

Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign – Briefing for TDs of the 33rd Dáil

Six Actions to Tackle Ireland’s Drug Problem

1. Whole-of-government Response

We need strong Political Leadership by appointing a Junior Minister with responsibility for drugs who has a seat at the cabinet table, as has happened in the past.

We need strong co-ordination and co-operation in delivering NDS actions involving 17 different departments, agencies and sectors and, to ensure accountability across all sectors, the Taoiseach’s Department needs to have high-level representation on the NDS National Committees.

2. Restore Budgets to Community Drugs Projects

Despite the fact that the overall NDS budget has increased in recent years, **there has been no increase in core budget funding for community drug services from 2015 to date.** While some short-term and once-off funding was allocated in 2018 & 2019, core Task Force budgets remain at the levels they were reduced to during the years of austerity.

These cuts have affected the whole range of services – treatment, rehabilitation, aftercare, youth services, education and awareness, childcare, community safety etc. – and it is crucial that resources are now directed back in to these services.

3. Support Local and Regional Drug Task Forces to meet needs on the ground

Whether it’s the community drug problems in disadvantaged areas, the growing drug problems in towns outside of Dublin or the often-hidden drug use in rural areas, we need to ensure that appropriate responses are in place to deal with the drug issue as it impacts on particular communities and communities of interest. Drugs Task Forces were set up to support, facilitate and co-ordinate interagency partnership responses to drugs at local and regional level, with the Task Force Community Reps playing a crucial role in bringing their knowledge of the drugs problem in their community to the Task Force table.

Action 1

Appoint a ‘**Super Junior**’ Minister of State with responsibility for the NDS

The **Taoiseach’s Department** to appoint a senior official to the NDS National structures.

Action 2

Immediately **restore the core budgets** of Community Drugs Projects to support the delivery of essential drug services.

Action 3

Support strong pro-active community representation on Task Forces and make **statutory engagement obligatory** for departments and agencies.

4. Concerted Effort to respond to Drug-related Intimidation

Drug-related intimidation and violence represent a serious threat to our local communities and these communities must be seen as partners in shaping the responses to the problem. Senior Justice and Garda personnel, community representatives and other relevant stakeholders i.e. local authorities, must come together at the highest level and as a matter of urgency.

5. Possession of drugs for personal use

Criminalising people for drug use has been shown to have a negative impact on their lives and future opportunities.

A Health Diversion Approach is being introduced in 2020 which will divert people to a health assessment on the first occasion they are caught in possession of drugs for personal use, an adult caution may be applied on a second occasion, on the third occasion and onwards, the current policy where possession is a criminal offence will apply.

This new approach will have an impact on people who use drugs, on communities and on drug services and we need to ensure that there is cross-sectoral involvement in its implementation and monitoring.

6. Community Participation

The worst impact of the drugs problem continues to be in the poorest communities where the drugs problem has become chronic, deep-rooted and embedded, impacting negatively on all aspects of community life. Intimidation and violence are one of a number of factors making it more and more difficult for people to get involved in responding to the drugs issue in their community and it is crucial that resources are invested in supporting people who are interested in getting involved.

Action 4

Urgently establish a **National High-level Group** including communities to develop an action plan to respond to the devastation caused by drug related intimidation and violence.

Action 5

Set up an **Oversight Group** engaging with all the relevant partners to monitor the implementation of the Health Diversion Approach.

Action 6

Make an **immediate investment in a new Community Development Initiative** to support community participation on the drugs issue.

Drugs in Ireland

The International Background to Ireland's drugs problem...

The global production of illicit drugs is booming, with record figures for both opium and cocaine

Data from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) shows the cultivation of opium, coca and cannabis between 2009 and 2018 increased by 130% for opium poppy and by 34% for coca bush. Total global opium production jumped by 65% from 2016 to 2017, the highest estimate ever recorded by UNODC. At the same time as the traditional illicit drugs like opium and cocaine are booming, new drugs are also emerging as a major problem

Non-medical use of opiate-based prescription drugs is becoming a major threat around the world, with **fentanyl** driving an unprecedented number of overdose deaths in North America, **heroin** remaining as the main opiate of concern in Europe.

