



Opening Statement of *Families for Reform of CAMHS*

to the Oireachtas Health Committee,

“Accessing CAMHS”

Wednesday 28th January, 2026

We would like to start by thanking the Committee for inviting us in to speak today.

We were last before the Committee two years ago as a newly formed group. We have since doubled in size and are now made up of over 1,500 members from across the country.

What remains the same, however, is our call for urgent reform of CAMHS. We are making that call on behalf of our children but also on behalf of the children to-come.

The year our group was formed, was the year that the Inspector of Mental Health Services publicly stated that she could not provide assurance that children in Ireland have access to a safe mental health service.

Rather than that stark warning acting as a much-needed catalyst for change, we are yet to see real reform.

We wanted today to provide you with a small snapshot of what *fighting* to access CAMHS looks like from a family perspective. A fight that families have to take on at their most vulnerable times.

Imagine promising your child you will get them help and keep them safe, only to have the door closed repeatedly in your face. Imagine seeing your child lose more of themselves each day and being unsure

whether support will come too late. This is the heart-breaking reality of many families across Ireland.

18 months ago we published a report based on the experiences of 736 families accessing CAMHS.

The report illustrates the difficulties at *every* stage of the process.

First of all trying to get through the referral process, which for 44% of families takes multiple referrals before being accepted. And it's worth noting that these referrals, which have to be made by GPs, are rejected by CAMHS without ever meeting the child.

We have families telling us that their child with suicidal ideation or self-harm have been turned away without any discussion or their child being met. And all families can do is to make another referral.

Once you make it onto the waiting list, however, the fight for services continues.

Three-quarters of our families said that their child's mental health deteriorated while on the waiting list. And 39% ended up having to go to A&E. That is a frighteningly high percentage of children having to go to A&E while they are waiting for support from CAMHS. That is almost 4 in 10 of our children reaching such a critical, emergency point before help is received. That is beyond cruel. And that is avoidable pain and suffering.

We found that once in the door of CAMHS, it could still prove hard to access support. 8% of children were discharged on their first appointment. So after all that waiting, support did not come. 10% of children were discharged after 3 appointments; and 13% after 6 appointments.

Of the families who stayed in the service for a longer period of time, almost 70% of children had been offered medication whereas much smaller percentages had been offered any therapeutic interventions.

Many families also felt that there was a lack of accountability. Only 30% of families who had made a complaint were happy with how it was handled. And many were too worried to make a complaint in case it impacted their child's care. This speaks to the vulnerable position families find themselves in.

Families widely acknowledged the huge strain staff were under, the heavy work load they carried and how many teams simply didn't have the time or the capacity to offer appropriate care to their child. Individual staff members who went out of their way to help a family were highlighted and huge gratitude expressed. Being listened to, believed and validated made a huge difference. And this should be the norm.

In terms of leaving CAMHS, 70% of families were not in agreement about their child being ready to be discharged. This led to a large sense of distrust in the system. Families worried about what would happen if their child needed help again in the future as they knew how hard it would be to get back in the door.

It is also worth briefly mentioning the experiences of certain groups.

70% of families with an autistic child felt that being autistic negatively impacted their ability to access CAMHS or the mental health supports that were offered to their child. This is deeply troubling. Anxiety, depression and other mental health disorders are treatable conditions. And autistic children should have equal opportunity to that treatment and support.

For children with intellectual disabilities, over three-quarters had no access to a CAMHS-ID. And only 14% were being offered any interim support. That is 63% of our children with intellectual disabilities

having no access to any mental health service at all. That is not good enough. And families have nowhere to turn.

We continue to call for meaningful prioritisation of reform.

Thank you.