



Report to:



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

Review of the National Sexual Health Strategy

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full term
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
CIDR	Computerised Infectious Disease Reporting System
COALESCE	Collaborative Alliances for Societal Challenges
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DCEDIY (formerly DCYA)	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (formerly Department of Children and Youth Affairs)
DoE (formerly DES)	Department of Education (formerly Department of Education and Skills)
DoH	Department of Health
DSGBV	Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
EMI	Emergency Management of Injuries
EMIS	European Men Who Have Sex With Men Internet Survey
gbMSM	Gay, Bisexual and Other Men Who Have Sex With Men
GHN	Gay Health Network
GMHS	Gay Men's Health Service
HAART	Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy
HBV	Hepatitis B Virus
HIQA	Health Information and Quality Authority
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPSC	Health Protection Surveillance Centre
HPV	Human Papillomavirus
HSE	Health Service Executive
HSE SHCPP	HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme
ICGP	Irish College of General Practitioners
IPV	Intimate Partner Violence
LARC	Long-acting Reversible Contraceptives
LGBTI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Intersex
MRL	Microbiological Reference Laboratory
NASC	National AIDS Strategy Committee
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCDS	National Condom Distribution Service
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
NIAC	National Immunisation Advisory Committee
NIO	National Immunisation Office
NSHS	National Sexual Health Strategy
NYCI	National Youth Council of Ireland

PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
PEP	Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (medication to prevent HIV after a possible exposure – must be started within 72hrs of exposure)
PN	Partner Notification
PrEP	Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (medication that reduces a person's chances of getting HIV from sex or injection drug use)
RSE	Relationship and Sexuality Education Programme
SATUs	Sexual Assault Treatment Units
SAVI	Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland Study
SHPO	Sexual Health Promotion Officer
SENYPIC	Sexual Health and Sexuality Education Needs. Assessment of Young People in Care in Ireland
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SHAG	Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
SSSTDI	Society for the Study of Sexually Transmitted Infections in Ireland
STBRL	Sexually Transmitted Bacterial Reference Laboratory
STI(s)	Sexually Transmitted Infection(s)
TasP	Treatment as Prevention
UNAIDS	United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UnPAC	Unplanned Pregnancy and Abortion Care
VOD	Video on Demand
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive Summary

Sexual health and wellbeing is a fundamental aspect of the human identity and life experience. The World Health Organisation (WHO) definition of sexual health is:

A state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled¹.

In October 2015, Ireland's *National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 – 2020* (NSHS) was launched as a strategic framework for the sexual health and wellbeing of the population. This is the first time Ireland has developed a coordinated approach at a national level to address sexual health and wellbeing and to reduce negative sexual health outcomes. The underpinning ambition of the strategy is that everyone in Ireland experiences positive sexual health and wellbeing, and has access to high quality sexual health information, education, and services. The strategy is characterised by a life course approach to sexual health which recognises and accepts the importance of developing healthy sexuality throughout childhood and adolescence, and builds on this principle for positive sexual health and wellbeing into adulthood and older age. The NSHS was extended to 2022 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted on every aspect of life in Ireland and as such created challenges for programmes, initiatives, and innovations that seek to improve access, engagement, and interventions associated with sexual health.

This document is an independent review of the NSHS. The progress of the current strategy is considerable, with significant legislative, policy, epidemiological, and environmental changes being realised during its lifecycle. The actions and priorities set out in the NSHS, and the subsequent implementation plans, are assessed thematically – an assessment of Progress Made or No Progress Made is assigned to each area. Of the 56 Priority Actions, 49 are assessed as having been successfully progressed.

The review benefited from significant contribution from stakeholders associated with sexual and reproductive health, with both individual and organisational submissions providing high levels of insight and influence. The contributions of stakeholders are set out in this paper in terms of thematic ambitions for the next NSHS.

A section of this review provides a brief profile of aspects of the sexual health strategies of three countries: France, the Netherlands, and Spain, with examples of practice provided and areas of difference highlighted.

A list of indicative recommendations is set out for consideration to build on the achievements of the NSHS 2015 – 2020, and to optimise the development of a new strategy. It is understood that a number of the current priorities and actions will progress further into the NSHS 2023 – 2030. A series of 32 recommendations is provided, together with an overview of the caveats relating to a number of our findings. The ongoing collaboration and development of strategic planning with stakeholder bodies across sectors and specialties, with shared interests, may provide additional benefits into the next phase of the NSHS.

¹ WHO (2006) Defining Sexual Health—Report of a Technical Consultation on Sexual Health 28-31 January 2002, Geneva. Sexual Health Document Series, World Health Organization, Geneva

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

Crowe was commissioned by the Department of Health (DoH) in July 2022, to undertake an independent review of the National Sexual Health Strategy². The consultancy team was supported and guided by a review support group with senior representatives from both the Department and the HSE.

1.2 Project Background

Sexual health and wellbeing is a fundamental aspect of the human identity and life experience. It is a key public health issue: access to quality sexual health services improves the health and wellbeing of individuals and populations and provides a challenge for services and policymakers. Sexual and reproductive health is multifaceted and complex, encompassing more than physical health. It is affected by wider determinants, and those who are most vulnerable to sexual ill-health are also those who may experience other challenges within their lives.

The *National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 - 2020* (NSHS) is Ireland's first national framework for sexual health and wellbeing, with the aim to improve sexual health and wellbeing and reduce negative sexual health outcomes.

The Strategy is based on a life course approach, recognising the importance of the development of healthy attitudes to sexuality throughout childhood and adolescence and the foundation this provides for positive sexual health and wellbeing into adulthood and older age.

The NSHS sets out an ambitious approach to improving sexual health and reproductive health outcomes across all communities, with three goals:

- **Goal 1** - Sexual health promotion, education, and prevention: Everyone living in Ireland will receive comprehensive and age-appropriate sexual health education and/or information and will have access to appropriate prevention and promotion services.
- **Goal 2** - Sexual health services: Equitable, accessible, and high-quality sexual health services that are targeted and tailored to need will be available to everyone.
- **Goal 3** - Sexual health intelligence: Robust and high-quality sexual health information will be generated to underpin policy, practice, service planning, and strategic monitoring.

The Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme³ (SHCPP) is a Policy Priority Programme within the Health Service Executive (HSE), with responsibility for implementing the NSHS and identifying the Priority Actions required to deliver the aims and goals of the strategy.

² Department of Health, *National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 – 2020*, October 2015 www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/national-sexual-health-strategy/national-sexual-health-strategy.pdf

³ Department of Health, 2021, *Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme* www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthwellbeing/our-priority-programmes/sexual-health/

1.3 Terms of Reference

The project task was to provide an independent review of the *National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 – 2020* (NSHS). The strategy was extended to 2022, to account for the delays in implementation resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pace, scale, and volume of change associated with sexual and reproductive health in recent years has been notable. Since 2015, Ireland has introduced a wide range of additional schemes and initiatives.

The implementation of the NSHS is led by the SHCPP and the consultancy team benefited from positive support from the NSHS Review Group.

The terms of this review were set out to include:

- Review of the original strategy and associated reports;
- Review of evidence arising from stakeholder consultation and submissions;
- Review of similar sexual and reproductive health services in exemplar countries;
- Consideration of the rapidly evolving policy and legislative landscape;
- Recommendations qualified from evidence and data emerging from stakeholder consultations and policy and research materials, in line with international best practice;
- Identification of priorities for action in any future iteration of the strategy.

1.4 Our Approach

The methodology undertaken for the review of the NSHS is set out below, incorporating the following key activities A to G.

Task	Description	Status
A	Project initiation Formal initiation of the review project with the NSHS policy leads and the HSE implementation team, whose participation from the outset was necessary to ensure all perspectives were covered.	<i>Completed</i>
B	Documentary analysis and assessment This task provided a strong foundational understanding of the NSHS, how it has been implemented to date, progress made, its context and how it aligns with relevant and related policy and research.	<i>Completed</i>
C	Identification of gaps, bottlenecks, and challenges Assessment and identification of gaps, bottlenecks, and challenges, to gain a full picture of overlaps, synergies, and challenges for the implementation of the strategy.	<i>Completed</i>
D	International comparator review This stage contextualised the NSHS from an international perspective through a comparison of sexual and reproductive health policies in our sample comparator countries: France, Netherlands, and Spain.	<i>Completed</i>

E	Review of stakeholder consultations and analysis A comprehensive stakeholder engagement exercise was completed in 2021 to gain insight and informed opinions. The evidence from this exercise, together with additional stakeholder consultation undertaken during the project, was reviewed to identify key themes and opportunities to influence the next phase of the strategy.	<i>Completed</i>
F	Development of conclusions and recommendations This activity encompasses the process of developing and testing our conclusions and recommendations.	<i>Completed</i>
G	Reporting Production of a draft and final report. Target delivery of final report is January 2023	<i>First Draft Report Completed</i> <i>Final Report Completed</i>

2 Context: Policy and Legislative Initiatives

2.1 Overview

Although the NSHS was launched in 2015, the priorities, goals, aims, and recommendations set out have facilitated important changes, adaptations, and innovations to allow sexual health and reproductive services to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, other determinants of health and wellbeing, and emerging morbidities.

This section provides an inexhaustive selection of factors that both influence and inform the delivery of the NSHS and the associated SHCPP Implementation Plan, but also represent the outcomes of the associated initiatives, interventions, and programmes. Further outcomes and achievements are provided in Section 5 of this report.

2.2 Chronology of Policies, Publications, and Legislation

2.2.1 Legislation

The following identifies the relevant legislation affecting NSHS since 2015.

2022

- Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No.2) Act, 2022, provided the legislative framework for provide free prescription and emergency contraception for 17- to 25-year-old women, girls, and other people identifying as transgender or non-binary for who hormonal contraception is deemed clinically suitable⁴.

2020

- Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020⁵.

2019

- Termination of pregnancy was legalised on January 1st, 2019. The law providing the legislative framework for termination of pregnancy services in Ireland, is the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018⁶.

2018

- Referendum held on repeal of the 8th Amendment to the Constitution to allow for the introduction of termination of pregnancy services in Ireland.

⁴ Government of Ireland, 2022, *Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) (No.2) Act 2022*
<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2022/68/>

⁵ Government of Ireland, 2020, *Harassment, Harmful Communications and Related Offences Act 2020*
<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2020/act/32/enacted/en/>

⁶ Government of Ireland, 2018, *Health Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy Act 2018*
<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/bills/bill/2018/105/>

2017

- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017, including the criminalisation of the purchase of sexual services⁷.

2.2.2 Policies and Publications

A range of policies and publications are highlighted, by year of launch, set across the seven years of the NSHS timeframe. These are typically available through the www.sexualwellbeing.ie resource, in the 'For Professionals' section.

2022

- *Unplanned Pregnancy and Abortion Care (UnPAC) Study*, published to document women's experiences of abortion and unplanned pregnancy support services since the implementation of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018⁸.
- Completion and publication of the *National Condom Distribution Service Report of activities for 2021*⁹.
- *Information Summary about Teenage Pregnancy in Ireland 2000-2020*¹⁰.
- New information summary on importance of parental communication on relationships and sexuality, to augment existing resources¹¹.
- Clinical management guidance for individuals taking HIV PrEP within the context of a combination HIV (and STI) prevention approach in Ireland, Version 2.1 May 2022; Version 2.2 September 2022¹².
- *The Pilot Online STI Testing Service in Ireland, Evaluation Report*¹³.

2021

- Publication of the *Scoping Study to Inform a Survey of Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviours on Sexual Health and Wellbeing and Crisis Pregnancy among the General Population in Ireland*.
- Publication of Tusla / SHCPP resource: *Healthy Sexuality and Relationship Development: Education and Support Needs of Children and Young People in Care Toolkit*¹⁴.

⁷ Government of Ireland, 2017, *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017* <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2017/act/2/enacted/en/html>

⁸ Conlon et al, 2022, *Unplanned Pregnancy and Abortion Care UnPAC Study* <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/unpac.pdf>

⁹ Department of Health, 2021, *National Condom Distribution Service, Report of Activities for 2021* https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/national-condom-distribution-service/national-condom-distribution-overview/ncds-2021_final.pdf

¹⁰ Department of Health, 2022, *Information Summary about Teenage Pregnancy in Ireland 2000-2020* <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/36381/1/teenage-pregnancy-information-summary-final.pdf>

¹¹ HSE, 2022, 'HSE launches new Relationship & Sexuality resources to support parents to have ongoing conversations with their children, adolescents and young adults' <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/media/pressrel/hse-launches-new-relationship-sexuality-resources-to-support-parents-to-have-ongoing-conversations-with-their-children-adolescents-and-young-adults.html>

¹² Department of Health, 2022, *Clinical management guidance for individuals taking HIV PrEP within context of a combination of HIV (and STI) prevention approach in Ireland*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/prep-information-for-service-providers/guidelines-for-the-management-of-prep-in-ireland-final-may-2022.pdf>

¹³ Harbottle, Justin, Shaw, A Torm, Baraitser, Paula, Lyons, Fiona, O'Connell, Nicola, Hurley, Caroline, and Metrustry, Rachael, 2022, *The Pilot Online STI Testing Service in Ireland, 2021: Evaluation Report* <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/the-pilot-online-sti-testing-service-in-ireland-2021-evaluation-report.pdf>

¹⁴ HSE and Tusla, 2021, *Healthy sexuality and relationship development: The education and support needs of children and young people in care. A Toolkit for Practitioners* https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/HSRD_Toolkit.pdf

- Completion and publication of the *National Condom Distribution Service Report of activities for 2020*¹⁵.
- Publication of *Guidance on Mycoplasma Genitalium testing and management in Ireland*¹⁶.

