

Citywide Fergus McCabe Memorial Event

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The role of community drug projects

- We deliver an integrated approach to service delivery based on the understanding that people's drug-related problems cannot be addressed in isolation from the wider issues that are impacting on their lives e.g. trauma and poverty.
- Community drug projects are experienced and innovative services with a proven track record in collaborative and partnership approaches e.g. Local and Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Forces.
- Community drug projects provide services along a continuum of care including low threshold and harm reduction responses, stabilization, Community Employment drug rehabilitation programmes, and other recovery orientated responses- across the 4 Tier model of service delivery.
- A key feature of community drug projects is the knowledge of local community issues and needs.

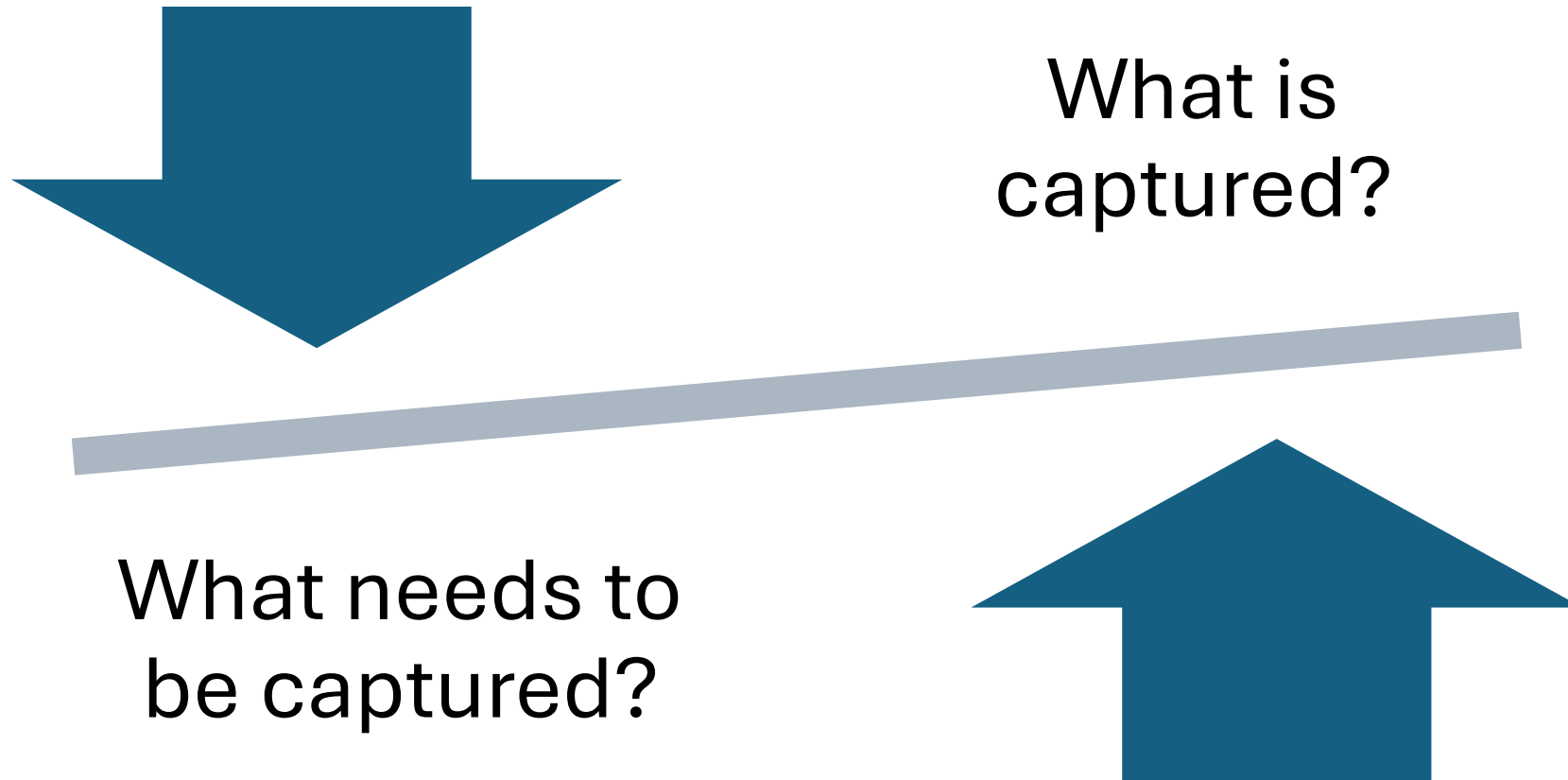
The role of community drug projects

- Our work responds to and ranges across all relevant issues e.g., housing, legal issues, family support, mental health, childcare, education, training, etc.
- We promote peer-led working so that people using the services can contribute their own knowledge and understanding to improving existing responses and developing new ones.
- We support and promote the reintegration of people back into the community and support a positive community response to the drugs issue.
- Community Drug Projects continue to innovate in developing specific programmes to address a range of issues e.g., mental health, domestic violence, alcohol use, recovery coaching etc.

