

St Patrick's
Mental Health Services



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Submission to Department of Health on the New National Drugs Strategy 2017 onwards

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Services

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SUBMISSION FROM ST PATRICK'S MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR THE NEW NATIONAL DRUGS STRATEGY 2017

St Patrick's Mental Health Services is Ireland's largest independent mental health service provider providing inpatient, day and community mental health services through our approved centres and Dean Clinics. We provide addiction and dual diagnosis treatment services in addition to adolescent and adult mental health services through specialist multidisciplinary teams. St Patrick's Mental Health Services welcomes the news that the Department of Health is developing a new National Drugs Strategy to run from 2017 onwards. It recognises the efforts made under the existing National Drug Strategy (NDS; 2009-2016) to tackle problem drug use in Ireland but more needs to be done.

St Patrick's Mental Health Services are very much aware that drug misuse continues to be a significant problem in Ireland from what we see on a day-to-day basis in our addiction and dual diagnosis treatment services and as outlined in the recent Health Research Board publication: Irish National Focal Point to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (Ireland: national report for 2015).

A key strength of the current National Drug Strategy (2009-2016) has been the bringing together of departments, agencies and the community & voluntary sectors to develop a collective response to tackling the drugs problem. The value and importance of this partnership to include the independent sector is recognised and should continue to underpin the implementation of the new Strategy from 2017 over its lifetime.

St Patrick's Mental Health Services was very positive about the fact that in 2009, the Government gave approval for the development of a combined National Substance Misuse Strategy to cover both alcohol and drugs. This was due to the fact that during the extensive consultation process for the current National Drug Strategy held during 2008, there was widespread public concern in relation to the problem use of alcohol - both as a stand-alone public health issue and in association with illicit drug use. Alcohol misuse is to be incorporated from the start into the new National Drug Strategy which is very much welcomed by St Patrick's Mental Health Service. There is a developing scientific knowledge of what strategies work to reduce alcohol-related harm. The WHO has highlighted policies

and programmes that have been shown to be effective in tackling alcohol misuse: (Second Report of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Expert Committee on Problems Related to Alcohol Consumption, 2007). These include: reducing the demand for alcohol through taxation and pricing mechanisms; regulating and restricting the availability of alcoholic beverages; regulating the marketing of alcoholic beverages (in particular those practices that influence younger people); enactment of appropriate drink - driving policies; implementing screening programmes and brief interventions against hazardous and harmful use of alcohol (e.g. in primary care and Emergency Departments); and providing easily accessible treatment services for people with alcohol - related disorders. Such policies and programmes should be further developed in the new National Drugs Strategy 2017. St Patrick's Mental Health Services is also very positive about the fact that in the new National Strategy 2017 "drugs" not only includes alcohol but also over-the-counter medicine (OTCs), such as codeine-based prescriptions, and prescribed medications such as benzodiazepines as these substances are a growing problem in Irish society.

Programmes aimed at preventing harmful substance use among young people should be a core part of this new National Drug Strategy. This area should strongly consider programmes to prevent use, delay use and reduce harmful patterns of use and should take place at different stages ranging from early childhood, through school years into young adulthood. The new National Strategy 2017 should continue to ensure that the opportunity exists for all those experiencing problems with substance use to access treatment and other services and to make progress towards full participation in society.

In relation to mental health, improving access to treatment for co-morbid mental disorders is an important issue for improving outcomes for people with drug problems. Although A Vision for Change in 2006 stated that uncomplicated addiction problems were the remit of Addiction services, the importance of improving access to mental health treatment for co-morbid mental health problems in drug misuse is recognised and recommendations for new services such as dual diagnosis services made. However, ten years on progress in this area has been limited. A process to review and update A Vision for Change is also underway. This presents a unique opportunity for addiction and mental health services to jointly address the needs of people with co-occurring addiction and mental health problems. Common goals in the two strategies could lead to joint actions and targets set in order to promote progress in this area. Ireland's National Strategy to Reduce Suicide 2015-2020 identifies the risks and

links between suicide and alcohol and drug problems and again would provide an opportunity for collaborative working on shared targets to reduce such devastating outcomes.

Families and significant others affected by a loved one's substance use problems are a key group requiring consideration in the new National Strategy from several different perspectives: there is a need to consider provision for family support to safeguard the children of people with substance use problems; family members of people with drug and alcohol problems suffer significant harms, such as mental distress, and require support in their own right; and the international evidence shows the value of families in supporting treatment and recovery. The new National Drug Strategy should take into account these different aspects of family involvement. Access to skills-based Family Programmes designed to influence their loved one's behaviour towards recovery and help reduce the negative emotions that comes with living with substance misuse should be considered in the new National Drugs Strategy.

St Patrick's Mental Health Services would like to commend the excellent research undertaken by the Health Research Board on substance misuse in Ireland. On-going high quality research needs to continue to be undertaken to generate reliable and accurate information and statistics about substance misuse in Ireland. This would result in an increased understanding of the factors that influence people (including young people) in Ireland to misuse drugs and lead an improvement in the availability of data to accurately inform decisions on initiatives to tackle problem substance use. Research around drug use behaviour should be adequately funded and new services or initiatives developed under the New National Strategy, 2017 should be evaluated with appropriate information systems/performance measurements to ensure meaningful outcomes are achieved. There is a need to measure quantity, quality and impact of interventions. The development of a structure that ensures that research is integrated within the strategy implementation process is important.

In conclusion, since 1746 St Patrick's Mental Health Service has provided high quality mental health care and addiction treatment, has continued to promote mental health awareness and strives to protect the rights and integrity of those experiencing mental health difficulties. We are delighted to participate in the public consultation process that will inform the development of a new National Drugs Strategy and hope that the independent sector can continue to contribute in a positive way to improving the lives and families of those with substance misuse problems.

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