health – 'How are you feeling today?'. Thereby making mental health a part of everyday conversation (in the tea room and in the Board room, at council chambers, the Assembly and at Westminster, in the Dáil, at the UN and in the EU). **Together we will break down the discriminatory views and dispel the myths surrounding mental health**. In doing so, individuals, families, friends, employers, colleagues, policy and decision makers will become better equipped to recognise, understand and respond to mental health issues.



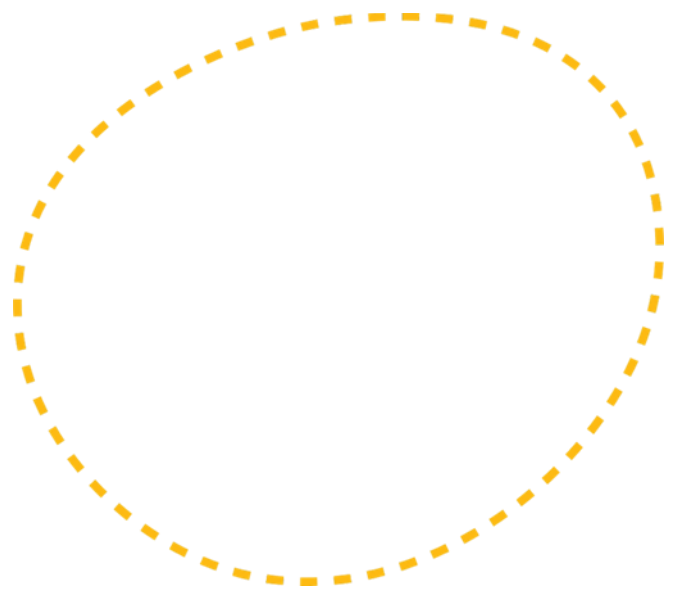
What we will do:

- Continue to deliver our training and educational programmes to schools, colleges, employers and key decision makers.
- Continue to ensure that mental health remains high on the public agenda by encouraging open dialogue, understanding and acceptance.
- Continue to influence mental health policy, legislation and practice via mental health and wellbeing campaigns, for example: How to protect and maintain mental health and wellbeing; How to create a mentally healthy society where discrimination is not tolerated; How to address drivers for poor mental health across society.

What you can do:

- Work collaboratively with MindWise and support our ethos that mental health is everyone's business to end the stigmatisation and discrimination directed at people living with mental health conditions.
- Be proactive in challenging stigma and discrimination around mental health when you encounter it.
- Think about the language you use, and how it could be alienating to people living with mental health conditions.
- Ensure that your staff and council staff are aware of our [WorkWise Mental Health Training package](#)
- Promote a mentally healthy workplace and grow awareness of the issues surrounding mental health.
- Ask your constituents what they feel are the mental health needs within your District Electoral Area.
- Ensure that the DEA you serve is a place where people feel comfortable talking about mental health.

**By working together
we can build a
society based on
empathy, respect
and togetherness.**



Protect the mental health of our next generation

Young people who continue to need mental health treatment and care will transition (around the 18th birthday) from child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) to adult mental health services. However, **there is currently no regional protocol in Northern Ireland for the transition of young people from CAMHS to adult mental health services**, while transition pathways vary across the five health and social care trusts. Young people continue to report that transferring to adult mental health services can be very difficult and that a gradual transition to adult services for those aged 16–25 years old would be preferable.



Prevention and early intervention minimise the prevalence and incidence of poor mental health and the severity of the life time impact of mental health issues. It is estimated that half of all mental health problems have been established by the age of 14, rising to 75 % by age 24, with schizophrenia having its peak

onset in late adolescence/early adulthood.

Additionally, up to 50% of those attending psychiatric outpatient clinics, 50% of those in psychiatric inpatient services and 80% of the prison population meet the criteria for a personality disorder (also referred to as Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder). 45% of those presenting at Emergency Departments with self-harm have a diagnosis of personality disorder and 9%-10% of those with a personality disorder die by suicide.

Early intervention in the treatment of psychosis has been shown to reduce the severity of symptoms, improve relapse rates and significantly decrease the use of inpatient care and specialist support. NICE guidelines on schizophrenia clearly support the development of both psychosis prevention services and first episodes psychosis services. Early intervention can also reduce the significant number of people experiencing mental health issues who are criminalised within the justice system.

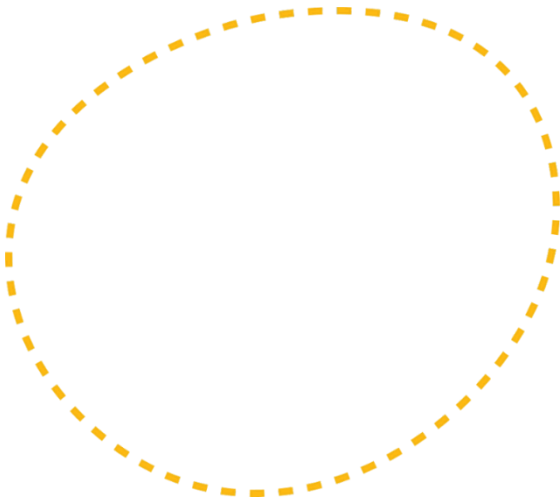
What we will do:

- Implement a trauma-informed life cycle approach to the work we do.
- Develop our early intervention and prevention strategies and service provision. 'We want to create an organisation which supports people to access support early, thereby reducing the need for specialist or crisis intervention'.

- Empower children and families to develop their emotional resilience and mental wellbeing through our schools and wellness programmes.

What you can do:

- Make your DEA an environment where young people feel comfortable and confident in talking about their mental health.
- Listen to young people and ensure that their voices are represented in the council chamber.
- Be proactive in creating an environment where young people's creativity is nurtured from an early age.
- Put mental health at the forefront of conversations in schools.



Evidence shows that school-based programmes for children and adolescents achieve a reduction in symptomatic depression of 50% or more a year after the intervention.



We have set out our plan for the years ahead - however we cannot do this alone.



Together, with your support, we will develop and deliver services that support individuals with mental health needs to live their best lives, maintain their mental health and wellbeing, while managing their recovery and journeys of discovery.

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