

FIND THE EVIDENCE: NEW KNOWLEDGE RESOURCES FROM THE NDC

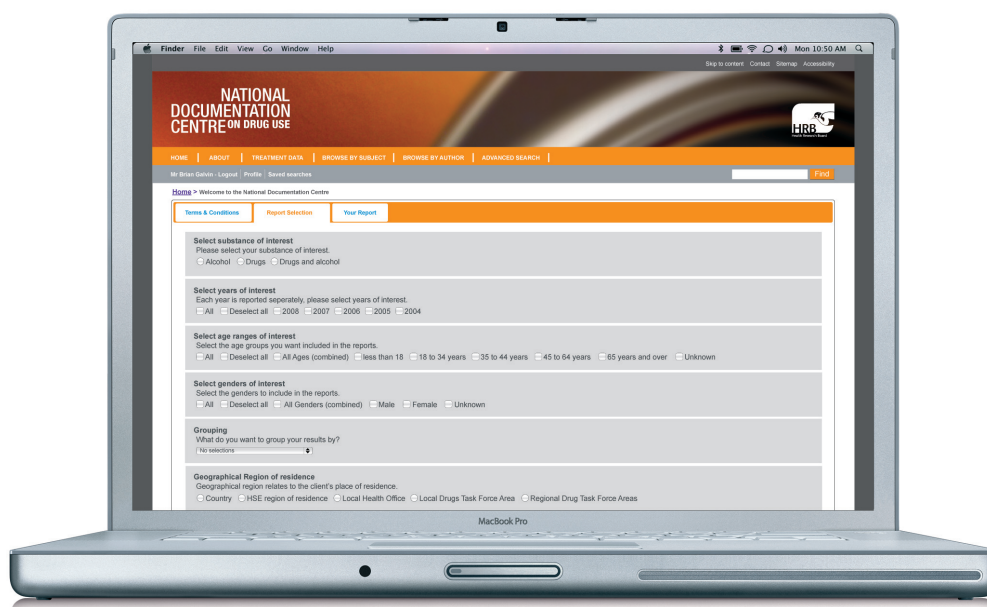
Since 2002 the National Documentation Centre on Drug Use (NDC) has contributed to the development of the knowledge base informing practice and policy in the field of substance use in Ireland. In 2009 we launched our new website and research repository, a comprehensive and accessible database of Irish research and policy documents.

In the last year or so we have added several new information resources which demonstrate our commitment to providing an innovative, responsive and efficient service to those taking an evidence-based approach in the policy-making, research and education arenas. The most recent additions to our resources and services are described in detail below.

LAUNCH OF NDTRS INTERACTIVE TABLES

The NDC achieved an important milestone in December with the launch of the National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS) interactive tables. Following completion of the development of the NDC website in 2009, the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs asked the NDC to find a way to enable stakeholders to access and use NDTRS data. It was felt that this could be best achieved by making treatment data available online in the form of interactive tables which would allow the stakeholder to choose the treatment group they were interested in and then pick the variables relevant to their query.

NDTRS staff worked with NDC staff to develop the specification for the interactive tables. The existing infrastructure of the user authentication system of the NDC website was used, as this allows the NDC to control levels of access. Visitors to the website can sign in to both the main NDC database and the new interactive table module using this system. The interactive table module was developed using the same AJAX technology employed in the NDC site, which will ensure a seamless and efficient service for visitors to various parts of the site. The interactive tables are a flexible and user-friendly tool, making high-quality data available and easily accessible. The tables can be used for planning purposes, to identify gaps in service provision and to monitor trends in substance use.



The National Drug Treatment Reporting System

The NDTRS receives data on treatment for problem alcohol and drug use from statutory and non-statutory services, including residential centres, community-based addiction services, general practices and prison services. For the purpose of the NDTRS, treatment is broadly defined as 'any activity which aims to ameliorate the psychological, medical or social state of individuals who seek help for their substance misuse problems'. Clients who attend needle-exchange services are not included in this reporting system. From 2004 onwards, clients who report alcohol as their main problem drug have been recorded by the system. Drug treatment options include one or more of the following: medication (detoxification, methadone reduction, substitution programmes and psychiatric treatment), brief intervention, counselling, group therapy, family therapy, psychotherapy, complementary therapy, and/or life-skills training.

Compliance with the NDTRS requires that one form be completed for each new client coming for first treatment and for each previously treated client returning to treatment for problem drug use. Service providers at treatment centres throughout Ireland collect data on each individual who attends for first treatment or returns to treatment in a calendar year. Health Research Board (HRB) staff compile anonymous, aggregated data, which are analysed and reported at national and EU levels.

The main elements of the reporting system are defined as follows:

- **All cases treated** – describes individuals who receive treatment for problem drug and/or alcohol use at each treatment centre in a calendar year, and includes:
 - **Cases assessed only** – individuals who were assessed but who did not progress to treatment
 - **Previously treated cases** – individuals who were treated previously for problem drug/alcohol use at any treatment centre and have returned to treatment in the reporting year;
 - **New cases treated** – individuals who have never been treated for problem drug/alcohol use; and
 - **Status unknown cases** – individuals whose status with respect to previous treatment for problem drug/alcohol use is not known.

In the case of the data for 'previously treated cases', there is a possibility that individuals appear more than once in the database: for example, where a person receives treatment at more than one centre or at the same centre more than once per year.

Who can use the interactive tables?

Anyone who is interested in drug and alcohol treatment in Ireland may use the tables. This includes all our stakeholders: Office of the Minister for Drugs; Department of Health and Children; HSE; regional and local drugs task forces; service providers; service users; researchers; and students.

