

**Statement by former Ministers with responsibility for the  
National Drugs Strategy 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019**

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We are calling on the government to act as a matter of urgency to restore confidence in the National Drugs Strategy, as the partnership approach which has been at the heart of the Strategy since 1996 is now in danger of collapse. Having been adopted by the State in 1996 as a radical new approach to drugs policy in Ireland, this approach has been reaffirmed by every successive government since, recognising that community participation and interagency working is crucial to an effective response to an increasingly complex and challenging drugs problem.

When launching its new National Drugs Strategy *Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery* in July 2017 the current government recommitted to this approach, stating that “partnership between the statutory, community and voluntary sectors was a major factor in the success of previous strategies and will continue to be the cornerstone of the new strategy”. In particular, the Taoiseach, in his foreword to the Strategy, states “It 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.”

Two years on from the launch of *Reducing Harm Supporting Recovery* we are concerned and frustrated at the failure of government to meet these commitments. At national, regional and local level, decision-making authority is being taken away from the Strategy’s partnership structures and is reverting to the Dept of Health and the HSE, who now make the key decisions centrally and without consultation with communities. The role of the Drug and Alcohol Task Forces in delivering on the Strategy at local and regional level is being undermined, with Task Forces being treated as if they are HSE-led projects rather than interagency partnership bodies with a collective responsibility to respond to local needs.

Communities are being devastated by the impact of the drugs problem. Drug-related deaths in Ireland are at the highest figure ever; new drugs appear regularly on the illicit market while familiar drugs such as cannabis are becoming more potent, and far too many people are living daily with the nightmare of drug-related intimidation and violence. The worst impact of drug-related harms continues to be in the most disadvantaged communities that have the least resources to respond. Now, more than ever, we need our National Drugs Strategy to work.

We are calling on the Taoiseach to appoint representation at a senior level from his own Department to the National Oversight Committee (NOC) to ensure that the partnership structures, i.e. the NOC, its sub-committees and the Task Forces, are supported at the highest level of government to do the job that is set out for them in the National Drugs Strategy. This also requires an immediate re-investment of resources in the Strategy so that budgets lost to local areas between 2008 and 2014 are restored.