2020

- *Talking About Sex and Sexual Behaviour of Young People in Ireland* report was launched by Minister Frank Feighan, Minister of State for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy¹⁷.
- *Clusters of health behaviours among young adults in Ireland* report¹⁸, released as part of the joint research programme with the ESRI.
- Completion and publication of the *National Condom Distribution Service Report of activities for 2019*¹⁹.
- Development of a set of STI and HIV indicators to contribute to the development of a second-generation sexual health surveillance system for Ireland.
- COALESCE award research studies to examine potential support the implementation of the NSHS.

2019

- Publication of the *EMIS-2017 Ireland, Findings from the European Men who have sex with Men internet survey*²⁰.
- Clinical management guidance for individuals taking HIV PrEP within the context of a combination HIV (and STI) prevention approach in Ireland²¹.
- *National Standards for the Delivery and Management of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV* issued²².
- Publication of *Assessing the Preparedness of Public STI Clinics for HIV-PrEP implementation*²³.

¹⁵ HSE, 2021, *National Condom Distribution Service Report of activities for 2020*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/ncds-2020_final-draft.pdf

¹⁶ Mycoplasma Genitalium Working Group, 2021, *Guidance on Mycoplasma genitalium testing and management in Ireland, January 2021* <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/guidance-on-m-gen-testing-and-management-2021.pdf>

¹⁷ Feighan et al, 2020 *Scoping Study to Inform a Survey of Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviours on Sexual Health and Wellbeing and Crisis Pregnancy among the General Population in Ireland*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/scoping-study_sexual-health-and-wellbeing-and-crisis-pregnancy_2021.pdf

¹⁸ Nolan et al, 2020, *Clusters of Health Behaviors Among Young Adults in Ireland*, https://www.esri.ie/system/files/publications/RS101_0.pdf

¹⁹ HSE, 2019, *National Condom Distribution Service, Report of Activities for 2019* <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/national-condom-distribution-service/national-condom-distribution-overview/ncds-report-2019.pdf>

²⁰ HSE & HPSC, 2019, *EMIS-2017 Ireland, Findings from the European Men who have sex with Men internet survey (Ireland)*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/emis-final.pdf>

²¹ HSE, 2019, *Clinical management guidance for individuals taking HIV PrEP within the context of a combination of HIV (and STI) prevention approach in Ireland*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/prep-information-for-service-providers/guidelines-for-the-management-of-prep-in-ireland.pdf>

²² HSE, 2019, *National Standards for the Delivery and Management of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/prep-information-for-service-providers/national-standards-for-hiv-prep-in-ireland.pdf>

²³ Tecklenborg et al, 2019, *Assessing the Preparedness of Public STI Clinics for HIV-PrEP Implementation* https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/assessing-the-preparedness-of-public-sti-clinics-for-hiv-prep-implementation_final.pdf

- Publication of a logic model and theory of change for HIV Ireland’s MPOWER outreach programme for gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM)²⁴.
- Completion and publication of the *National Condom Distribution Service Report of activities for 2018*²⁵.
- Publication of an *Evaluation of the HSE’s Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion Training for Professionals 2016-2018*²⁶.
- Published data of the number of women travelling from Ireland to the UK and Netherlands for an abortion in 2018, and the use of online early abortion medication²⁷.
- Publication of the evaluation of the ‘If I were Jack’ educational resource²⁸.

2018

- Publication of a qualitative research study on how parents communicate with their young children aged 4–9 years about relationships, sexuality, and growing up²⁹.
- Publication of an evaluation report of the GMHS Outreach Programme and, in line with its recommendations, the development of a logic model to inform service delivery³⁰.
- Publication of annual monitoring reports on the NCDS for 2017³¹.
- *National Guidelines on Referral and Forensic Clinical Examination Following Rape and Sexual Assault* published³².
- Development of Tusla’s online toolkit for professionals, with a module on the sexual health and education needs of young people in care³³.
- *Mid-term Review of the Implementation of the National Sexual Health Strategy*³⁴.
- Consultation Report: *Stakeholder Workshops on Actions for Sexual Health Services*³⁵.

²⁴ HSE, 2019, *Theory of Change and Logic Model for an Outreach Programme for Gay, Bisexual and Other Men Who Have Sex with Men* <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/msm%20outreach%20logic%20model.pdf>

²⁵ HSE, 2019, *National Condom Distribution Service Report of activities for 2018*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/ncds-2018-final.pdf>

²⁶ HSE, 2019, *An evaluation of the HSE’s Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion Training for Professionals 2016 – 2018* <https://www.lenus.ie/bitstream/handle/10147/626780/Foundation%20Programme%20FINAL.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

²⁷ HSE, 2019, *Decrease in number of women giving Irish addresses at abortion clinics in England and Wales in 2018*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/media/press-releases/2018-decrease-abortion-stats.pdf>

²⁸ Gillespie, Kathryn Mary, 2019, *Evaluation of the If I Were Jack Educational Resources in Post-primary Schools with Regard to the Relationship and Sexuality Education Requirements of Teenage Me*, Queen’s University Belfast. Faculty of Medicine, Health and Life Sciences

²⁹ Conlon et al, 2018, *Supporting Parents Communicating with Children Aged 4-9 Years about Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up*, www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/pdfs/supporting-parents-communicating-with-children-aged-4%E2%80%939-years-about-relationships-sexuality-and-growing-up-research-report.pdf

³⁰ HSE, 2018, *An Evaluation of the Gay Men’s Health Service Outreach Programme*, <https://www.lenus.ie/bitstream/handle/10147/623993/final-evaluation-report.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

³¹ HSE, 2018, *National Condom Distribution Service, Report of activities for 2017*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/ncds-report-of-activities-2017.pdf>

³² Sexual Assault Response Team, 2018, *National Guidelines on Referral and Forensic Clinical Examination Following Rape and Sexual Assault (Ireland)*, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/healthprotection/sexual-assault-response-team-national-guidelines.pdf>

³³ HSE, 2018, *Healthy Sexuality and relationship development: The education and support needs of children and young people in care*, https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/HSRD_Toolkit.pdf

³⁴ HSE, 2018, *Mid-term review of the implementation of the national sexual health strategy*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/mid-term-review-of-the-implementation-of-the-national-sexual-health-strategy.pdf>

³⁵ HSE, 2018, *Consultation Report: Stakeholder Workshops on Actions for Sexual Health Service Ireland*. https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/consultation-report_june-2018.pdf

- Publication of *Sexual Health in Ireland: What Do We Know?*³⁶
- Report on *Monitoring HIV Treatment and The Continuum of HIV Care In Ireland*³⁷.
- Publication of *Guidance Document on HPV Vaccination in Public HIV and STI Clinics*³⁸.
- Publication of *STI Diagnostics in Ireland: A Survey of Laboratories*³⁹.
- Publication of *Sexual Health Services in Ireland: A Survey of General Practice*⁴⁰.
- Publication of *Sexual Health Services In Ireland: A Survey of STI and Contraception Services*⁴¹.

2017

- Publication of *Practical Guidance for Healthcare Workers in Ireland on HIV PrEP*⁴².
- Research study to develop core indicators for HIV among a range of at risk groups, via the 2016 Irish Research Council/ SHCPP research for society award⁴³.
- HSE Position on *Antiretroviral Therapy for all people living with HIV* published⁴⁴.

2016

- The SENYPIC study was launched to capture the views of service providers, foster carers, birth parents, and young care leavers with regard to the sexual health and sexuality education needs of young people in care - publication of six reports, *Sexual Health and Sexuality Education Needs Assessment of Young People in Care in Ireland (SENYPIC)*⁴⁵.
- Publication of the findings of the MISI survey on the sexual health and HIV prevention needs of men who have sex with men (MSM) in Ireland⁴⁶.

³⁶ HSE, 2018, *Sexual Health in Ireland: What Do We Know?* www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/sexual-health-in-ireland_june2018.pdf

³⁷ HSE, 2018, *Continuum of HIV Care, Ireland 2017*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sexually-transmitted-infections/information-on-hiv/continuum-of-hiv-care_ireland-2017.pdf

³⁸ HSE, 2018, *Guidance Document on HPV Vaccination in Public HIV and STI Clinics*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/guidance-for-hpv-vaccination-in-public-hiv-and-sti-clinics.pdf>

³⁹ HSE, 2018, *STI Diagnostics in Ireland: A Survey of Laboratories*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/survey-of-sti-diagnostics_june2018.pdf

⁴⁰ HSE, 2018, *Sexual Health Services in Ireland: A Survey of General Practice*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/survey-of-general-practice_january2018.pdf

⁴¹ HSE, 2018, *Sexual Health Services in Ireland: A Survey of STI and Contraceptive Services*. https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/survey-of-sexual-health-services_june2018.pdf

⁴² HSE, 2017, *Practical Guidelines for Healthcare Workers in Ireland on HIV Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sexually-transmitted-infections/information-on-hiv/practical-prep-guidance-december-2017.pdf>

⁴³ Tecklenborg et al, 2017, *STIs and HIV in Ireland: towards developing a national second generation surveillance system*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/shcpp-irc-research-awards/sti-and-hiv-behavioural-surveillance-report.pdf>

⁴⁴ HSE, 2017, *HSE Position on Antiretroviral Therapy for all people living with HIV*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sexually-transmitted-infections/information-on-hiv/hse-position-on-antiretroviral-therapy_vfeb2018.pdf

⁴⁵ Fullerton et al, 2016, *Sexual Health and Sexuality Education Needs Assessment of Young People in Care in Ireland (SENYPIC)*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/senypic-report-1-final.pdf>
<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/senypic-report-2-final.pdf>
<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/senypic-report-3-final.pdf>
<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/senypic-report-4-final.pdf>
<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/senypic-report-5-final.pdf>
<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/senypic-report-6-final.pdf>

⁴⁶ O'Donnell, Kate et al, 2016, *MISI 2015 Findings from the Men Who Have Sex With Men Internet Survey* <https://gayhealthnetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/MISI-2015.pdf>

2015

- Think Contraception, Positive Options, Abortion Aftercare and B4uDecide.ie campaigns.

2.3 Chronology of Initiatives and Change

2.3.1 Clinical Services

A number of the initiatives and changes relating to clinical services are presented in reverse chronological order, from 2015 to 2022.

2022

- HSE launch of a free national home STI testing service⁴⁷.
- HSE launch of a new service to provide free prescription and emergency contraception for 17- to 25-year-old women, girls, and other people identifying as transgender or non-binary for whom hormonal contraception is deemed clinically suitable⁴⁸.

2021

- Piloted a free online sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing service integrated with public STI clinics⁴⁹. The pilot was initiated in early January 2021 and ran to the end of May in Dublin, Cork, and Kerry. During the pilot period, 13,749 STI test kits were ordered. Eight per cent had a reactive result requiring further care, while 57% of users had never previously engaged with sexual health services.
- Provision of 439,450 condoms and 259,603 lubricant sachets (lube) via the NCDS.
- Services that were temporarily reduced in 2020 as a result of redeployments were gradually reinstated in 2021 as pressures eased and the vaccine rollout enabled gradual and safe relaxation of restrictions.

2020

- Roll-out of a HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) programme to support populations at substantial risk of sexual acquisition of HIV.
- 445,658 condoms and 255,370 lubricant sachets were ordered by 64 organisations to distribute among key target groups. Eight organisations established postal services to ensure that condom distribution to their service users continued uninterrupted.
- The initial phase of necessary COVID-19 restrictions during early 2020, resulted in the temporary curtailment of some sexual health services, as a consequence of emergency redeployments to manage the pressures of the pandemic.

