



# Thematic Inspection: An Evaluation of the Provision of Psychiatric Care in the Irish Prison System

## February - March 2023

**People in prison with serious mental disorders are not receiving the right care, in the right environment, at the right time.**

OIP engages Clinical Psychiatry Experts, Dr Clive Meux and Mr Andy Flynn, to assist OIP with Thematic Inspection of Mental Health Provision in Irish Prisons



Inspection Visits to 7 Prisons:



Dóchas Centre, Mountjoy Men's Prison, Cloverhill Prison, Cork Prison, Limerick Prison, Portlaoise Prison & Midlands Prison

-70% of total prisoner population

July / August 2023: IPS report review and Action Plan

August 2023: Report submitted to Minister for Justice

February 2024: Report Published



## Inspection Objectives

1. Describe current situation of treatment of adults in prison with serious mental illness
2. Identify issues of concern in relation to treatment of adults with mental disorders
3. Make recommendations, that if implemented, would address concerns identified by OIP

### Staffing & Environment

### Inspection Key Findings



- There were **not enough specialist mental healthcare staff working in many of the prisons**, and there were **long wait lists to access a mental health professional**. More than 1/3 of psychology posts were not filled in early 2023.
- There were **not enough housing and resettlement staff available in the prisons**. People leaving prison with mental disorders did not always receive the supports they required to connect with mental healthcare treatment in the community.
- **Not enough training and support was provided to officers working with prisoners with serious mental disorders**, particularly those officers working in special units.
- **5 of the 7 prisons visited in February - March 2023 were severely overcrowded**; many people shared small, cramped cells and slept on mattresses on cell floors.
- **Some prisoners with mental disorders were living in degrading conditions**. Many people in prison with mental disorders were not provided opportunities to engage in purposeful activities.

### Prisons are not a suitable environment to treat people with serious mental disorders.

### Treatment & Care Pathways

- **Many psychiatric treatments available in the community were not available to people in prison**; despite prisoners being entitled to receive an equal standard of psychiatric care.
- **Ireland does not have enough space to support people who need treatment for serious mental health disorders, resulting in long delays to transfer prisoners to the National Forensic Mental Health Service Hospital (NFMHSH)**. On average, across Europe there are 10 beds available for people with serious mental disorders for every 100,000 people; in Ireland there are only 2 beds for every 100,000 people.
- **Unhoused prisoners with mental disorders experienced great difficulty in accessing psychiatric hospital in-patient treatment.**

## 5 Key Recommendations

- A rapid pathway should be created for prisoners with mental disorders who require a psychiatric hospital bed to be **swiftly transferred to the NFMHSH**.
- **Staff increases**, in particular: Psychologists, Psychiatrists, Nursing, Healthcare Assistants, Housing Support, Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, Administrative Staff
- **Prison officers should be offered training** in recognition, assessment and treatment of prisoners with serious mental disorders.
- Cell conditions should be improved and **all prisoners should have their own bed**; this will require liaison between DOJ, the Courts and the HSE to identify strategies to reduce overcrowding in prisons.
- Action should be taken to **support unhoused prisoners with mental disorders to access psychiatric treatment in civil psychiatric hospitals**.

## Voices from Prisons



"I'd really like the chance to talk issues through".

"I just wake up, drink milk, count the hours and watch TV; I'd really like something to do".

*People in Prison*

"Prison is not the right setting for some of these men to be held in".

"We don't have the facilities to do the treatment required, there's not enough clinical staff".

"If they had TB, they'd be transferred to hospital for treatment, but for mental disorder there seems little chance of transfer".

"We have to keep patients here, in prison (...) it's only by begging and pleading that we get any help".

*Staff*