

Intercultural Health Strategy
Responding to the Needs of People Involved in
Problematic Drug Use from Black and Minority Ethnic
Communities
Submission

Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign
October 2017

Introduction

CityWide is a national network of community activists and organisations involved in responding to issues of drug use. It works to develop local community capacity to respond to drugs issues, to support and network local groups working on drugs issues, to lobby on policy issues and play a representative role for the community sector on policy bodies, and to encourage an inter-agency and inter-sectoral response to drugs issues. CityWide supports a community development response to drugs issues.

CityWide facilitates five networks: Local Drugs Taskforce Community Representatives Network; Regional Drugs Taskforce Community Representatives Network; Prisons Network; Drugs Rehab Special CE Projects Network; and Drugs Project Network. It is represented on the National Coordinating Committee on Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces, the Oversight Forum on Drugs, the National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol, and the National Drug Rehabilitation Implementation Committee.

In early 2017, CityWide published a research report on problematic drug use within Black and Minority Ethnic Communities and responses to this issue, entitled “Stimulating and Supporting a Black and Minority Ethnic Voice on Drugs Issues”. This submission is based on this research and subsequent discussions within the organisation. This report is available at:

[https://www.citywide.ie/download/pdf/black minority ethnic voice on drugs issues web.pdf?issuysl=ignore](https://www.citywide.ie/download/pdf/black%20minority%20ethnic%20voice%20on%20drugs%20issues%20web.pdf?issuysl=ignore)

Drugs Policy

The Department of Health has published a new national drugs strategy, “Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025”. This makes particular reference to:

- Population groups with “complex needs” and emphasises the importance of “recognising diversity” among drug users, including those from the “Traveller community and other minority ethnic communities”.
- The particular barriers to accessing services that can be experienced by “migrant communities”.
- The need to improve the capacity of service providers to accommodate the needs of “new communities”.
- The contribution of inequality to “vulnerability that may lead to dependency and harm and act as barriers to recovery and leading a fulfilling, safe and healthy life”.

Under “Objective 2.1: To attain better health and social outcomes for people who experience harm from substance misuse and meet their recovery and rehabilitation needs”, the following strategic actions are proposed:

- Expand the availability and geographical spread of relevant quality drug and alcohol services and improve the range of services available, based on identified need, with this to be achieved by “strengthening the capacity of services to address complex needs” among other activities (2.1.13 with HSE as lead).
- Improve the capacity of services to accommodate the needs of people who use drugs from specific communities including new communities, with this to be achieved by “engagement with representatives of these communities”, considering the need for “specialist referral pathways”; providing “anti-racism, cultural competence and equality training”; and use of “ethnic equality monitoring” (2.1.27 with HSE as lead).
- Increase the range of progression options for recovering drug users and develop a new programme of supported care and employment, with this to be achieved by establishing a working group with an agenda that includes to identify and remedy the barriers to accessing educational, personal development, training and employment opportunities and supports (2.1.19 with Department of Health as lead and HSE participating).

This strategy provides a positive foundation for the Intercultural Health Strategy to build on and further develop to ensure an adequate, effective and appropriate response to the needs of Black and minority ethnic people involved in problematic drug use.

Intercultural Health Strategy

The Intercultural Health Strategy should specifically name the issue of problematic drug use among Black and minority ethnic communities, acknowledge the specific barriers they face in accessing services and dealing with the issue, and ensure adequate resources are made available to address this issue appropriately and effectively.

While research data is limited, problematic drug use is found to be an issue among Black and minority ethnic communities. There are low levels of take-up of services by Black and minority ethnic drug users. They face specific barriers to presenting including: lack of knowledge of services and of the issue of problematic drug use, isolation and lack of family support networks, legal status, community issues of shame and stigma associated with drug use, language barriers, the absence of targeted or outreach services, failure of services to take account of cultural difference, racism and lack of investment in integration.

The strategy should commit to ensuring that responses to Black and minority ethnic people involved in problematic drug use are both adequate and appropriate. It should specifically commit to:

- The National Oversight Committee providing leadership and direction for an integrated interagency approach to the issue of problematic drug use amongst Black and ethnic minority communities.

- The Standing Sub-committee on Implementation and the Drugs Policy Unit providing support to Drug and Alcohol Task Forces to co-ordinate the implementation of this work at a local and regional level.
- Regional and local drugs task forces supporting the implementation, through local community drugs projects, of outreach activities to Black and minority ethnic communities that support prevention and foster take-up of services as required. In particular, these activities need to:
 - Be community-based in engaging with organisations of Black and minority ethnic people in the area.
 - Be peer-led in employing Black and minority ethnic staff.
 - Involve making connections with institutions that have links with Black and minority ethnic communities, including schools, churches and youth services.
- Mainstream services taking steps to ensure they have a commitment and a capacity to be accessible to and to secure take-up from and outcomes for Black and minority ethnic people involved in problematic drug use. In particular, mainstream services need to:
 - Put in place an equality and diversity policy, that sets a standard of dignity, participation, and inclusiveness for the service, and make this policy publicly available.
 - Train all staff in cultural competence to build their capacity to understand and respond appropriately to cultural difference and to eliminate all forms of racism and discrimination.
 - Use an ethnic identifier and analyse the results of the data gathered to shape further provision.

The strategy should commit to ensuring the voice of Black and minority ethnic communities is heard in drugs policy and service provision and that their issues are identified and understood. It should specifically commit to:

- National, regional and local policy makers working on drugs issues to implement creative and effective processes of consultation with and participation by Black and minority ethnic communities and their representatives so that they influence policy-making, policy-monitoring, and policy-evaluation.
- Regional and Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces taking steps to develop and include Black and minority ethnic representation in their structures.
- Regional and Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces taking steps to engage in a dialogue of mutual education with Black and minority ethnic communities.
- The National Advisory Committee on Drugs and Alcohol supporting research on problematic drug use within Black and minority ethnic communities.
- Regional and Local Drugs and Alcohol Task Forces supporting Black and minority ethnic organisations in building their capacity to take up issues of problematic drug use in their work.

The strategy should commit to ensuring Black and minority ethnic people involved in problematic drug use are enabled to build their recovery capital. It should specifically commit to:

- The Department of Health working group on progression options for recovering drug users including Black and minority ethnic representation and establishing and addressing the particular needs of drug users from these communities.