⁴⁷ HSE, 2022, *HSE announces launch of free national home STI testing service*, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/media/pressrel/hse-announces-launch-of-free-national-home-sti-testing-service.html#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20service%20allows%20individuals%20to,with%20the%20principles%20of%20SI%3%A1intecare.%E2%80%9D>

⁴⁸ HSE, 2022, *HSE announces free prescription and emergency contraception for 17-25 year old women and people*, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/media/pressrel/hse-announces-free-prescription-and-emergency-contraception-for-17-to-25-year-old-women-and-people.html>

⁴⁹ HSE, 2021, *The Pilot Online STI Testing Service in Ireland, 2021: Evaluation Report*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/the-pilot-online-sti-testing-service-in-ireland-2021-evaluation-report.pdf>

2019

- Commencement of the national HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) programme to support populations at substantial risk of sexual acquisition of HIV.
- Completion of guidance, standards, and information for service providers and service users, prior to the commencement of the PrEP programme.
- Sign-up to the HIV Fast-Track Cities Initiative. On 13 June 2019, Cork, Dublin, Galway and Limerick signed the Paris Declaration, committing to fast-track city-level responses to HIV, as part of a global partnership to end the HIV epidemic⁵⁰.
- Establishment of the Sexual Health Advisors Association of Ireland.
- Establishment of a stakeholder group tasked to explore the integration of sexual health promotion in the core curricula of relevant undergraduate courses⁵¹.
- Provision of 730,439 condoms and 444,489 lubricant sachets (lube) via the NCDS.

2018

- Completion of the sexual health services mapping and needs assessment work, including surveys of STI and Contraception Services, General Practice, and a survey of STI diagnostics laboratories in Ireland⁵².
- Provision of 409,319 condoms and 287,565 lubricant sachets (lube) via the NCDS.
- Conducted a nationally coordinated HIV treatment audit to inform the development of the first Continuum of HIV Care for Ireland (2017 data). Development of the CoC led by HPSC in collaboration with UNAIDS⁵³.
- Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Working Group make HIV PrEP recommendations and develop guidance to inform implementation. This included:
 - Updating of the PrEP patient information leaflets in English and Portuguese that accompany the HIV PrEP practical guidance for healthcare workers.
 - Assessment of the readiness of public STI services for the implementation of HIV PrEP to national standards and to determine the resources required for implementation, by Royal College Surgeons in Ireland.
 - Development of national standards for the delivery and management of PrEP.
 - Development of clinical management guidance for individuals taking HIV PrEP within the context of a combination HIV (and STI) prevention approach.
 - Development of a HIV PrEP monitoring and evaluation framework.
 - Commencement of work, through the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), on a health technology assessment of a PrEP programme for populations at substantial risk of sexual acquisition of HIV.

⁵⁰ HIV Ireland, 2019, *Fast-Track Cities*, <https://www.hivireland.ie/policy-news-and-media/fast-track-cities/>

⁵¹ HSE, 2020, *Annual Report 2020, Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/shcpp-ar-2020-final-draft.pdf>

⁵² HSE, 2018, *Sexual Health Services in Ireland, A Survey of STI and Contraception Services*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/survey-of-sexual-health-services_june2018.pdf

⁵³ HSE, 2018, *Continuum of HIV Care, Ireland 2017*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sexually-transmitted-infections/information-on-hiv/continuum-of-hiv-care_ireland-2017.pdf

- Expansion of the HPV vaccine rollout to men who have sex with men (MSM), including MSM living with HIV, from 26 to 45 years in line with National Immunisation Advisory Committee recommendations.⁵⁴
- Facilitated a Sexual Health Advisor training course for nurses, run by Staffordshire University, and for subsequent years (2019, 2020 and 2022).
- Updated HIV treatment information for people living with HIV, promoting the importance of HIV treatment to stay healthy and prevent onward transmission.

2017

- Publication of the *HSE Position on HIV Antiretroviral Therapy*, which states that “all people living with HIV attending HIV services in Ireland are offered antiretroviral therapy and informed of the benefits of antiretroviral therapy in improving their personal health and reducing HIV infectiousness”⁵⁵.
- Publication of HIV treatment information for people living with HIV, promoting the importance of HIV treatment to stay healthy and prevent transmission to others.
- Development of HIV treatment estimates (2016 data) in line with the European Centre for Disease Prevention & Control (ECDC) continuum of HIV care framework and ECDC/UNAIDS reporting requirements.
- Development and dissemination of practical guidance for healthcare workers, including patient information leaflets, to provide support and guidance for people accessing PrEP informally⁵⁶.
- Commissioning of an assessment of the readiness of public STI services for the implementation of HIV PrEP to national standards and the resources required for implementation.
- Funding to the Gay Men’s Health Service (GMHS) to commence a PrEP monitoring clinic, in order to support people accessing PrEP themselves⁵⁷.
- Development and dissemination of patient information leaflets and web-based resources for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and genital conditions⁵⁸.
- Roll out of the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccine to men and women living with HIV and MSM aged 16 to 26 years attending public HIV and STI clinics⁵⁹.
- Designation of a national bacterial STI reference laboratory (STBRL).

2016

- Mapping of clinical sexual health services and laboratories, with findings finalised in 2017.

⁵⁴ HSE, 2018, *Guidance Document on HPV Vaccination in Public HIV and STI Clinics*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/guidance-for-hpv-vaccination-in-public-hiv-and-sti-clinics.pdf>

⁵⁵ HSE, 2018, *Antiretroviral therapy for people living with HIV in Ireland*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sexually-transmitted-infections/information-on-hiv/art-people-living-with-hiv-english.pdf>

⁵⁶ HSE, 2017, *Practical Guidance for Healthcare Workers in Ireland on HIV Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/sexually-transmitted-infections/information-on-hiv/practical-prep-guidance-december-2017.pdf>

⁵⁷ HSE, 2018, *An Evaluation of the Gay Men’s Health Service Outreach Programme*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/gmhs-report_final.pdf

⁵⁸ HSE, 2018, *Annual Report 2017*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/sexualhealth_annualreport-final.pdf

⁵⁹ HSE, 2018, *Guidance Document on HPV Vaccination in Public HIV and STI Clinics*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/guidance-for-hpv-vaccination-in-public-hiv-and-sti-clinics.pdf>

- HPV vaccine extended to HIV-positive men and women aged up to 26 years, who are attending public HIV clinics.
- Establishment of a multisectoral PrEP Working Group.
- Development of draft core functions and responsibilities of a bacterial STI reference laboratory.
- Health Protection Surveillance Centre established a multidisciplinary, multisectoral group to respond to the increase in HIV and STIs among MSM in Ireland. This includes representation from SHCPP⁶⁰.

2.3.2 Education and Training

A range of changes and initiatives focused on education and training are presented by year of launch, dating from 2015.

2021

- Redevelopment of the Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion to a six-day training programme.
- Development of a one-day training programme on sexuality, health and policy called Working Safely and Effectively in Sexuality and Wellbeing – Developing Policy and Guidelines.
- Launched the online resource with Tusla, *Healthy Sexuality and Relationship Development*, for the education and support needs of children and young people.
- Partnership project with the Sexual Health Centre and BeLonG To Youth Service to develop the *In the Know* training manual⁶¹.

2020

- Development, publication, and launch of *Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks*, for parents of 8-12 year olds and *Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks: Healthy Ireland At Your Library Collection* and rebranded the earlier parent booklet as *Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks: for parents of 4-7 year olds*.
- Adaptation and publication of an updated *Busy Bodies* booklet for children and young people, which addresses puberty and early adolescence.
- Support to HP&I and NGO colleagues in the completion of six Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion courses, training 81 professionals.
- Publication (online) of the RSE element within Unit 1 of the new Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) resource for schools, in partnership with the Programme Manager for Education, Health and Wellbeing.
- Funded the delivery of Parenting: Supporting Your Child to Build Healthy Friendships and Relationships programme to 178 parents, by the National Parents' Council.
- Funded the delivery of the 8-week 'Speakeasy' training programme to 110 parents by the Irish Family Planning Association.

⁶⁰ HSE, 2016, *HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme Annual Report 2016*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-sexual-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-programme-annual-report-2016.pdf>

⁶¹ HSE, 2021, *Health Service Executive, Health and Wellbeing Annual Report 2021*, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/hse-tfi-2018-2021-plan/health-and-wellbeing-annual-report-2021.pdf>

- Funded the delivery of training workshops – sexual health policy development and pornography to 72 youth work sector participants by the National Youth Council of Ireland.
- Funded the delivery of the ‘REAL U training for trainers programme’ to 182 participants from the youth work sector by Foróige⁶².

2019

- Delivery of 12 Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion courses in nine locations throughout the country.
- Launch of the *Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy, 2019-2029*⁶³.
- Launch of the new LGBTI+ eLearning course through the HSEland programme ‘LGBTI+ Awareness and Inclusion Training’.
- Establishment of a collaboration between the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), Health Promotion and Improvement (CHO1), and Donegal’s Library and Youth Services to make relationship and sexuality books available to parents, children, and young people in every library - through the ‘Healthy Ireland (HI) at your library’ scheme.
- Piloting and adaptation of the first set of new Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE).
- Partnership with Health Promotion and Improvement (CHO4) to establish an advisory group of statutory and non-statutory partners to review and feedback on the updated Busy Bodies booklet
- Development of an online learning tool to enable social workers, social care workers, and foster parents to address the sexual health and sexual education needs of children in care.
- Collaboration with the Sexual Health Centre Cork and BeLonG To, to publish the *In the Know* Programme.
- Funded the delivery of the 8-week ‘Speakeasy’ training programme to 167 parents (The Irish Family Planning Association).
- Delivery of training workshops on sexual health policy development and pornography to 88 youth work sector participants (the National Youth Council of Ireland).
- Delivery of the ‘REAL U training for trainers programme’ by Foróige to 226 participants from the youth work sector⁶⁴.

2018

- Delivery of the Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion courses in ten locations throughout the country.
- Publication and launch of the *Talking to Your Young Child about Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up* resource along with the accompanying storybook, *Tom’s Power Flower*.
- Refinement of Phase 1 of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) element of a new Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE) resource to meet the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) short course requirements.

⁶² HSE, 2020, *Annual Report 2020, Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/shcpp-ar-2020-final-draft.pdf>

⁶³ HSE, 2019, *Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy 2019–2029* <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/professionals/research/research-summaries/summary-final.pdf>

⁶⁴ HSE, 2019, *Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Annual Report 2019*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-1.pdf>

- Development of the parent section of the website www.sexualwellbeing.ie.
- Delivery of 8-week 'Speakeasy' training programme to 121 parents (the Irish Family Planning Association).
- Delivery of training workshops on sexual health policy development and pornography to 157 youth work sector participants (the National Youth Council of Ireland).
- Delivery of Parenting: Supporting Your Child to Build Healthy Friendships and Relationships programme to 452 parents⁶⁵.

2017

- Delivered the Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion in ten locations training 222 professionals.
- Development of web-based content for parents to support them in talking to their pre-adolescent children about relationships and sexuality.
- Review and update of the 'B4uDecide' resource to support youth workers to facilitate sexual health education to their service users.
- Development of a resource for Senior Cycle (SPHE) lessons on alcohol, with a particular focus on the RSE-related material.
- Delivery of Parenting: Supporting Your Child to Build Healthy Friendships and Relationships programme to 559 parents.
- Delivery of 8-week 'Speakeasy' training programme to 109 parents (the Irish Family Planning Association)⁶⁶.

2016

- Development of web-based content for parents on sexuality and sexual development education.
- Delivered the Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion in ten locations, training 188 professionals.
- Qualitative research RSE Programme in Primary Schools.
- Redesign of the 'B4uDecide' lessons to reflect the learning outcomes of the new Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) short course.
- Materials to support parents in talking to their children about relationships and sex were disseminated through HealthPromotion.ie⁶⁷.

2015

- Delivery of the Certificate in Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Skills course, and a series of masterclasses for 'Supporting an Unplanned Pregnancy' (SHCPP/NUI Maynooth).
- Promotion and dissemination of the 'B4uDecide.ie' and the TRUST resource materials to teachers of Junior and Senior Cycle students at in-service training.
- Sexual Health Advice and Guidance Week and annual welfare officer training.