Terms and conditions of use

Anyone wishing to download and use the NDTRS data for analysis must accept and abide by the terms and conditions of use. These conditions safeguard the integrity and confidentiality of the data. They include an undertaking not to publish tables where any individual cell contains less than five cases, acknowledging the NDTRS as the source of the data and providing the NDTRS and the NDC with copies of all documents in which the NDTRS data are used.

Type of data

The tables contain data for the years 2004 to 2008. The database is updated every year and the most recent annual figures are added to the tables as soon as they are ready for publication. National data are available in aggregated form, thus ensuring client confidentiality. The interactive tables allow a download of annual figures for treated cases which can be broken down by main problem substance type, and by basic demographic and geographical variables. Other treatment-related variables include source of referral, route of administration (of main problem substance) and frequency of use. The responsibility for interpretation of the data lies fully with the user.

Output

When a user has generated a report the results can then be exported to Excel or CVS file as preferred and used as required.

Contact

If you have any queries, please contact the NDC at 01 2345 175 or ndc@hrb.ie

EVIDENCE RESOURCES IN THE NDC

The primary function of the NDC is to gather and disseminate Irish drug and alcohol research material. We recognise that practitioners and researchers also require access to the best available international evidence.

NDC staff have compiled a database of reports, reviews and guidelines that provide evidence for drug and alcohol interventions. There are currently over 200 full-text items available. Items are catalogued so that you can search all of these resources through the NDC website.

You can access the 'evidence-based resources' search page through the NDC homepage at www.drugsandalcohol.ie. You can search by drug or intervention type as well as by title, author, date or publisher.

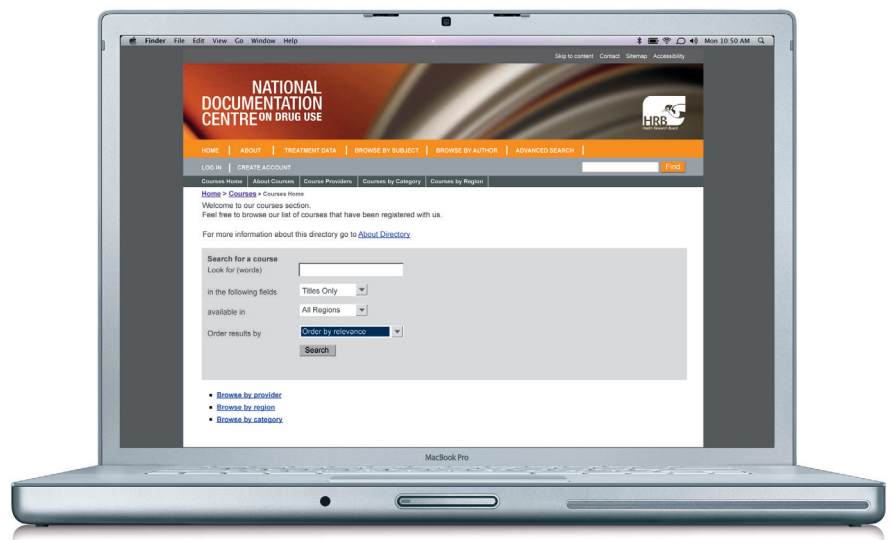
These are some of the evidence sources that you can search:

- Addiction Technology Transfer Center Network
- Cochrane Library
- European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)
- National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE)
- National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)
- National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices (NREPP), SAMHSA.
- National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse
- World Health Organization mhGAP Evidence Resource Centre

ONLINE DIRECTORY OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL COURSES

The NDC has developed an online directory of courses and training programmes on drug misuse in Ireland. Visitors to the website may search for a course by keyword, or browse the directory by course title, region or provider.

Most courses refer directly to drugs or addiction, though others aim to develop broad skills, such as supervision, facilitation and counselling techniques, which may be of interest to those working in this area. A wide variety of training standards, methods and approaches are represented in the directory. The NDC does not assess the quality of courses listed; we present information as supplied by the course co-ordinators on course length, assessment, qualifications and accreditation. Although many providers cater specifically for people in their locality, some also offer courses on a regional or national basis.



We will update the directory in early 2011 and throughout the year. Course co-ordinators who wish to revise an existing entry or include a new course may request an application form from mdunne@hrb.ie

CURRENT RESEARCH AND EVALUATION DATABASE

The NDC obtains information from researchers in the area of substance use to add to our current research and evaluation database. This database records the title of each project, its aims, the research or evaluation methods used, the names of commissioning bodies, funding details and the names of the researchers and evaluators involved in the project. The database includes details of current projects only.

This resource increases awareness of current research and helps researchers identify who is working in their areas of interest. Once you have registered with this service you can submit your own project, update the details and edit your own profile. Please contact mnelson@hrb.ie for further information.

EVENTS

Details on upcoming events, including conferences, seminars and workshops, are available through the events module on the NDC website. Please contact ndc@hrb.ie for further information or to submit information about an event.

ONLINE COURSE IN EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICE FOR DRUG PREVENTION WORKERS

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In 2010 the National Documentation Centre piloted an online course in evidence-based practice in drug prevention and education work.

The course provided instruction in a range of information-literacy skills which helped the participants understand how evidence in their field is produced, how this evidence can be found and how research-based knowledge can be used to shape policy and bring about better health outcomes.

The course comprised seven modules covering the following topics: the policy context; the research infrastructure; the evidence for drug prevention interventions; evidence-based medicine; searching the scientific literature; critical appraisal; and data sources.

The pilot course was very successful and the NDC is currently preparing a submission for course accreditation by an Irish university. We will be running the course again beginning in March 2011. If you are interested in participating or wish to learn more about the course please contact Brian Galvin at (01) 2345 168 or bgalvin@hrb.ie.