

# Orla O'Connor Director

Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign  
Citizens Assembly



National Women's Council

# NWC

- Feminist organisation working towards an Ireland where every woman enjoys true equality and no woman is left behind
  - Movement building organisation rooted in our membership, (190 member groups), working on the whole island of Ireland.
  - Purpose: To lead action for the achievement of women's equality through mobilising, influencing and building solidarity
  - Values – Feminist, Caring, Inclusive, Diverse, Strategic, Fearless
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# Background to Citizens Assembly

- Established by Oireachtas 2012-2014 – Constitutional Convention – to consider constitutional issues
  - Constitutional Convention – 33 Political Representatives, 66 citizens, Independent Chairperson –
  - Issues – Presidential Term, Voting Age, Dail electoral system and Dail reform, Right of citizens living abroad to vote in Presidential elections, Same sex marriage, Role of Women, Blasphemy, Economic Social and Cultural Rights
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# Background to Citizens Assembly

- Established by Oireachtas 2016–2018 – Citizens Assembly established to consider 5 issues (set out in Programme for Government 2016)
    - Eighth Amendment
    - Challenges and Opportunities of an Ageing Population
    - Fixed Term Parliaments
    - Operations of Referenda
    - Climate Change
  - Members – Independent Chair – appointed by Oireachtas, 99 citizens selected from electoral register by polling company. Achieved spread geographical spread, age, gender, social class.
  - Secretariat – civil servants
  - Expert Advisory Group – legal, academic and policy experts.
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# Citizens Assembly on Eighth Amendment and Gender Equality

- Expert Group appointed – decide the issues to be addressed by the CA
  - Call for written submissions, summarised submissions presented to Citizens
  - Eighth Amend – 2016–2017
    - 6 sessions – medical/legal experts/campaigners/direct experiences
    - Emphasis on ‘balance’ both sides of argument are reflected in all sessions
    - Campaigning orgs – observer status– private and public sessions for citizens
    - Series of voting
    - Special Joint Oireachtas Committee
  - Gender Equality – 2019
    - Broad range of issues including constitutional Art 41.2
    - Directed to – prioritise proposals, policy, legislative, constitutional change.
    - COVID – Fully Online – shorter sessions, shorter recorded inputs, video material for information,
    - Powerful final recommendations presented by video to Oireachtas
    - Report to Oireachtas June 2021
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# Learnings

- Providing space for Informed conversation and discussion – leads to informed decision making – Citizens Assembly significant space of deliberative participation and democracy
- The framing of the issue within the CA is critical – determine how the conversations are organized and the process and voting
- Experiences of those most effected – central part of evidence, can be done in multiple ways
- Provides civil society organisations with a better understanding of the thinking of the public on the issue and an opportunity to bring public attention to the issue during the process
- Provides a strong public impetus beyond the civil society and campaigning organisations making it harder for political process to ignore

# Learnings

- When given a supported, open, informed discursive space – the public are ahead of our political leadership
- Evidence shows that the results of CA's are reflected in the voting public
- Not necessarily lead to change, requires a sustained campaign after CA makes report.
- Campaigning Strategy post CA particularly for areas that require legislative and policy change not referendum.
- ~~Composition of CA – limited to those on electoral register~~

# Sign up to our campaigns

Nwc.ie



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