⁶⁵ HSE, 2018, *Annual Report 2018*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-1.pdf>

⁶⁶ HSE, 2017, *Annual Report 2017*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/sexualhealth_annualreport-final.pdf

⁶⁷ HSE, 2016, *HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Annual Report 2016*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-sexual-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-programme-annual-report-2016.pdf>

- Approximately 1,000 packs containing lesson plans, posters and promotional items were disseminated to teachers and youth workers via training and HealthPromotion.ie. A further 2,034 promotional items were disseminated via outreach events and HealthPromotion.ie.
- Approximately eighty copies of the TRUST (Talking Relationships Understanding Sexuality Teaching) resource for Senior Cycle RSE, delivered to youth organisations.
- Materials to support parents in talking to their children about relationships and sex were disseminated through HealthPromotion.ie.
- SHCPP resource materials made available to the general public and to those who deal with the prevention and management of crisis pregnancy in the course of their work, via HealthPromotion.ie.
- Delivery of Parenting: Supporting Your Child to Build Healthy Friendships and Relationships programme to 1,098 parents.
- Delivery of 8-week ‘Speakeasy’ training programme to 109 parents (The Irish Family Planning Association).
- Delivery of ‘Leave it til later’ training, which supports the SHCPP’s ‘B4uDecide.ie’ education initiative.
- Delivery of training sessions for 56 youth workers to support the review and development of sexual health policies for their organisations.
- Foróige delivered the ‘REAL U training for trainers’ programme to 167 participants from the youth work sector.
- Supported locality-based initiatives included:
 - Blanchardstown Youth Service, Foróige, Dublin, delivered the Teenage Health Initiative for young men aged 13–17 years.
 - Donegal Women’s Centre, Letterkenny, delivered a holistic sexual health and personal development education pilot programme for young women experiencing social exclusion.
 - Here2Help (formerly Pact), delivered RSE programmes in schools in Dublin, Cavan and Wicklow.
 - Real Deal, a peer-led sexual health education training programme for early school-leavers or those at risk of being early school-leavers, delivered in the Leinster region and in Mayo.
 - Community mobilisation project that involves relationships and sexual health education components for young people in both formal and non-formal education settings, delivered by the Sexual Health Centre, Cork.
 - ‘Getting Real’, a personal development programme for adolescents who are at risk of becoming early school-leavers or who are early school-leavers, delivered by SouthWest Counselling Centre, Kerry⁶⁸.

⁶⁸ HSE, *Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Annual Report 2015*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-sexual-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-programme-annual-report-2015.pdf>

2.3.3 Communications

An indicative list of many of the changes and initiatives associated with communications is identified in chronological order, during the lifecycle of the NSHS.

2022

- Launch and promotion of online STI testing as a free service to all members of the population across Ireland, aged 17 and over.

2021

- Promotion of the topic of sexual consent and sexual health messages on Tinder and video on demand (VOD) platforms (Spotify and Twitch) during Valentine's Day and Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance (SHAG) week.
- Publication of online articles in partnership with College Times to raise awareness of the misconceptions around HIV and presentation of a comprehensive guide to sexual consent aimed at third-level students.
- Development of a syphilis social media campaign to raise awareness of the increase in syphilis among gbMSM and young people aged 18 years and over.
- Launch of the 'Because' campaign promoting condom use, which appeared across multiple channels. A short 10-second advert appeared on RTÉ Player and All 4 VOD, delivering a simple educational message.
- Launched of the new Fact or Fiction video series on VOD (Twitch, Spotify).
- Publication of the information guide *What You Need to Know About Contraception*, available in eight other languages: Arabic, Chinese, French, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, and Urdu⁶⁹.

2020

- Launch of a national campaign to address HIV-related stigma.
- Launched of a new sexual health campaign 'Play it Safe! (response to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions lifting over the summer months).
- Launch of *Sex: Fact or Fiction*, a series of videos aiming to debunk myths around sexual health.
- Delivery of 'My Options'⁷⁰ campaign highlighting the availability of free support services, such as counselling and a telephone helpline, for those experiencing an unplanned pregnancy.
- A webpage titled 'Sex and COVID-19' went live on sexualwellbeing.ie.
- Promotion of HIV prevention messages, including information on PrEP, PEP and information on STI and HIV testing.
- Outreach initiatives to third-level institutions, including four SHAG Week events.

⁶⁹ HSE, 2021, *Health Service Executive, Health and Wellbeing Report 2021*, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/hse-tfi-2018-2021-plan/health-and-wellbeing-annual-report-2021.pdf>

⁷⁰ https://www2.hse.ie/unplanned-pregnancy/?utm_source=hercontent&utm_medium=editorial&utm_campaign=myoptions211019 Freephone: 1800 828 010

- Launch of a partnership with some of Ireland's top podcasters to discuss the topic of sexual consent and to promote the information on www.sexualwellbeing.ie⁷¹.

2019

- Roll-out of the NCDS at third level.
- Work with the HSE Communications Programme and Campaigns team to launch a new campaign, 'Because', promoting condom use and good sexual health.
- Work with the HSE Communications Programme and Campaigns team to launch the My Options service, a new unplanned pregnancy support service (My Options leaflet translated into 13 languages).
- Developed and disseminated the *Your Contraceptive Choices* leaflet.
- Delivery of 38 outreach events targeting young people aged 18–30 to promote consistent and correct use of contraception.
- Work in partnership with Cairde to translate sexual health information into four community languages.
- Advertisement of STI and contraceptive resources in 1,250 GP locations⁷².

2018

- Integration of two websites – Crisispregnancy.ie and Thinkcontraception.ie – bringing together one identity and one new website: www.sexualwellbeing.ie.
- Launch of a new social media safer sex campaign at the Electric Picnic, with the tagline *#respectprotect*.
- Delivery of 29 activation events, SHAG Week and festival, concert appearances, and nightclub/pub engagements.
- Launch of a SHAG campaign over Valentine's week with the tagline of 'Are You Getting It?', with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI).
- Management of a national public awareness campaign around emergency hormonal contraception (EHC), with the Irish Pharmacy Union.
- Work with the Sexual Health Centre to support a 'parkrun' in Ballincollig, Cork, to raise awareness about HIV stigma and testing.
- Provision of information to 12–16-year-olds who attended 12 conferences and events targeting young people, parents and teachers.
- Street Art project, aimed at 14–17-year-olds, delivered 22 street art workshops with Youth reach/Community training centres with 324 young people in total⁷³.

2017

- Introduction of an educational pillar to the 'Johnny's Got You Covered' (JGYC) campaign.
- Delivery of 45 activation events, SHAG Week and festival, concert appearances, and nightclub/pub engagements.
- Establishment of links with the LGBTI+ community with JGYC appearing at Gay Pride.
- Distribution of 60.5K units of condoms and 28.5K units of lube through outreach.

⁷¹ HSE, 2020, *Annual Report 2020, Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/shcpp-ar-2020-final-draft.pdf>

⁷² HSE, 2019, *Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Annual Report 2019*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-1.pdf>

⁷³ HSE, 2018, *Annual Report 2018*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/annual-report-2018.pdf>

- Utilisation of Snapchat to drive traffic to the thinkcontraception.ie site, raising follower numbers by 15% from previous year.
- Featured Johnny in The Daily Edge as a 'win'. This was viewed over 5,000 times⁷⁴.

2016

- New website, sexualwellbeing.ie, developed to provide information on sexual health and wellbeing for the general public, and guidance for professionals working in the area of sexual health.
- Establishment of a national working group to coordinate sexual health communications activities between HSE and non-statutory organisations and to ensure that joint resources are used to promote sexual health when possible.
- Market research indicated that there was 71% awareness among the target audience of the new 'Johnny's Got You Covered' campaign.
- Distribution of over 90,650 condoms to people attending Student Races days; Cork Jazz Festival; Longitude, Dublin; Forbidden Fruit Festival; Kodaline at Marlay Park; Disclosure at Kilmainham; Electric Picnic; Sea Sessions, Donegal; Knockanstockan, Wicklow; and the Life Festival, Westmeath.
- Delivery of sexual health training for incoming student welfare officers at all colleges affiliated with the USI.
- Distribution of the *Contraception 35+* leaflet, covering a broad range of topics relevant to women who are in their 30s, 40s and 50s.
- Press releases relating to service provision, education outreach, RSE and key statistics.
- Two editions of *Sexual Health News* (SHN) and the distribution of 500 copies to 182 health professionals and 62 health services nationally⁷⁵.

2015

- Distribution of *Think Contraception* Protection Packs over bank-holiday weekends outside pubs and clubs in Galway, Cork, and Dublin.
- Work with a number of specialised contraceptive support services and information providers, including:
 - Donegal Women's Centre, Letterkenny, for the 'iLASH' women's health clinic.
 - Youth Health Service (YHS), for the provision of family planning services for young people under the age of 23 years.
 - Sexual Health Centre, Cork, for drop-in sexual health information and support, as part of a wider health promotion project.
 - Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP), for the provision of contraception workshops to GP trainers, particularly on the use of long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARC)⁷⁶.

⁷⁴ HSE, 2017, *Annual Report 2017*, https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/sexualhealth_annualreport-final.pdf

⁷⁵ HSE, 2016, *HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Annual Report 2016*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-sexual-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-programme-annual-report-2016.pdf>

⁷⁶ HSE, 2015, *HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Annual Report 2015*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-sexual-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-programme-annual-report-2015.pdf>

2.3.4 Crisis Pregnancy Services

A selection of the crisis pregnancy initiatives and change are set out according to the year of instigation.

2021

- Unplanned pregnancy counselling services.
- My Options unplanned pregnancy helpline, which took 11,926 calls in 2021, including 2,275 directly to the nursing line.
- A range of NGOs to deliver counselling, training, parenting support, and testing⁷⁷.

2020

- My Options unplanned pregnancy helpline.
- Provision of funding to 11 services to deliver free and accessible face-to-face crisis pregnancy and post-abortion counselling.
- NGO partners (HIV Ireland; ACET; Sexual Health Centre; GOSHH; Sexual Health West) to provide community HIV testing in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick.
- The MPOWER outreach programme under HIV Ireland, for gbMSM, in line with the programme logic mode⁷⁸.

2019

- Commencement of the My Options helpline.
- Provision of funding to 11 services to deliver free and accessible face-to-face crisis pregnancy and post-abortion counselling.
- Service providers to assist with ongoing training, continuing professional development (CPD) and supervision (internal and external) for those providing crisis pregnancy counselling and related services.
- One Family's and Treoir's national information services for one-parent families and unmarried parents.
- Crisis pregnancy counselling services on issues related to the new Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 and quality improvement topics⁷⁹.

2018

- Provision of funding to 13 services to deliver free and accessible face-to-face crisis pregnancy and post-abortion counselling.
- Provision of funding to AkiDwA to deliver information sessions on reproductive health to women seeking asylum and living in accommodation centres.

⁷⁷ HSE, 2021, *Health Service Executive, Health and Wellbeing Annual Report 2021*, <https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/tobaccocontrol/hse-tfi-2018-2021-plan/health-and-wellbeing-annual-report-2021.pdf>

⁷⁸ HSE, 2020, *Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/shcpp-ar-2020-final-draft.pdf>

⁷⁹ HSE, 2019, *Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme, Annual Report 2019*, <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/hse-health-and-crisis-pregnancy-1.pdf>

2017

- Provision of funding to 15 services to deliver free and accessible crisis pregnancy and post-abortion counselling.
- Development and update of Treoir's *Information Pack for Unmarried Parents* and the delivery of One Family's adult education training service.
- Disseminated information packs (rights and obligations of cohabiting parents, guardianship, access, custody and shared parenting, education and training opportunities etc) to healthcare professionals and unmarried parents.

2016

- Provision of funding to 16 services to deliver free and accessible crisis pregnancy and post-abortion counselling.
- Provided support for the delivery of two youth health cafés – Zone Youth Health Café, Blanchardstown and Exit Youth Health Café, Tallaght.
- Distribution of resources relating to the Abortion Aftercare campaign which promotes the availability of free post-abortion medical and counselling services to women in Ireland.

2015

- Provision of funding to 16 services to deliver free and accessible crisis pregnancy and post-abortion counselling.
- Positive Options resources and campaign, promoting the message 'talking to a counsellor can help'.
- Delivery of Masterclasses for 'Supporting an Unplanned Pregnancy' for professionals to gain the knowledge and skills required to support women, their partners and families in relation to an unplanned pregnancy.
- Delivery of Certificate in Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Skills by NUI Maynooth to deliver a year-long skills-based programme to health and counselling professionals.
- The Limerick City Slickers programme – a parenting support group for young parents who are socially excluded or at risk of social exclusion.
- Provision of support to support One Family's and Treoir's national information services for one-parent families and unmarried parents.

3 Review of Stakeholder Contributions

3.1 Overview

Department of Health personnel undertook a comprehensive stakeholder consultation exercise in 2021 to elicit feedback from professionals working in and around the sphere of sexual and reproductive health. All of the feedback was reviewed by the Crowe project team, with further Crowe-led engagement activities also undertaken to obtain further clarity.

A consistent approach was adopted by the Department in engaging with stakeholders, who were presented with four key questions:

- How well has the strategy delivered its goals?
- Are there specific areas / priorities that the strategy should focus on for the period 2021-2026?
- Are there ways in which the structures for the delivery of the strategy could be improved / strengthened?
- Are there any additional points you would like to make or areas you would like to see included in a subsequent strategy?

The information provided (including question responses, as well as separate submissions and associated materials) suggests that the current strategy, and the associated evolution of policies, initiatives, and practices, is well regarded and is considered to have delivered a positive impact for health and care professionals, service users, and the wider population.

