

Alex McMahon
c/o Mike Murray
Directorate of Primary and Community Care
Mental Health Division
3ER, St Andrews House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

19 March 2008

Dear Alex,

Improving the Physical Health of Those with Mental Illness

Children in Scotland welcomes the document, *Improving the Physical Health of Those with Mental Illness*. We acknowledge the importance of a focus on the relationship between physical and mental health among adults. Indeed, since many of these adults are parents (or otherwise engaged with children in significant ways), it is vital that these adults are as healthy as possible whilst carrying out their child-related responsibilities.

Thus, we support the aspirations articulated in this document. However, we also hope that the Scottish Government will accord a similar emphasis to improving the physical health of *children and young people* with mental illness.

Approximately one in ten children and young people aged 5 - 16 in the UK have a clinically diagnosed mental disorder.¹ There are others, of course, whose problems have not yet been diagnosed. Like adults, these children and young people will be more likely also to have physical health problems. A survey carried out by the Office for National Statistics found that in children with no mental health problems, six per cent were rated as showing fair, poor or very bad general health; the corresponding proportion among children with mental health problems was over three times higher, at 20 per cent.²

It is essential that problems are identified as early as possible in childhood/adolescence, in order to facilitate early intervention and to prevent these health problems worsening in adulthood. Indeed, given that physical illness and disability can trigger or exacerbate mental health problems, it might be the case that increasing the physical well-being of children and young people will decrease the severity of adult mental health difficulties.

¹ *The Mental Health of Children and Young People in Great Britain*, The Office for National Statistics, 2004

² *The Health of Children and Young People*, The Office for National Statistics, 2004

In dealing with the physical health of children and young people with mental illness, age-appropriate services staffed by professionals specifically trained to work with these age groups will be essential. Furthermore, sectors and services need to work together to properly and promptly identify and address the physical health needs of children and young people with mental illness.

We recommend that the Scottish Government provide guidance for, and assistance in, improving the physical health of children and young people with mental illness -- similar to that presented in *Improving the Physical Health of Those with Mental Illness*. Further, we encourage the Scottish Government to develop this guidance and assistance through a consultation process that meaningfully includes the views, experiences and advice of relevant children and young people themselves (in accordance with Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child).

If you have any questions about these comments, then please contact Paula Evans (Policy and Parliamentary Information Officer) on pevans@childreninscotland.org.uk.

Yours Sincerely,
Paula Evans

Children in Scotland is Scotland's national agency for organisations and professionals working with and for children, young people and their families. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that policies, services and other provisions are of the highest possible quality and are able to meet the needs of a diverse society. Children in Scotland represents over 450 members, including all major voluntary, statutory and private children's agencies, professional organisations, as well as many other smaller community groups and children's services. It is linked with similar agencies in other parts of the UK and the European Union.

The work of Children in Scotland encompasses extensive information, policy, research and practice development programmes. The agency works closely with MSPs, the Scottish Executive, local authorities and practitioners. It is a partner of the Participation Partnership Group for children and young people's mental health. It services a number of groups such as: the Cross Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Young People; the National Children's Voluntary Forum; the National Early Years Forum, and the Rural Advisory Group. Children in Scotland hosts Enquire, the national advice service for additional support for learning.