

Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign

Manifesto for Election 2016 – Tackling Ireland’s Drug Problem

- New figures released this week for 2013 (latest year for which figures are available) show the **number of drug-related deaths reached a peak with 679 fatalities**. It means that, on average, 13 people died every week, directly or indirectly, from illegal drugs, prescribed pills, and alcohol.
- These figures are shocking, but sadly will come as no surprise to those working on the frontline in drug services, who have been struggling in recent years to meet an increasingly complex range of drug misuse with significantly reduced resources.
- These figures come out as we are beginning the process of consultation on our next National Drugs Strategy (NDS); this document sets out some key points that need to be addressed by the next government in developing the new NDS.

There is no increase for drug services in Budget 2016...

Despite the evidence of the extremely serious and potentially lethal nature of our drug problem, **there was no increase in funding for community drug services in Budget 2016**. Between 2008 and 2014 the Drugs Initiative budget was cut by 37%, forcing essential local drug services on the ground to deal with cumulative cuts of up to 30%. 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 frontline services, as this is where even a relatively modest amount of investment can produce the most cost-effective outcomes into the future.

We are calling for the immediate allocation of an Emerging Needs Fund to support the delivery of drug services that can respond to the current service gaps in our local communities.

Local and Regional Drug Task Forces should be supported 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.

It's time to open up debate on decriminalisation of drug use...

Based on 20 years experience of working on the drugs issue, Citywide believes that drug use should be addressed as a social and health issue rather than as a criminal justice issue. Over 70% of drug related convictions in Ireland are for possession – the resources used to process these convictions would be better spent on health and social services for people who have drug problems. The Oireachtas Justice Committee has recommended that the possession of a small amount of illegal drugs for personal use could be dealt with by way of a civil/administrative response rather than via the criminal justice route.

There is a continuing failure to integrate alcohol in to the NDS...

Every community group on the ground continues to highlight the extent to which the widespread availability and misuse of alcohol is a core part of the polydrug problem. Considerable work was done between 2009 and 2011 to develop an integrated drugs and alcohol strategy, but since then, there has been a complete lack of clarity from government around whether this integrated approach will be implemented, how it will be done and what resources will be allocated.

We need to support the work of Drugs Task Forces by ensuring strong pro-active community representation and by making statutory engagement obligatory.

We need to support an open, honest and rational debate on decriminalisation and to implement the recommendation from the Oireachtas Justice Committee to remove criminal sanctions for possession of drugs for personal use.

Alcohol is a core part of our poly-drug use problem and it needs to be addressed as part of a properly integrated drugs and alcohol strategy.

Drugs Prevention and education work has been disproportionately affected...

The prevention/education pillar of the NDS has been affected by cuts of up to 60-70% in recent years, and good partnership models that have been developed in some areas between schools and communities are being undermined. The current NDS identifies the specific responsibility of the Dept of Education for ensuring young people are pro-actively supported to stay in school but there has been a failure to integrate this action into the NDS.

The Young People's Facilities and Services Fund (YPFSF) was put in place as part of a broad-based drugs prevention strategy and it needs to remain as a core part of that Strategy. We must ensure that the resources in the YPFSF are invested in a way that ensures access to quality youth services for young people who are at risk and who need to be diverted from problem drug use and engagement with the drugs trade.

The problem of drug-related intimidation continues to grow...

One of the key issues to be addressed is intimidation of drug users, families and communities, and a recent intimidation audit carried out by Citywide and the HRB showed the following:

- 74% of people who experienced drug-related intimidation did not report the incident to the Gardai because of fear of reprisal;
- 67% reported mental health problems as a result of intimidation;
- 37% reported experiencing physical injury as a result of intimidation.

However, almost 90% of those interviewed had reported the intimidation to a community or family support organisation and this indicates the importance of these organisations as a first port of call for people experiencing intimidation. Funding mechanisms for community development e.g. SICAP¹, need to recognise the value and importance of this work.

¹ Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme

We need to re-instate prevention and education as core elements of the NDS through retaining YPFSF as part of the NDS and strengthening the role of the Dept of Education as a partner in local education initiatives.

We need to use SICAP and other community development supports to build on the role of local community and family groups in providing support to people experiencing intimidation.

Statutory bodies have been disengaging from Interagency Partnership...

It is essential to have strong co-ordination and co-operation in delivering NDS actions involving 17 different departments, agencies and sectors across treatment, rehabilitation, education, prevention, policing and justice issues and linking with other serious social issues such as homelessness and mental health. The National Structures of the NDS were set up to ensure that this inter-agency partnership approach was implemented, but the structures are not working and government departments and agencies are not being held to account.

We need strong Political Leadership, a Junior Minister with a designated budget and full support of the Cabinet in holding all agencies and departments to account for implementation of the NDS.

For more information about these issues and demands contact:

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