The feedback data addresses all the target areas set out in the NSHS, although it is acknowledged that not all of the areas raised by stakeholders directly relate to the current sexual health strategy. The considerable levels of interest and positive engagement from stakeholders strongly influence the emergent recommendations for the next iteration of the strategy, highlighted in Section 6 of this report. Extensive feedback identifying future priorities and actions, with underpinning evidence, was submitted by the SHCPP.

The contributions of stakeholders are set out in this section, in terms of thematic ambitions for the next NSHS.

3.2 Stakeholder Contributions

3.2.1 *Women's Health*

Contributors suggested the following issues relating to women's health be addressed in the future strategy:

- Regulation for assisted human reproduction;
- Greater awareness and promotion of Sexual Assault Treatment Units;
- Targeted approach for positive menstrual health up to menopause;
- Abortion limitation of 12 weeks is considered by some stakeholders to be too restrictive, and the 3-day wait protocol is burdensome (it is understood that a comprehensive legal review of abortion care, and the issues relating to the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018, is due to conclude in 2023);

- Requirement for a central referral point for abortion;
- Drive actions through the maternity networks for the National Women's and Infants Programme.

3.2.2 Vulnerable and At-Risk Groups

Stakeholders identified the following challenges relating to the strategy's inclusivity regarding vulnerable and at-risk groups in the population:

- A more targeted and culturally sensitive approach for people from Roma and Traveller communities;
- Assessment of the culture of Irish sexual and reproductive health services and the factors that contribute to the barriers for hard-to-reach persons;
- The requirement for a specialist workforce targeting work with at-risk groups, such as gbMSM, sex workers, migrants, and young people;
- The importance of language – for example, the term “people of migrant background” is preferable to “migrants”;
- Specific targeted actions for the challenges associated with chemsex;
- The need to strengthen services for people engaged in sex work.

3.2.3 HIV

Contributions from participants highlighted the following actions they regard as being associated with HIV:

- Free screening for everyone across the country;
- Accessible peer support for those living with HIV;
- Opening up fertility services for those living with HIV;
- Increased focus on optimising living/aging well with HIV;
- Increase in availability of HIV appointments which provide preventative medicines;
- Funding allocation needs to be matched and expanded for 90-90-90 targets;
- Clear focus on the 90-90-90 targets to which the State is already committed.

3.2.4 LGBTI+

Stakeholders provided a range of recommendations that may deliver additional benefit to people of the LGBTI+ community:

- Better access to GPs to prevent potential health risks for LGBTI+;
- Duration of wait for transgender services, currently 6 years, requires action, together with resources to enable treatment to be accessible in Ireland;
- Targeted sexual healthcare services of transgender people before, during, and after transitioning, recognising the sensitivities and challenges of attending clinics;
- Promotion of HPV vaccine to gbMSM;
- Greater engagement with members of the LGBTI+ community living outside of Dublin;
- Diversify Gay Men's Health Services holistic hub for LGBTI+ (for example, Fenway Health, USA);

- Specific targeted policy documents for “high-risk” populations including gbMSM, the transgender community, sex workers, and people from a migrant background;
- Train GPs to offer inclusive sexual health services, such as smear tests to trans men;
- Increase in availability of gay men’s services outside of Dublin;
- Updated guidelines, standards, and provision of information and education courses for users and providers of PrEP;
- Sex positive messaging for older people in the community.

3.2.5 Young People

Future actions and priorities for young people were highlighted by stakeholders:

- Sexual health of young people and students should be a focus, addressing the barriers preventing young people from accessing particular sexual health services (such as, STI testing, contraception, etc.);
- Adolescents should be able to access information and care without the need for parental consent;
- Confidentiality and accessibility must be ensured for adolescents who seek sexual health services;
- Gender and age-appropriate sexuality education, which includes sexual and gender diversity, consent and Intimate Partner Violence (IPV);
- Greater support to parents in educating their children about sexual and reproductive health.

3.2.6 Training

Issues regarding the training of health, care, and education professionals were identified by stakeholders for consideration:

- Training for healthcare professionals regarding all aspects of abortions;
- Focus on training healthcare workers outside tertiary referral services, such as primary care and student health services, to provide high-standard sexual health services;
- Defined pathways for onward referral from sexual health services, including a hub and spoke model, with the “hub” being the local GU Clinic, not necessarily a Dublin-based service;
- Enhanced training in RSE for teachers that is relevant and up to date;
- Intercultural training across all professional groups;
- Existing training regarding LGBTI+ to be further enhanced and expanded;
- Enhanced training in sexual and reproductive health for professionals outside of health services, such as teachers and youth workers.

3.2.7 Clinical

Participants highlighted recommendations relating to specific clinical provision:

- The establishment of a bacterial reference laboratory;
- A defined model of care, with a clear implementation plan, for the delivery of sexual and reproductive health services;

- Development of KPIs, and auditable outcomes for sexual health service provision.

3.2.8 Disabilities

Contributors provided feedback and suggestions regarding disabilities:

- Incorporate a disability rights-based approach into the strategy;
- Engagement with disabled people's organisations to be best guided on how to deliver sexual health services in an accessible manner;
- Ensure educational and informational materials are available in a variety of accessible formats as the norm, rather than an afterthought;
- Recognise the limitations of disabled persons in congregated settings who have limited opportunities for education around sexual health;
- Be cognisant of intersectional identities – LGBTI+/migrants/Travellers who have disabilities;
- Increased education for healthcare professionals about the rights and needs of disabled people regarding their sexual health;
- Ensure tailored RSE is provided to young people with disabilities in an empowering way;
- Limitations on abortion affecting those with disabilities due to limited access to travel across counties – independence needed for choice;
- Parents with disabilities require accessible materials and supports to equip their own children with sexual health information.

3.2.9 Inclusivity and Accessibility

Issues relating to inclusivity and ensuring accessibility were raised by stakeholders:

- Sexual health in respect to older generations requires consideration in terms of specialist service provision;
- Care homes and older people's services to take steps to be more accepting and affirming of their LGBTI+ aging population;
- Development of actions that are representative of the multi-cultural society;
- Challenging heteronormativity throughout services and communications;
- Increase accessibility of contraception, pregnancy, fertility, and abortion services for everyone in society;
- Ensure universal access to testing and information through a centralised point along clear pathways into clinical services;
- Increased access to specialist services outside Dublin;
- Menopause symptoms affecting sexual function should be addressed, along with erectile dysfunction;
- Current financial and geographic barriers for accessing services require action.

3.2.10 Communications and Review

Stakeholders suggested recommendations for communications:

- Development of a campaign promoting positive sexual health – not motivated by fear of negative consequences, but one embracing of our sexuality – and that sexual health, physical health, mental health, and overall well-being are all positively associated with sexual satisfaction, sexual self-esteem, and sexual pleasure;
- Mid-term reviews should be reported in line with the layout of the NSHS detailing progress made on specific recommendations rather than an overview of work done to date;
- Where reviews of sexual health services are being undertaken, data must be collected and analysed in relation to service provision for disabled service users;
- Maintain the partnership approach between stakeholders, both statutory and NGOs, in every phase of strategic development and service development;
- The strategy could be developed with a personal social development lens.

3.2.11 Resources

Stakeholders indicated further resources that may benefit the next NSHS:

- Introduction of a Nurse Lead for sexual health and wellbeing;
- Requirement for a Director of Nursing for Sexual Health for SHCPP;
- Investment in Public Health Nursing;
- Workforce development to enhance, develop, and expand specialist practices;
- Further investment in sexual health services;
- Development of robust sexual health intelligence to enable critical and qualitative research;
- Focus on the development of resilience in the system – Mpox has highlighted the difficulties in responding to crises;
- Introduction of risk and contingency planning;
- Free contraception for all.

3.3 The Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme

The SHCPP has the lead responsibility within the HSE for the implementation and coordination of the actions aligned to the NSHS, and delivers sexual health services including coordination, funding, research, education, training, and clinical initiatives, together with a programme of research and communications campaigns and information-sharing.

The SHCPP has provided submissions to the Department of Health as part of the Review and has played a very active role in supporting it. The SHCPP presents a number of overarching priorities, together with those aligned to the three goals of the NSHS, including:

- Continuation of the life-course approach – suggesting that there is an opportunity to explore and address the sexuality education and information needs of younger and older people;

- Strategically address the needs of those who are most at risk or have not been engaged with – such as, people with disabilities, people living in areas of high economic deprivation, homeless individuals, older adults, LGBT+ and gbMSM, refugees, people seeking asylum, Roma, Travellers, and people in the criminal justice system;
- Rationalisation of state funding and support for initiatives addressing sexual/sexuality health and education and campaigns – requiring collaborative working and information sharing across government departments and agencies;
- Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Services – not included in the current NSHS but highly relevant in light of the introduction of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018;
- Salutogenic approach to sexual health and wellbeing – focuses on factors that support human health and well-being, rather than on factors that cause disease;
- The RSE needs of children and young people – building on current initiatives, actions can be set out across three settings, the home, school and ‘out of school’, and the youth work environment;
- Wider dissemination of materials and improved awareness of sexualwellbeing.ie resources – possible routes include Family Resource Centres, and Healthy City and Healthy County coordinators, with accessible resources accessible to all;
- Training and supporting professionals to integrate sexual health promotion into their core work – SHCPP’s *Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy 2019-2029* provides a guide to decision-making regarding the development and the funding of training, and other associated actions; the SHCPP proposes the continuation of existing training initiatives and the development of new initiatives to support professionals to respond to the needs of the general population, and of specific populations, across all settings;
- Prevention through clinical interventions – the SHCPP suggests that prevention measures and other related actions, are better positioned under the goal of Sexual Health Services (currently under Education, Promotion, and Prevention);
- STI Services – develop and implement a model of care for STI and sexual health service delivery, develop and implement standards and KPIs for the provision of STI and sexual health care, build capacity and meet demand for HIV PrEP, continue to update guidelines, develop new guidelines as needed, and provide information and education resources to service providers;
- Research and information – including population research, health services research, and evaluation studies; the SHCPP will complete a large-scale general population study on sexual health and wellbeing as a key priority.

The SHCPP also sets out further challenges for consideration that require effective intersectoral strategic and operational working, including:

1. An updated and relevant RSE curriculum and associated service provider/ teacher training in the Early Learning setting, and in Primary and Post Primary schools.
2. Model of Care for contraception and women’s health more broadly.
3. Health needs of transgender people.
4. Sex trafficking and DSGBV.
5. Consideration of widening the reproductive health component of the NSHS so it becomes a broader sexual and reproductive health strategy.

6. Exploration of the intersectionality of sexual health with all other forms of health, especially mental and emotional.

4 International Comparators

4.1 Overview

This section provides a brief profile of aspects of the sexual health strategies of three countries, France, the Netherlands, and Spain, selected in terms of relevance, applied learning, and contrast. All three countries have overarching national sexual health strategies. The sources for the information set out in this section include desk-based research and industry consultation.

Countries such as Canada, New Zealand, and Australia do not have an overarching national sexual health strategy, with preference given to subject-specific strategies and plans, such as those targeting STIs, blood-borne infections, and sexual violence.

4.2 France

France's *National Sexual Health Strategy, 2017 – 2030*⁸⁰ was produced following wide-ranging consultation with agencies and institutions, academic organisations, and a range of government sectors. It is designed as a framework that defines the main national objectives shared across Government to promote better sexual health. Its governance involves all relevant Ministries at national and regional level, to define common aims and ensure a joint approach in terms of implementing, monitoring and evaluating programmes; this governance structure is considered to be essential to the success of the strategy.

The strategic approaches of the *Sexual Health Strategy* address six priorities:

1. Invest in the promotion of sexual health, in particular among young people, as part of an overall and positive approach.
2. Improve the health pathway with regard to STIs, including HIV and hepatitis viruses, in terms of prevention, screening, and treatment.
3. Improve reproductive health.
4. Meet the specific needs of the most vulnerable populations
5. Promote research, knowledge, and innovation in matters of sexual health.
6. Take into account the specific characteristics of French Overseas Territories to implement the strategy as a whole.

A series of targets and aims for each of the six priorities are identified and typically set within a specific timeframe. Maternal and child health and medically assisted reproduction are not covered by this strategy, and are subject to specific national policies, but the multiagency stakeholder governance ensures that these link and dovetail with the Sexual Health Strategy.

The strategy recognises that achieving satisfying, autonomous, and responsible human sexuality is determined by various factors (individual, interpersonal, structural, and environmental) which directly affect people's sexual behaviour. This is acknowledged in Priority 1, which seeks to educate people from a young age on relationships and sexuality in compliance with human rights, improve the impact of sexual health information, and increase

⁸⁰ Ministère Des Solidarités Et De La Santé, 2017, *National Sexual Health Strategy, 2017 – 2030* https://solidarites-sante.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/strategie_sante_sexuelle_def_ang.pdf

the sexual health training of health and social care professionals, as well as those in the educational and legal sectors.