So, what's happening in Ireland?

How many people use drugs in Ireland?

Over 26% (more than 1 in 4) of the Irish population **have used illicit drugs** with **cannabis** the most widely used illicit drug.

- **Cannabis**

2015 figures show **14% of young adults (15-34) used cannabis** in the previous year and the ESPAD school survey for 2015 showed almost 19% of 15 to 16 year olds had used cannabis during their lifetime.

- **Opiates**

In the most recent study in 2014, **estimated opiate** users showed a range from **18,720 to 21,454, with an estimate of 13,458 in Dublin.**

The European (EMCDDA) Early Warning System for new drugs monitored 670 **NPS (New Psychoactive Substances)** by the end of 2017, up from 300 in 2013.

Cannabis remains the world's most commonly used drug, with 192 million people using it in the past year. Data collected from 28 EU member states show a significant increase in the average potency of **cannabis resin** from 8.14 per cent THC content in 2006 to 17.22 per cent in 2016.

In the EU **over 92 million people have used illicit drugs.**

Drug markets continue to be the most important illegal market in the EU. Over 33% of organised criminal groups (OCGs) have participated in the production, trafficking and supply of illicit drugs, resulting in extensive profits that fund a range of illegal activities.



Cocaine

There has been a significant increase in new cases for treatment reporting cocaine as the main problem drug, from **297 in 2013 to 1,232 in 2018.**

There has been an increase in availability of **crack cocaine** in local communities and surveys from **Community Drugs Projects** show a significant number of service users using crack cocaine.

Poly drug use

Our communities are now coping with an increasingly complex and chaotic drug problem that includes a mix of:

- Prescription drugs including painkillers, sedatives and tranquillizers: (benzos e.g. Valium, Xanax, Dalmane, Tamazepan, Zs e.g. Zimovane)
- Illegal drugs, including heroin, cocaine, amphetamines, ecstasy/MDMA, mephedrone .
- New psycho-active substances (NPS), are often sourced on the internet
- High-strength cannabis which is now having a significant impact, particularly on young people and their mental health, not identified with cannabis use in previous generations.
- Crack cocaine is now a significant problem in specific areas in Dublin, with the risk for users of a rapid decline in both physical and mental health
- GHB and GBL (Gs), crystal meth and ketamine are associated with chemsex
- Widespread availability and misuse of alcohol continues to be a core part of the polydrug problem

Drug Related Intimidation

As well as drug misuse, the impact of the drugs trade is having a devastating effect on our communities...

- Murders, attempted murders and violent attacks by and between members of criminal gangs related to control of the drugs trade are now the most visible features of drug-related violence and intimidation in Ireland. This violent crime has also brought to light the role of Irish criminal gangs in the European and International drugs trade.
- What remains hidden is the insidious, ongoing, day-to-day drug-related intimidation that is experienced in our communities - in our 2016 study *Demanding money with menace - drug related intimidation* **less than 10% of people experiencing intimidation reported it to Gardai** for fear of reprisal. Figures from the NFSN/Garda National Intimidation Reporting Programme show that in 2016 only 4 charges relating to intimidation were pending across all Garda divisions and in 2017 only 1 case was under investigation.

Drug Related Deaths

786 people **died** from Drug Related causes in 2017

Between 2004–2017 there have been 8,995 drug-related deaths

Drug-related deaths are 3.5 times higher than road deaths

2 out of 3 poisoning deaths involved poly drugs with on average 4 different drugs involved

<https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/deaths-data/index.html>

Possession of drugs for personal use

In 2018, **72% of convictions for drug offences in Ireland were for possession of drugs for personal use.**

The UK's National Treatment Agency (NTA) estimates that every £1 spent on drug treatment saves society £9.50 through crime reduction, economic and social reintegration and reduced health expenditure