

Context counts: Comparing Public Mental Health and Community Inclusion Strategies across the island of Ireland with a Community Development Lens

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Background

- There is a **strong and indisputable link** between poverty, mental health, and structural inequality contributing to poor mental health outcomes and distress (1,2)
- Both Ireland (IRE) and Northern Ireland (NI)'s Mental Health Policy Frameworks **reference international best practice guidance** (3), but public reviews highlight a **persistent implementation gap** in mental healthcare delivery (4)
- Voice Equality Experience Power (VEEP)** is a community mental health and poverty platform for community and voluntary workers and organisations across the island of Ireland. It promotes **community-led, rights-based, and preventative** approaches to health, grounded in **tackling the root causes of poverty and inequality**.

Research Aim

To understand how **public policy strategies** across the island of Ireland **align with international best practices in health transformation**



Method

We developed a **North-South policy grid** of key terms in public policy strategies across the island of Ireland. This poster presents the results from a first-stage **comparative content analysis** of four public strategies in NI and IRE:

- Government**
 - IRE: Programme for Government 2025:** Securing Ireland's Future (*Department of the Taoiseach*)
 - NI: Programme for Government 2024-2027** Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most (*The Executive Office*)
- Mental health**
 - IRE:** Sharing the Vision, A **Mental Health Policy** for Everyone, 2020 (*Department of Health*)
 - NI: Mental Health Strategy** 2021-2031 (*Department of Health*)
- Health and wellbeing**
 - IRE: Sláintecare** Implementation & Action Plan 2021-2023, Sláintecare Action Plan 2023 (*Department of Health*)
 - NI: The Health and Wellbeing** 2026 Delivering Together Strategy (2016-2026) (*Department of Health*)
- Community inclusion**
 - IRE:** Roadmap for **Social Inclusion** 2020-2025 (*Department for Employment Affairs and Social Protection*)
 - NI: Building Inclusive Communities** 2020-2025 (*Department for Communities*)

Results so far

<u>Term</u>	<u>Number of mentions</u>							
	NI Programme for Government	IRE Programme for Government	NI Mental Health Strategy	IRE Mental Health Policy	NI Health and Wellbeing	IRE Sláintecare	NI Building Inclusive Communities	IRE Sustainable, Inclusive Communities
Mental Health	4	30	529	1000+	15	18	1	4
Community Development	0	3	0	5	2	0	0	95
Inequality/Inequalities	11	2	5	1	7	30	1	11
Determinants of Health	1	0	7	4	1	2	0	2
Human Rights/Rights	3	2	4	37	1	0	1	12
Poverty	12	14	12	0	2	2	18	39
Prevention & Early Intervention	11	8	68	87	6	55	0	0
Co-production/co-design	3	1	13	3	9	0	5	0
Partnership/Collaboration	15	37	20	21	23	2	13	62
Participation/Participate/Engagement	4	8	2	6	1	42	2	48



- “Community Development”**: Appears **only twice in 1 of 4** NI strategies, but **110 times in 3 of 4** IRE strategies
- “Prevention & Early Intervention”**: These core equity principles are **absent** from both Community Inclusion strategies
- Collaborative Language**: **Variations** in the use of terms like “participation” and “partnership” suggest regional preferences in policy language
- Mental Health documents**: Poverty is **not mentioned** in NI’s strategy and inequality appears **only once** in IRE’s policy

Conclusion

- Initial results show there is an **urgent need to strengthen policy development and implementation** in both jurisdictions, emphasising the meaningful involvement of communities, people with lived experiences, and frontline practitioners
- Closing the policy-practice gap** on cross-cutting mental health challenges needs a **whole-of-government, whole-of-society response** rooted in intersectoral collaboration to reduce social, health, and economic inequities to achieve better wellbeing (5)

Next Steps

VEEP will present the **full content and relational analysis** in a short paper by Autumn 2025 and **continue to use our platform to support community voice in policy spaces**.



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