Aligned to this are specific targets such as all young people receiving high-quality education in sexuality and the associated risks (STIs, unwanted pregnancies) throughout the school curriculum, and the comprehensive provision of basic or continued sexual health training for all healthcare professionals. There is a clear aim to educate young people towards positive sexuality, sexual health, and interpersonal relationships. Notable actions include:

- Implement sexuality and sexual health education in all educational establishments from nursery school to college.
- Develop sexual health education aimed at adolescents (with particular regard to preventing sexism, homophobia and sexual violence) within settings outside of the school or university curriculum, for example, through sports clubs and cultural activities;
- Develop sexual health education aimed at adolescents outside of the school or university curriculum, such as sports clubs and cultural activities (with particular regard to preventing sexism and homophobia, as well as sexual violence).
- Make sex lives and relationships accessible and adapted to young people living in institutions, in particular young people living with disabilities (including education and training for care professionals and parents).
- Improve the availability of information resources and tools to educational teams and those involved in working with young people, for example, guides on sexist and sexual behaviours.
- Strengthen prevention measures and resource supports in schools, the home environment, and in social settings, and equip younger people with the knowledge and skills to manage their sexual health and to provide peer support.
- Equip parents to educate their children on sexual health matters by providing them with suitable tools and learning resources.

Programmes and resources for information, education, and communication should be adapted to different stages of life and to specific groups, in particular those with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Although the strategy was launched in 2017, there is evidence of flexibility in recent years in terms of service changes and resource realignment to address the challenges of epidemiological changes and demand for remote testing and consultation⁸¹.

4.3 The Netherlands

The *National Action Plan on STIs, HIV and Sexual Health, 2017-2022*⁸² is centred around a positive approach to sexuality. The plan sets out the principle that the population of the Netherlands should be properly informed and able to make sensible choices in the matter, with broad sexuality education as the foundation.

⁸¹ Cohen, J, 2022, *Amid Rising STDs, France Makes Condoms Freely Available For People Between The Ages Of 18 And 25*, Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/joshuacohen/2022/12/10/amid-rising-stds-france-makes-condoms-freely-available-for-people-between-the-ages-of-18-and-25/?sh=38d005873e9b> Accessed: December 2022

⁸² National Institute for Public Health and the Environment, RIVM, 2018, *National Action Plan on STIs, HIV and Sexual Health, 2017-2022* <https://www.rivm.nl/en/documenten/national-action-plan-on-stis-hiv-and-sexual-health-2017-2022>

The plan focuses on six cornerstones:

- Monitoring and surveillance – regarded as an overarching topic, to keep track of how many people experience problems and provide the required recorded data to set effective measures, treatment, and policy.
- Promotion of sexually healthy lifestyles (backed up by comprehensive sexuality education) – regarding as an overarching topic, with sexuality education seen as the basis for healthy sexual development and important for preventing STIs, HIV, unwanted pregnancies, and sexual violence.
- Prevention and control of sexually transmitted infections.
- Prevention and control of HIV.
- Prevention of unwanted pregnancies.
- Prevention of unacceptable sexual behaviour and sexual violence.

A series of specific objectives and targets are identified across the six cornerstones, formulated in collaboration with, and with the commitment of, Departments and agencies who are active in the areas of interest. There is a strong recognition that sexual health covers more issues and practices than just those aligned directly to sexual health services. The plan explicitly recognises that the achievement of the objectives requires resources and efforts by parties such as local authorities, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment. This partnership approach has enabled a commitment and focus on areas such as, an improvement of the position of sex workers and people in detention, and the targeting of sexual health in the integration of people migrating to the Netherlands.

One of the objectives is to reduce long term complications resulting from the sexually transmitted disease chlamydia. Another measurable target is to halve the number of new cases annually of syphilis, gonorrhoea, and HIV. Objectives for HIV include, 95 per cent of people with HIV will be aware that they have the virus, 95 per cent of them will be being treated for it, and in 95 percent of these patients the HIV virus will no longer be detectable (by 2022).

Combating sexual violence is a key component of the plan, as is care for the victims. This has provided a framework for schools to structurally identify and recognise behaviour that is unacceptable - training and refresher courses for professionals in the healthcare and education sectors are central to this.

One initiative arising from effective monitoring and surveillance during the COVID-19 pandemic, is the introduction of video consultations, in combination with remote STI testing, at Dutch sexual health clinics⁸³; this will now form an objective of the next iteration of the national action plan. The consultations have received positive feedback from professionals and service users, with the benefits identified including, the ability to reach target groups that make less use of the current services, strong maintenance of confidentiality, and equal clinical outcomes (compared to face-to-face consultations) for those who do not require a physical examination. It is understood that the initiative will dovetail with existing education and sexual health promotion streams.

⁸³ Zimbile, Filippo et al, 2022, *Introducing video consultations at public sexual health clinics in the Netherlands: a mixed-methods study*, 37, Health Promotion International

4.4 Spain

Although Spain's *National Strategy for Sexual and Reproductive Health, 2012 – 2020* is now outside of its intended timeframe, it remains the prevailing framework for sexual and reproductive health.

The overall aim of the strategy is to support the population to achieve high levels of sexual and reproductive health. However, it is noted that the Spanish health system is highly decentralised and regional governments are responsible for managing and implementing the strategy, with considerable variation, priorities, and outcomes⁸⁴. The recommendations do not represent required actions, resulting in variable interpretation by service leaders and policy makers. Epidemiological surveillance systems for STI notification vary greatly. It is reported that the regional sexual health plans are largely focused on HIV prevention and control and, to a lesser extent, on STI prevention.

The strategy sets out its priority areas through, 'strategic lines' that generate a series of aims and recommendations. For sexual health, the strategic lines are:

- Sexual health promotion.
- Sexual healthcare.
- Training professionals.
- Research, innovation, and good practices.

The strategic lines identified for reproductive health are:

- Strategic aims and lines for reproductive health.
- Promotion of health during pregnancy.
- Health care during pregnancy.
- Care during the delivery: Strategy for Care during a Normal Delivery in the Spanish National Health System.
- Care from birth to the first week of life.
- Promotion of maternal breastfeeding.
- Care of the hospitalised newborn.
- Care and healthcare during the puerperium.
- Training professionals.
- Participation of women and partners.
- Institutional coordination.
- Research, innovation, and good practices.

It is unclear if the inclusion of reproductive health in the strategy has delivered measurable benefits, but in terms of providing a 'joined up' view of the wider determinants of sexual health, including women's health and fertility, it may be argued that its position within the strategy provides a fuller view of the issues at hand. Further benefits may also be realised in terms of surmounting issues of stigma associated with sexual health services, and the training of health and social care professionals.

⁸⁴ Castellá, Javier Gómez et al, 2022, *Approaches to STI Prevention and Control in a Highly Decentralized State: An Integrative Review*, *Frontier in Reproductive Health* <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frph.2022.725646/full>

Notable reforms to the law on sexual and reproductive health and the voluntary interruption of pregnancy were ratified in 2022, which will further inform the next iteration of the strategy. Changes are concerned with ensuring and expanding sexual and reproductive rights and include compulsory sex education at all stages of education; new specialised care services (including a telephone hotline) aimed particularly at women; condoms distributed free of charge in high schools, prisons and social service centres; new rights relating to menstrual health and free feminine hygiene products in educational and social service centres; and other rights-based reforms related to termination of pregnancy, pregnancy and childbirth, and reproductive violence.

4.5 Summary Considerations

The three national sexual health strategies briefly outlined reinforce the requirement for national sexual health strategies to take a positive and life course view of sexuality and sexual health. There appears to be close alignment with the principles of the NSHS 2015 – 2020, with a number of programmes and initiatives implemented that may be considered of interest during the development of the next iteration of the NSHS 2023 – 2030, such as:

- France's significant investment in the promotion and education of people from a young age on relationships and sexuality. This has resulted in the comprehensive sexual health training of health and social care professionals, as well as those in the educational, sports and recreational, and legal sectors.
- The Dutch approach to sexual health has benefited from multisectoral and partnership working across Government in terms of its reach, impact, and outcomes. This has been apparent from policy development, to service delivery, and has underpinned specific multidisciplinary priorities such as combating sexual violence. The provision of video consultations is considered to be a positive development, with plans in place to roll out this service across the country.
- The inclusion of reproductive health in Spain's strategy may provide policy and service benefits to women's health and fertility, and enables a more comprehensive view of the wider determinants of sexual health and wellbeing. The recent series of initiatives and resources implemented at a national level to ensure and expand sexual and reproductive rights may further support the principles aligned to the life course approach.

5 Progress of the Current Strategy

5.1 Overview

The progress made in implementing the current NSHS is considerable, with significant legislative, policy, epidemiological, and environmental changes being realised during its lifecycle. The actions and priorities set out in the NSHS, and the subsequent implementation plans, are grouped together for the purpose of this review, and are assessed thematically; an assessment of *Progress Made* or *No Progress Made* is aligned to each area.

The NSHS identifies **71 recommendations** across three Goals, which inform the SHCPP's Implementation Plan 2017 – 2020, identifying **56 Priority Actions**, mapped within six domains: Clinical Services, Education: Supporting Parents and Educators; Communication and Information; Surveillance; Research; and Crisis Pregnancy Services. **Of the 56 Priority Actions, 49 are assessed as having been successfully progressed.**

5.2 Goals, Actions, and Priorities

5.2.1 Goal 1: Sexual Health Promotion, Education, and Prevention

Goal 1 states that everyone living in Ireland will receive comprehensive and age-appropriate sexual health education and/or information and will have access to appropriate prevention and promotion services.

Wide-ranging promotion, education, and prevention activities and initiatives have been delivered since the commencement of the NSHS. This has required intersectoral collaboration and shared learning and pooling of resources and intelligence, with further ambitions expressed to improve the reach and influence of activities. Issues relating to the funding of programmes and activities are not identified, although it is clear that the SHCPP provides a pivotal and strategic role in the allocation and coordination of resources to stakeholders.

An extensive list of initiatives and interventions is provided in Section 2 of this document, and further examples of notable achievements include:

- Working with parents and carers across all age ranges – such as work with Tusla to develop the *Healthy Sexuality and Relationship: Education and Support Needs of Children and Young People in Care Toolkit*, developing a narrative for mychild.ie about developing healthy sexuality for 0–5-year-olds, and creating a range of booklet and video materials for parents within the *Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks* series of resources;
- Working with schools across all age ranges – such as the development of three RSE units within a new SPHE resource for Junior Cycle, provision of accessible *TRUST* and *Growing up LGBT* resources on sexualwellbeing.ie, and updated publication of *Busy Bodies* in collaboration with HSE, education and NGO bodies;
- Sexual Health Promotion Training – such as the creation, publication, and implementation of the *Sexual Health Training Strategy 2019-2029*, and the revision and implementation of the national *Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion* with subject matter partners;

- RSE training – such as support to the National Youth Council of Ireland and Foróige for the delivery of training to youth workers, support to the Irish Family Planning Association to deliver training to parents and professionals, and support to the National Parents Council to help the delivery of training to parents;
- Sexual health campaigns – such as the *#respectprotect* social media and digital campaign to promote condom use and good sexual health, partnership working with the Gay Health Network to develop Man2Man.ie and HIV/STI testing campaigns, and a series of videos, *Sex: Fact or Fiction?*, to address commonly held but inaccurate, beliefs;
- National Condom Distribution Service – providing a very significant resource since later 2015, with in excess of 2 million condoms and one million lubricant sachets ordered by over 155 organisations since its launch;
- Digital development – such as the development of sexualwellbeing.ie to provide comprehensive information on all aspects of sexual health, contraception, HIV, and uses of consent, high profile podcasts focusing on sexual consent, and the utilisation of the healthconnect.ie app (in partnership with Cairde) to support the translation of contraception and unplanned pregnancies for people from migrant communities;
- Information initiatives – such as the development and dissemination of *Your Contraceptive Choices*, the development and distribution of *General information on STIs and genital conditions*, and condition specific information leaflets for STIs and genital conditions;
- Further specific campaigns – such as the *Play it Safe* campaign that was developed in collaboration with the Irish Pharmacy Union during the COVID-19 pandemic and supported the safeguarding of sexual health during this time, and a national HIV stigma campaign to inform people that HIV is a manageable illness.

It is noted that the *SHCPP Implementation Plan, 2017 – 2020*, updated in 2021, identifies the completion or progression of all Priority Actions 12 – 25, in alignment with the stated purpose. However, Priority Action 23, concerned with tracking the implementation of the RSE through the *Lifeskills Survey* in Primary and Post-Primary Schools and in Youth Reach Centres, led by the DoE, has been subject to COVID-19 related disruption, and has not progressed.

Sexual Health Promotion, Education and Prevention is assessed as Progress Made

5.2.2 Goal 2: Sexual Health Services

Goal 2 states that, equitable, accessible, and high-quality sexual health services, which are targeted and tailored to need, will be available to everyone.