Benefits and impacts of Community Drug Projects

- Understand the relationships between substance use and other social issues.
- Community drug projects can adapt and respond quickly to the changing and emerging needs in their communities.
- Community drug projects ensure rapid accessibility to interventions and supports.
- Community drug projects are responsive, providing diverse services and responses along a continuum of care – ensuring service provision gaps are filled.
- Community drug projects work beyond a ‘one size fits all approach’.
- Challenge the stigma faced by individuals and families impacted by substance use.
- Innovative responses addressing waiting lists and other blocks and barriers within the system.
- Respond to and support issues relating to individuals, families and communities.

The benefits and outcomes of Community Drug Projects?



Performance Management System

As set out in Action 6.1.50 of RHSR (2017-2025) a clearly identified action was to

“Develop an implementation plan to operationalise a Performance Measurement System by 2020 which will support RHSR, improve accountability across the statutory, community and voluntary sectors and strengthen the Drug and Alcohol Task Force model, in consultation with relevant stakeholders and sectors”.

Performance Management System

- Community Drug Projects are a unique model, and the current standard measurement of outcomes and effectiveness needs to be adjusted to reflect this uniqueness.
- An effective and fit for purpose Performance Measurement system requires a comprehensive analysis of the nature of the drugs problem in our communities and the range of factors that impact on it.
- The development of a Performance Management Framework needs to be in line with existing research and proposals “the importance of understanding how interventions to tackle problem substance use relate to this broader set of relationships involving a dense network of risk and protective factors” and “these risk and protective factors include social, economic and cultural influences as well as behavioural, environmental and institutional aspects” (Trutz Haas, 2017).
- His research states that there is a need “To recognise that projects supported by the DATFs may act in synergy with projects supported by other funding sources, just as projects can have beneficial effects not just on participants but also on the wider community” (Trutz Haas, 2017)

Implications

When our unique model of service delivery is not accurately measured there are several implications:

- For those who attend our services – individuals and families
- For our communities
- For those of us who work in and provide services
- For funders and policy makers

National Drug Treatment Reporting System

- Currently the NDTRS is the predominant tool for measuring what we do and the impact of the work from Community Drug Projects
- There are benefits to this HOWEVER also challenges

The NDTRS is an epidemiological database on treated cases problem drug and alcohol use in Ireland. It records episodes of treatment during the calendar year. It also records incidence and prevalence of drug and alcohol treatment.

Implications

If we solely rely on NDTRS and quantitative outcomes, we don't capture fully the

- essence of community drug projects
- impact of the work that we do in our projects from an individualistic, familial and wider community perspectives
- type and impact of the work that goes beyond drug specific interventions
- other health and social outcomes (RHSR Evaluation 2025)

Instead

- We get a flawed funding model using NDTRS data solely to measure our impact.

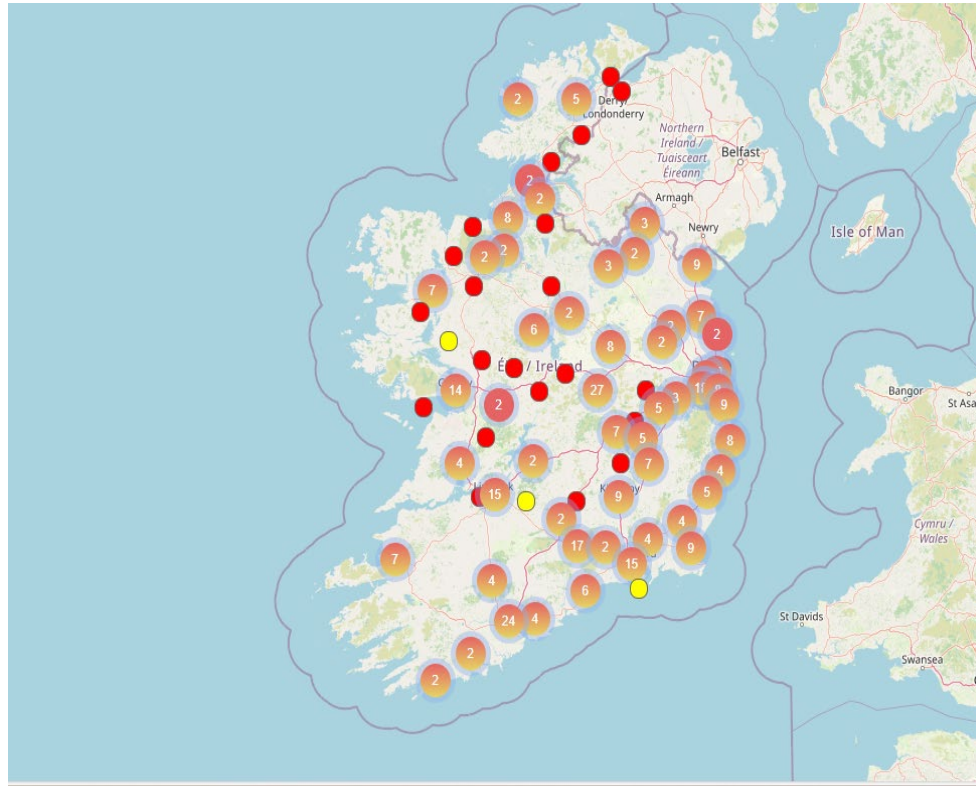
Implications

The Dept of Health is currently undertaking a national audit of drug services. The audit will have a number of objectives:

- Mapping of existing publicly funded drug services on a regional basis
- Analyse the demand for services using a population-based approach
- Identify gaps and challenges in service provision
- Inform the planning and delivery of drug services in the new health regions.

