

## KEY FACTS

**Drug Related deaths** are **3.5 times** higher than Road Deaths

In the twelve-year period 2004–2015 a total of **7,422** poisoning deaths and deaths among drug users.

### DRUG USE

**18,988** Estimated Opiate users in 2014<sup>1</sup>

### DRUG OFFENCES

**71%** (11,267) of Drug Offences in 2016 were for Possession for Personal Use<sup>2</sup>

### €600 Million

Estimated Annual Value of **Drugs Market** in Ireland

## DRUGS IN IRELAND

### DRUG RELATED DEATHS

**695** Drug Related Deaths in 2015<sup>3</sup> = 20,000 potential life years lost

**61%** Increase in Drug Related Deaths between 2004 - 2015

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

### DRUGS SERVICES

**37%** Cut to Drugs Initiative Funding from 2008 to 2013

**0%** Increase in funding to Community Drugs Services since 2013

### INTIMIDATION

In our study **less than 10%** of people who experienced Drug Related Intimidation<sup>4</sup> **reported** it to the Gardaí - because of the fear of reprisal

**52%** of victims of intimidation were **women and girls**

<sup>1</sup> HRB National Drugs Library. (2017) Factsheet: Opiates - the Irish situation. Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> CSO statistical release, 19 December 2016, Recorded Crime Quarter 3, 2016, Table 1

<sup>3</sup> Health Research Board (2017) National Drug-Related Deaths Index 2004 to 2015 data.

<sup>4</sup> Connolly J and Buckley L (2016) Demanding money with menace: drug-related intimidation and community violence in Ireland. Dublin, Citywide Drugs Crisis Campaign.

# 8 Key Issues in the National Drugs Strategy

## 1. Community Participation

The NDS... recognises the importance of supporting the participation of communities in key decision-making structures, so that their experience and knowledge informs the development of solutions to solve problems related to substance misuse in their areas. *Forward to NDS, Taoiseach, 2017*

In launching Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery – a health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar highlights the crucial importance of community participation in developing and delivering the NDS. If the commitment to community participation is to become a reality, then we must address the challenges that Community Representatives are facing in carrying out their role.

### Action

**Put in place a new Community Development Programme that will prioritise the development of strong community networks to facilitate and support real and meaningful community participation in the NDS.**

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## 2. Community Drug Projects

Community Drug Projects play an important role in building recovery capital by delivering an integrated holistic service on the ground in their communities in partnership with statutory agencies. *NDS 2017*

Community Drug Projects are crucial to the implementation of the new NDS,

delivering services in partnership with Statutory and Voluntary agencies, across treatment, rehabilitation, aftercare, youth services, education, childcare, community safety etc. Developing services to address problematic alcohol use, which is now an integral part of the NDS, will put more pressure on project resources. Projects have struggled through the devastation of 7 years of funding cuts, with an overall cut of 37% to the Drugs Initiative budget between 2008 and 2014. If we are serious about delivering on the new NDS, resources must now be directed back in to these frontline services.

### Action

**We are calling for the immediate allocation of an Emerging Needs Fund to support local Community Drug Projects in the delivery of services that can respond to current and emerging service gaps in our communities.**

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## 3. Drugs Task Forces

The approach requires services to work together so that people do not fall through the cracks as they navigate the different services required to meet their specific needs. *Forward to NDS, Taoiseach, 2017*

The new NDS recognises the central role of Drug and Alcohol Task Forces in co-ordinating the delivery of the Strategy at local and regional level. The Task Forces must now be supported and resourced to respond effectively to their local needs, 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.

## Action

Each Task Force should be given an immediate mandate to develop a three year action plan that sets out how the NDS actions will be implemented in their local/regional area through a collective interagency partnership response.

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## 4. Whole-of-government response

Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery represents a whole-of-government response to the problem of drug and alcohol use in Ireland. *Forward to NDS, Taoiseach, 2017*

Strong co-ordination and co-operation in delivering NDS actions is essential with 17 different departments, agencies and sectors involved and linkages needed with homeless and mental health services. We have consistently pointed out that this inter-agency partnership approach has not been working in recent years. A new National Committee structure has been put in place to address this problem and the effectiveness of this structure must now be closely monitored by government.

## Action

The Taoiseach's Department should appoint a senior official to the NDS National structures to ensure direct accountability of all agencies at national, regional and local level for their active participation in implementing the new NDS.

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## 5. Decriminalisation

Treating substance abuse and drug addiction as a public health issue, rather than as a criminal justice issue, helps individuals, helps families, and helps communities. *Forward to NDS, Taoiseach, 2017*

Citywide welcomes the setting up of the joint Health/Justice Working Group to look at alternative approaches in light of the recommendation by the Oireachtas Justice Committee 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. However Citywide's exclusion from membership of the Working Group is wholly unjustified and unacceptable, in light of our track record and lead role on the issue of decriminalisation over many years.

## Action

Citywide should be immediately appointed as members of the Working Group on Alternative Approaches to possession of drugs for personal use.

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## 6. Alcohol

Many Irish people engage in harmful drinking patterns and alcohol has become a major drugs issue. *Forward to NDS, Taoiseach, 2017*

The new NDS commits to delivering an integrated public health approach to drugs and alcohol as a key priority. Every community group on the ground has highlighted for years the extent to which the widespread availability and misuse of alcohol is a core part of the polydrug problem and it is essential that resources are now allocated to deliver

on this commitment. A key first step is the passing into law of the Public Health Alcohol Bill.

## Action

**The Public Health Alcohol Bill should be passed without any further delay followed by a realistic budget allocation for delivering on the commitment to addressing alcohol misuse as part of the new NDS.**

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## 7. Young People

*Rates of drug use in Ireland have risen significantly over the past decade, with the greatest increases among younger people. Forward to NDS, Taoiseach, 2017*

We need to work with and provide services for our young people that are relevant and effective in reducing their risks of problem drug use and engagement in the drugs trade. The NDS includes an action to develop a new scheme to provide services for young people, focused on socially and economically disadvantaged communities.

## Action

**Ensure that the new scheme for young people is developed through a partnership approach involving youth services, (in particular those involved in YPFSF), schools and community drug projects and that young people from the target group are directly involved in the design and development of the new scheme.**

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## 8. Drug related Intimidation

*(The NDS) ...outlines the key law enforcement strategies to protect the public from the harms of illegal drug markets. Forward to NDS, Taoiseach, 2017*

One of the major gaps in the new NDS is the lack of new actions to address the issue of drug-related intimidation in our communities. The Citywide research, Demanding Money with Menace shows that 74% of people who experienced drug-related intimidation did not report the incident to the Gardaí because of fear of reprisal and the evaluation of the FSN/Garda Intimidation Reporting Programme will also look at blocks to reporting.

## Action

**The NDS document states that the NDS Standing Sub-Committee will develop, implement and monitor responses to drug-related intimidation as a matter of priority. This commitment must be acted on immediately by bringing together all the relevant stakeholders to develop an action plan on drug-related intimidation.**

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## About Citywide

Citywide is a national network of community organisations and activists that are involved in responding to Ireland's drugs crisis. We represent the views of the community sector at national policy committees.

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See our Stop the Stigma Campaign:  
[www.stopthestigma.ie](http://www.stopthestigma.ie)