The development of new services and interventions, particularly with regard to specialist areas such as PrEP, the HPV vaccine rollout, and HIV antiretroviral treatment, mark significant enhancements to sexual health services. The 23 publicly funded STI Clinics are free of charge for people using the service, including cost-free treatment for STIs and HIV. It is noted that sexual health services are not currently available as community-based resources. The private sector and GP-led delivery of sexual health services, in terms of accessibility and practices, are not explicitly addressed in this review.

Initiatives and interventions relating to sexual health services are detailed in Section 2 of this document, and further examples of notable achievements include:

- Sexual health service mapping – the mapping of sexual health services included a survey of STI and contraception services, a survey of General Practice, and a survey of laboratories in relation to STI diagnostics in Ireland;
- HPV vaccine extension – initiative to extend the HPV vaccine to men and women living with HIV up to 26 years and to gbMSM up to 45 years, in line with National Immunisation Advisory Committee recommendation;
- National PrEP programme – following the publication of a HIQA health technology assessment and associated standards, clinical management, and patient information, a roll-out of a HIV PrEP initiative across Ireland commenced in 2019;
- HIV Antiretroviral treatment – a HSE position paper was published stating that people living with HIV are to be offered antiretroviral therapy, with information highlighting the supporting benefits, and further information was produced to promote the importance of HIV treatment to stay healthy and reduce transmission to others;
- Community HIV testing and outreach – such as support to NGOs in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick for community HIV testing, and the establishment of the MPOWER outreach programme under HIV Ireland;
- Online STI service – following the successful piloting of free-of-charge STI test kits being available to order online for home delivery in three counties, this 24 hours a day service, integrated with public STI clinics, became available free-of-charge to all members of the population across Ireland, aged 17 and over.

It is noted that the *SHCPP Implementation Plan, 2017 – 2020*, updated in 2021, identifies the completion, or progression of all Priority Actions 1 – 7, in alignment with the stated purpose. However, Priority Actions 9 – 10, concerned with Hepatitis B Virus (HBV) vaccination and the development of key performance indicators respectively, have not been progressed.

Sexual Health Services is assessed as Progress Made.

5.2.3 Goal 3: Sexual Health Intelligence (Including Research and Surveillance)

Goal 3 states that *robust and high-quality sexual health information will be generated to underpin policy, practice, service planning and strategic monitoring.*

A range of research and evaluation studies have been undertaken to gain evidence and intelligence regarding those factors and services that impact both directly and indirectly on sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing. Initiatives such as mapping and evaluations provide the basis for services, often in collaboration with stakeholder bodies, to maintain quality and relevance of the support provided across all age groups.

A variety of initiatives relating to sexual health intelligence are detailed in Section 2 of this document, and further examples of notable achievements include:

- Service mapping – a comprehensive mapping exercise, inclusive of STI, contraceptive, and laboratory services, was completed and informed a national assessment of need;
- Four studies under COALESCE – the development of a notable partnership working with the Irish Research Council to fund four studies under the COALESCE *Research for Policy and Society* award, contributing to the understanding of and evidence related to teacher training and RSE, HIV/STI surveillance, and sexual consent;

- EMIS Ireland, 2017 – collaborative working with the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and the Gay Health Network to oversee the analysis of European Men-Who-Have-Sex-With-Men Internet Survey, producing the 2017 data set for Ireland;
- Research with parents – a qualitative research study, exploring the needs of parents of children aged 4 to 9, in relation to conversations with their children about relationships, sexuality and growing up, was completed and published and subsequently influenced the development of educational resources;
- Young people in care – a comprehensive study was undertaken, in partnership with Tusla, addressing the development of support to young people in care, which led to resources that support the work of Tusla staff;
- Research programme with Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) – the formation of a joint research programme with ESRI, investigating health and wellbeing in adolescence, has produced the resource, *Talking about sex and sexual behaviour of young people in Ireland*, which emphasises the role of good communication between parents and children about relationships, sexuality, and contraception;
- Evaluation of Sexual Health Promotion – a full evaluation of the Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion was undertaken from 14 courses and three cohorts, providing evidence of the impact of training on enhancing competencies related to delivering sexual health promotion;
- Evaluation of gbMSM outreach – the pilot outreach programme to support gbMSM was evaluated to address issues of efficiency and efficacy, and included consideration of operational and resourcing challenges, with the evaluation providing the supporting evidence toward the transition of the service from a clinical setting to an NGO environment;
- Unplanned pregnancy and abortion care study – a large-scale qualitative study was commissioned to gain an in-depth understanding of women’s experiences of abortion and unplanned pregnancy, resulting in the *Unplanned Pregnancy and Abortion Care (UnPAC) Study* published in July, 2022, which will inform the legislative review led by the DoH;
- Scoping study for the general population survey – a scoping study was undertaken to inform a survey of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours on sexual health and wellbeing and crisis pregnancy among the general population of Ireland and this was published in 2021.

The *SHCPP Implementation Plan, 2017 – 2020*, updated in 2021, identifies the completion or progression of Priority Actions 37 - 39, 42 - 44, and 46 - 50 in alignment with the stated purpose. However, Priority Actions 40, 41, and 45, concerned with mechanisms to improve reporting of a core dataset for STI notifications, the establishment of a monitoring system for sexual health services, and a research study in post-primary schools to examine RSE delivery respectively, have not been progressed.

Sexual Health Intelligence is assessed as Progress Made.

5.2.4 Crisis Pregnancy Services

The expansion and engagement of crisis pregnancy services has continued since 2015. This area has been subject to significant legislative change with the introduction of the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018. Although there is evidence that access to

services associated with abortions is variable across the country, national resources and services have been developed and implemented to ensure the delivery of services.

Crisis pregnancy services are detailed in Section 2 of this document, and further examples of notable achievements include:

- Counselling services – resources to support 14 counselling services to provide crisis pregnancy and post-abortion counselling, with services moving to a remote function to maintain accessibility during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- *My Options* – the My Options service was established and promoted to provide phone-based unplanned pregnancy counselling, with access to qualified nurse support, and online information resources.

Further support has been provided to professional training for those involved in post abortion counselling, and the development of quality improvement plans to enhance quality within these services.

It is noted that the *SHCPP Implementation Plan, 2017 – 2020*, updated in 2021, identifies the completion or progression of all Priority Actions 51 – 55, in alignment with the stated purpose. Priority Action 56, concerned with the promotion of crisis pregnancy prevention with stakeholders such as ICGP, has made some progress but can be further enhanced.

Crisis Pregnancy Services is assessed as Progress Made.

5.2.5 Communication and Information

Effective communication and information-sharing initiatives and programmes may be considered to be of critical importance to a national health programme. Given the unprecedented challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, significant changes in legislation and national policy, a rise in immigration numbers, and emergent morbidities, the NSHS has required clarity of messaging, signposting, and purpose to ensure that the population has been guided and supported in maintaining positive sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing. The changes arising since the introduction of the strategy have required adaptability of services, and the ability to respond to the public's requirement for accurate information and messaging.

Initiatives and programmes relating to communication and information are detailed in Section 2 of this document, and further examples of notable achievements include:

- Establishment of advisory groups – there are several examples of subject-specific advisory groups that have benefited aspects of the NSHS since 2015, with one currently live example being the migrants communication subgroup which was set up to discuss access to asylum seeking centres to promote crisis pregnancy counselling and condom distribution services;
- Annual public communication plan – developed with the HSE Programmes and Campaigns team, the plan is based on the previous year's campaign outcomes, with agreed spending on initiatives such as My Options, Man2man and Sexualwellbeing.ie set annually, with quarterly campaign evaluations;
- Targeted information and campaigns – typically focusing on 'at risk' groups, with initiatives such as, *#respectprotect*, *Because...*, *Sex: Fact or Fiction?*, *Get Your Bits out*

for the Labs, Foreign Bodies, and the current initiative to promote awareness of the rise in the incidence of Mpox⁸⁵;

- Condom outreach programmes – aiming to maintain high levels of awareness of the campaign, particularly young adults and gbMSM, with a wide-range of creative initiatives and attendance at targeted events.

Support is provided to initiatives and interventions across the three Goals of the NSHS, many of which are highlighted in this review. It is understandable that the SHCPP Implementation Plan sets out Priority Actions explicitly aligned to communication and information activities.

The *SHCPP Implementation Plan, 2017 – 2020*, updated in 2021, identifies the completion or progression of all Priority Actions, 25 - 36, in alignment with the stated purpose.

Communication and Information is assessed as Progress Made.

⁸⁵ HSE, 2022, *Monkeypox Vaccine* <https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/monkeypox/vaccine/>

6 Key Findings and Recommendations

6.1 Overview

This report does not propose to prescribe the content of the next NSHS, but rather to provide a limited list of indicative recommendations.

The full extent of stakeholder contributions, including proposed actions identified in the SHCPP's submission that the consultancy team endorses, are not repeated in full here, but we would urge policy developers to undertake a focused collaborative process to ensure that all suggestions for the actions, aims, and goals of the NSHS 2023 – 2030 are duly considered. In providing indicative recommendations here, we do not seek to replicate those recommendations presented by the SHCPP, but to support the importance and pertinence of the stakeholder feedback recommendations highlighted in Section 3 of this report.

6.2 Indicative Recommendations

The 32 recommendations set out in this section are provided to build on the achievements of the NSHS 2015 – 2020 and to optimise and influence the development of a new strategy. It is understood that a number of the current priorities and actions will progress further into the NSHS 2023 – 2030. Recommendations are based on a number of different sources, including, variously, the outcomes and progress of the current strategy, the stakeholder engagement process, and academic research, including international comparators. The recommendations are not ranked in priority order.

No.	Recommendation
1	<p>Continuation of the positive life course approach</p> <p>Although there may be a focus required to address areas of unmet need, there may be benefits to maintaining and enhancing the messaging of a positive, holistic approach to sexual health and wellbeing.</p>
2	<p>Continuation of an overarching national sexual health strategy</p> <p>It is noted that many countries do not currently have an overarching national strategy for sexual health, preferring to dedicate distinct plans and strategies to specific areas of sexual and reproductive health. The achievements of the current NSHS in Ireland, particularly given the unprecedented changes and challenges presented during its lifecycle, suggests that benefits may have been realised, to an extent, because of the framework that the NSHS provides.</p>
3	<p>Development of a Model of Care for sexual health</p> <p>The development of a Model of Care for sexual health may ensure that services are effective, based on the best available evidence, facilitate the efficient use of resources, and are patient-directed. A Model of Care may also help to set out the vision for services in the future, and provide a platform for innovation and new ways of providing services, that are accessible and flexible enough to adapt to changing requirements. This approach may also support standardisation of services across the network of resources, reducing regional variability.</p>

No.	Recommendation
4	<p>Multiagency and multisectoral sexual health strategy development and governance</p> <p>Considerable benefits may be gained through the strengthening of multiagency and multisectoral involvement in the development stages of the next NSHS. Establishing a governance framework for the implementation and monitoring of the NSHS, characterised by multiagency and multisectoral input and ownership, may deliver further positive outcomes. France provides a useful template for increasing the reach of stakeholder inclusion, in recognition of the primary and secondary factors that determine sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing. This may achieve further advantages to extended policy areas, such as in criminal justice, social services, and education, and underpins the basis of greater collaborative and partnership working.</p>
5	<p>Development of a multisectoral Sexual Health Collaborative / Network</p> <p>There is evidence of good partnership working across sectors and disciplines. This can be further strengthened, with significant potential benefits to wide-ranging services and all parts of the population, with the development of a Collaborative, as a national network of interested professionals and stakeholders, designed to pull together disparate opinions, experiences, challenges, and learning. The development of a Sexual Health Collaborative may help to ensure that emerging challenges and issues, such as the poor engagement of specific groups, are recognised early with the appropriate action taken.</p>
6	<p>Enhancement and widening of the reach of the National Sexual Health Strategy</p> <p>There may be considerable benefits to widening the next NSHS to include additional, but related and interconnected, subject and speciality areas such as fertility, women’s health, termination of pregnancy, transgender, mental health in the context of sexual health, gender-based and sexual trauma and violence, etc. There are a range of areas that may achieve a greater and more collaborative focus from agencies, services, and policymakers by being included in the NSHS, not least a more comprehensive consideration of reproductive health and closer implementation linkages with the <i>Women’s Health Action Plan 2022-2023</i>⁸⁶.</p>
7	<p>Actions targeted to benefit older people</p> <p>The current NSHS does not include a strong focus on the sexual health and wellbeing of people over 40 years, and this may be a consideration for inclusion in the next strategy. As well as the significant wellbeing challenges that are associated with menopause and erectile dysfunction, there is recent evidence in Ireland of an increase in STIs in older age groups.</p>