- To inform a population-based resource allocation model in the new HSE health regions, an audit of existing services is required. The intention is to engage statutory agencies that fund drug treatment services to (i) provide a snapshot of current funding levels and activities, and (b) to assist with gathering more detailed data on what is being provided in relation to the funding. NDTRS figures will also provide a measurement of activity levels. This analysis will be furnished to the HSE to inform service planning and delivery.

NDTRS and Community Drug Projects



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Health Region: HSE Dublin and Midlands

Support For:

- Family
- Alcohol & Drugs

Service Types:

- Community

Age Groups:

- Adults Only

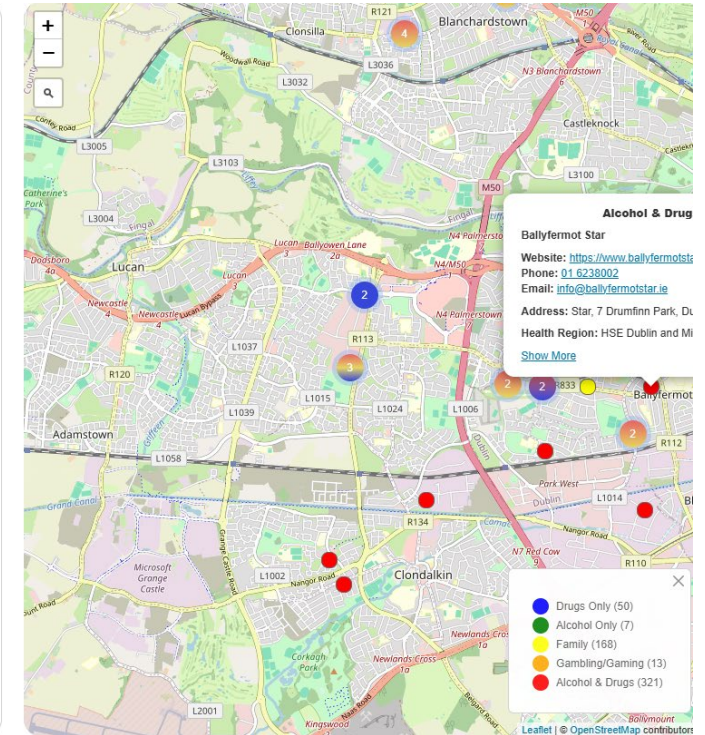
Treatment Types:

- Brief intervention
- Complementary therapy
- Drive interventions
- Group education/awareness programme
- Individual education/awareness programme
- Social and/or occupational reintegration
- Individual counselling
- Structured after-care programme
- Strengthening family programme/structured family intervention
- Medication-free therapy
- Multi-component model

NDTRS Reporting Status: **Active Centre**

Number of NDTRS cases in 2024: 173

Total number of NDTRS cases continuing treatment into 2024: 18



Evaluation of RHSR (2025)

- Stakeholders perceived an imbalance in the emphasis on outcome measurement within the NDS (2017–2025).
- Specifically, concerns were raised that the strategy prioritises service outputs and activities over the assessment of other outcomes.
- Key dimensions, such as the long-term impact of treatment, recovery success, and enhancements in family and community wellbeing, were perceived by stakeholders as insufficiently captured and evaluated.
- Although quantitative data on service provision (e.g., numbers in treatment) are available, there is an absence of qualitative and longitudinal data related to recovery trajectories and broader societal impacts. In response, stakeholders have advocated for the development of a comprehensive outcomes framework.
- Stakeholders indicated that such a structure would facilitate robust evaluation, support the integration of real-time surveillance systems to monitor emerging drug trends, and enhance understanding of intervention effectiveness over time.

Evaluation of NDS 2017-2025 Recommendations

Citizens' Assembly Recommendation⁽⁶⁾

Optimise the use of data by further investing in comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and research systems to inform evidence-based policy, track progress, and support accountability at all levels.

- Recommendation 33: The National Drugs Strategy should include a plan to strengthen the national research and data collection systems for drugs to inform evidence-based decision-making.
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What next?

Community Drug Projects are not opposed to measuring outcomes and to reviewing and evaluating our work and the impact of our work. However, a number of challenges persist that needs to be addressed.

- Existing evaluation and performance management systems do not adequately assess the impact of community drug projects. We need a measurement system or framework that aligns with the ethos of community drug projects one that is fully understanding of the complexities of communities and community drugs work to be recognized in our next NDS
- Lack of investment in frameworks that align with the work of community drug projects
- Biggest challenge is the lack of valuing of what we do and how we do it. Ensuring that the work of community drug projects is seen and valued is a priority.
- We need to create a space by saying that we need to work on this.



THANK YOU



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