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## **Half of Irish Adults Support Policy of Decriminalising the Possession of Drugs for Personal Use**

Support for the decriminalisation of the possession of drugs for personal use is split almost half and half among the national population, according to a new survey carried out by Red C for Citywide, Drugs Crisis Campaign. Forty-nine percent of people are in favour of changing the law to allow for decriminalisation while 51% are not.

The poll also shows that men (56%) and younger people between 18 and 34 (58%) are more supportive of a move towards decriminalisation. The results of the survey will be presented at a Citywide Seminar today entitled “A Health Led Approach to Drug Use in Ireland.”

By decriminalising drugs, a person found in possession of drugs for personal use would not be given a criminal conviction. Instead, depending on the circumstance, they could be given a warning, a fine or be directed to drug awareness classes or to appropriate treatment. This is entirely different to the concept of “legalizing” drugs where using, buying, importing and selling drugs would be regulated by the state in the same way as alcohol and tobacco are, according to Citywide.

Guest speaker at the Seminar, Niamh Eastwood, Executive Director of Release, the national centre of expertise on drugs and drugs law in the UK, said that criminalizing people who use drugs is a tremendous waste of state resources and a penalty that is wholly disproportionate to the act.

“Ireland currently has one of the highest drug-related death rates in Europe,” she said. “It is impossible to deny that a criminal justice approach to drug use contributes to such shockingly high figures - punitive approaches lead to poor education around safer drug use and reinforce societal stigma, which can deter the people who need help from accessing health, harm reduction or treatment services.”

“Research into over 25 jurisdictions across the world that have implemented decriminalisation shows that, when done well, decriminalisation can bring excellent social, economic and health benefits to society,” Niamh Eastwood said.

“Furthermore, despite what critics of reforming drug laws believe, this approach does not result in increased drug use but instead reduces problematic drug use.

The CSO data for 2015 shows that the number of recorded offences for possession of drugs for personal use in Ireland in 2015 was 10,962 – or about 30 every day of the year. On average, over 70% of convictions for drug offences are for possession for personal use.

The Red C survey, which was carried out on-line with a national representative sample of 1,000 adults, also shows that 70% of respondents do not regard people who are addicted to drugs as criminals, but more as victims. Over four out of five people (81%) agree that all drug users should have access to the treatment they require.

The Programme for Government has made a commitment to "pursue a health-led rather than criminal justice approach to drug use".

Eastwood and Citywide stressed that decriminalisation is not a panacea and must be accompanied with investment in the relevant health and social services.