⁸⁶ Department of Health, 2022, *Women’s Health Action Plan 2022-2023* <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/232af-womens-health-action-plan-2022-2023/>

No.	Recommendation
8	<p>Positive menstrual health education and awareness</p> <p>The inclusion of actions on education and awareness to support good menstrual health and positive attitudes towards and understanding of the menstrual cycle through to menopause, as well as issues of period poverty, may provide a range of benefits, including the development of associated workplace policies. Positive menstrual health education and awareness will benefit from a collaborative approach with multi-agency and cross-sector engagement, and defined links to the <i>Women's Health Action Plan 2022-2023</i>. A recent survey by Healthy Ireland found that 24% of eligible respondents, and 35% of under 25s, had experienced at least one indicator of period poverty, with 51% reporting disruption in everyday activities due to period symptoms⁸⁷.</p>
9	<p>Actions focused on the reduction of chemsex</p> <p>Chemsex is a growing public health concern in Ireland and Europe, with increased risks of transmission of STIs and HIV as well as other bloodborne viruses. Building on existing work, services supporting gbMSM will benefit from further targeted education, initiatives, and support, and the inclusion of this in the next NSHS may provide extended monitoring evidence to influence the actions required.</p>
10	<p>Action to reduce sexual and gender-based violence through collaboration across Government</p> <p>It is accepted that aspects of this area may be outside of the responsibility of the DoH and HSE, although Sexual Assault Treatment Units (SATUs) and educational support are within their remit. However, the practical working overlap between criminal justice and sexual health services in supporting people who suffer sexual violence is notable. For example, the recent <i>Zero Tolerance 2022 – 2026</i> strategy highlighted the requirement to overhaul the RSE curriculum, which is the remit of the DoE and NCCA. The new NSHS presents a strong opportunity to develop collaborative practices that may achieve positive outcomes for people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing DSGBV.</p>
11	<p>Expansion of accessible services for people working in the sex industry</p> <p>Reports suggest that sexual health clinics have dedicated treatment and consultation sessions for sex workers – prior to the pandemic, these were on a drop-in basis and were well used. Attendance has reduced with the current appointment system: stakeholders express concern, particularly for those who are believed to be victims of people trafficking. The inclusion of actions focusing on sex workers may provide awareness for services and healthcare professionals, help support safety and wellbeing amongst sex workers, and provide high levels of proactive and reactive engagement.</p>

⁸⁷ Department of Health, 2022, *Healthy Ireland Survey 2022* <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/f9e67-healthy-ireland-survey-2022/>

No.	Recommendation
12	<p>Education, awareness, and information for the sexual wellbeing of people who live with disabilities</p> <p>People with a disability have the same sexual needs, feelings, and desires as any other person and they have the right to access information. Action is required to enable those with special educational needs and physical and mental disabilities to develop safe and sexually healthy lives by strengthening education and training for people with disabilities, parents, carers, and professionals.</p>
13	<p>Outreach and collaborative action to support the sexual health of the prison population</p> <p>Although people in prison have access to primary care services, they do not currently have access to specialist sexual health services. The levels of need are not currently known, but consideration may be given to the benefits of targeted support, education, and testing for this group. Many people detained in prison are disadvantaged and vulnerable, and have experienced, or present a significant risk of experiencing, DSGBV.</p>
14	<p>Enhanced role for General Practitioners</p> <p>This opportunity may give rise to a number of actions, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Support GPs in the provision of STI services, including an efficient mechanism for partner notification within general practice. ■ The development of ‘hub and spoke’ GP-led community sexual health facilities that may improve access and reduce issue of stigma. ■ Consideration of a funding mechanism to ensure that people who cannot attend a public-funded clinic can access services through their GP free of charge, ensuring equitable access. ■ Increased training and shared learning with sexual health services.
15	<p>Education and training programmes to support children and young people in care, and young people leaving care</p> <p>The development of additional evidence-led training for foster carers and people working with young people and children in or leaving care settings, as a continuation of current initiatives, may provide support to the relationship and sexuality needs of young people at a critical time of vulnerability.</p>
16	<p>Action on the sexual health needs of transgender people</p> <p>The next NSHS may consider how sexual health services can most effectively engage with and support transgender people – in the context of facilities that may currently be gender-specific. Consideration may be given to bespoke sessional sexual health clinics to accommodate transgender people and address potential challenges and sensitivities.</p>

No.	Recommendation
17	<p>Stronger links to mental health services</p> <p>There are compelling links between psychological wellbeing and mental health and sexual and reproductive healthcare. There may be merit in exploring multidisciplinary and inter-agency collaborative working practices, potentially through policy development, education, mutual training, and shared learning arrangements, and/or interventions which may improve outcomes for service users.</p>
18	<p>Introduction of sexual health clinic video / remote consultations</p> <p>Remote consultations, typically online, by professionals based at sexual health clinics may provide considerable benefits to people seeking to engage with services, and extend the reach and influence of health and care professionals. The consultations, in combination with remote STI testing, will require robust protocols and specific referral and treatment pathways for those who do not require face-to-face consultation. This initiative may help to tackle issues of accessibility and stigma, whilst strengthening the ability to reach target groups that make less use of the current services.</p>
19	<p>Development and implementation of key performance indicators for HIV testing, STI services, and contraception services</p> <p>This was included in the SHCPP Implementation Plan, but was not fully progressed. The reason for this is not known, but there are clear benefits from addressing this as part of the new strategy.</p>
20	<p>Complete the designation of a national bacterial STI reference laboratory</p> <p>This may be considered to be a priority to deliver a national STI diagnostic resource.</p>
21	<p>Support for all services involved in sexual health to adhere to antimicrobial resistance treatment and surveillance policies and facilitate the adding of emerging strains into these protocols</p> <p>Explicitly defining the issue of antimicrobial resistance treatment and surveillance policies within the new strategy and implementation plan will reinforce the importance and high priority of this challenge.</p>
22	<p>Development of a workforce strategy to highlight and map the benefits of an expansion of specialist professionals</p> <p>There may be benefits in terms of quality, accessibility, and efficiency in the expansion of specialist workforce targeting at-risk groups, such as gbMSM, sex workers, people with a migrant background, transgender people, disabled people, and young people.</p>

No.	Recommendation
23	<p>Strengthening and expansion of professional training programmes</p> <p>Across health systems, there is evidence that many health professionals do not feel that they have the confidence, in terms of training and education, to proactively or reactively support and advise patients who present with sexual health difficulties or concerns. This issue is also apparent for other areas of work, including teachers and youth workers, who have a key role to play in shaping attitudes and knowledge of children and young people. A multisectoral and multidisciplinary approach is required to strengthen effective and training programmes, and the awareness of these programmes, as these can reduce barriers to support, and give professional confidence in delivering sexual health and wellbeing information.</p>
24	<p>Further development of a parent-based national health communication campaign to support adolescent sexual health</p> <p>Adolescents consistently report their parents to be the most important influences that shape sexual decision-making and behaviour. Parental communication about sex tends to shape adolescent sexual behaviour and outcomes. This sets parents in a pivotal role, presenting a compelling opportunity for positive influences and accurate, informed messaging. The strengthening and expansion of an effective and accessible campaign, equipping parents with the appropriate information and resources, may increase awareness of adolescent sexual wellbeing and ultimately impact on their sexual health beliefs and attitudes.</p>
25	<p>Development of a strategy to address the impact of early exposure to pornography</p> <p>Adolescents' pornography consumption is reportedly associated with subsequent increased sexual, relational, and body dissatisfaction, and increased pornography viewing has been associated with younger sexual debut, higher numbers of partners, and casual sex partners. The current strategy has supported training in this area to youth workers through the National Youth Council of Ireland, and further strategic development, focus, and intervention is recommended.</p>
26	<p>Development of 'Click and Collect' options for home testing services</p> <p>Currently, the sexual health home testing kits are sent out to a postal address of the choosing of the recipient. There is a strong case for expanding the option of 'Click and Collect' to support discretion and confidentiality, with community pharmacists a potential resource for this.</p>
27	<p>Review to look at an enhanced role for Community Pharmacists</p> <p>Providing an enhanced role for community pharmacists in sexual health and wellbeing may help to reduce stigma, expand prevention and self-care, and create access for groups that were previously excluded. Moving the focus away from hospitals and into the community, with interventions, management, information, and signposting, may be of considerable benefit to the overall strategy.</p>

No.	Recommendation
28	<p>Development of referral pathways for counselling and psychological support (crisis pregnancy/post abortion)</p> <p>A notable recommendation from the <i>Unplanned Pregnancy and Abortion Care (UnPAC) Study</i> is the proposed development of a new model for unplanned/crisis pregnancy support and counselling services, which is integrated with the model of care for termination of pregnancy services.</p>
29	<p>Accessible psychological support for home test kits</p> <p>The extent and nature of the psychological support provided to people who undertake home testing is not fully understood, but stakeholders expressed concern about the impact of low levels of, or difficult to access, psychological support during times of high levels of concern and stress for service users. This requires further exploration and understanding for the next strategy, including an assessment of current provision, with consideration of the psychological needs of people who want to be tested, and the issues aligned to that, and those who test positive.</p>
30	<p>Actions in support of the HIV Fast-Track Cities Initiative</p> <p>In 2019, Cork, Dublin, Galway, and Limerick signed the Paris Declaration, committing to fast-track city-level responses to HIV, as part of a global partnership to end the HIV epidemic. Further actions are required to set out the studies, profiles, implementation plans, targets, and work to support each of the four cities.</p>
31	<p>Development of clearly defined targets and a research, monitoring, and evaluation framework</p> <p>The new strategy will benefit from clarity in terms of the defined targets and the measures that will enable effective monitoring, scrutiny, and learning. The existing good work in this area will be further strengthened and co-ordinated by the development of a research, monitoring, and evaluation framework. Developing greater specificity will inform improved reliability of data through the evaluation process, influencing adaptations of actions and priorities over the lifecycle of the strategy.</p>
32	<p>Re-establish a dedicated annual report</p> <p>Following initial dedicated annual reports identifying the progress and achievements of actions and priorities, preference was given to including SHCPP updates in the HSE's <i>Health and Wellbeing Annual Report</i>. Reverting to annual reports, focusing specifically on the progress of the NSHS 2023 – 2030, may bring value in terms of clarity of purpose and a recognition of the priorities and issues at hand.</p>

7 Concluding Comments

Sexual health is fundamental to the overall health and wellbeing of individuals, couples, and families, and to the social and economic development of communities and countries. The WHO state that sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination, and violence.

International recommendations suggest the requirement for sexual health strategies to take a sex positive and human rights-based approach with gender equality and cultural sensitivity, equity, and social participation at its core. The *National Sexual Health Strategy 2015 – 2020* provides a focus on a life course approach, recognising the importance of the development of healthy attitudes to sexuality throughout childhood and adolescence, and it is envisaged that this focus will prevail in the next iteration of the strategy.

Considerable progress has been made to meet the goals and aims of the current NSHS, with significant legislative, policy, epidemiological, and environmental changes being realised during its lifecycle. Of the 56 Priority Actions set out in support of the strategy, 49 are assessed as having been successfully progressed. Significant stakeholder learning will continue to benefit initiatives, interventions, services, and campaigns over the next five years. There has been considerable legislative, policy, and service delivery change requiring a shift, realignment, and enhancement of resources and priorities for sexual health services since 2015. The new NSHS will need to incorporate the new services and build on the associated learnings.

There is now a requirement for the NSHS 2023 – 2030 to demonstrate a commitment to, and take the required actions to make progress towards, the WHO 2030 goal to end STIs as a public health concern, and prioritise action towards reducing health inequalities and delivering equity of access to services. The new strategy will benefit from greater collaborative working between sectors, agencies, and disciplines, and may be further strengthened by providing a strong community focus that may, in turn, improve the reach of messaging and services. The development of an explicit and evidence-led Model of Care for sexual health may provide a robust framework for the further development of accessible, effective, and efficient services, and set the vision for services in the future.

A series of 32 indicative recommendations is provided in this review, but further highly relevant and valuable contributions from stakeholders will influence the goals, priorities, and actions of the next strategy, notably the key actions proposed by the SHCPP as part of the stakeholder consultation exercise. This report does not seek to rank or prioritise opinions and recommendations for inclusion in the next strategy – this is a matter for services and policymakers following this review.

Appendix 1

Sexual Health Crisis Pregnancy Programme Implementation Plan 2017 – 2020

	Action	Timescale	Lead Agency	2021 Status
1	Complete and implement outstanding practice guidance from 2016 priority actions for HIV testing in various settings, including home HIV testing and point of care HIV testing.	2017-2018	HSE SHCPP	<p>The ECDC European HIV testing guidance was updated in November 2018 to provide guidance on both HIV and hepatitis testing. It was agreed to await ECDC publication before development of national HIV testing guidance for Ireland. This was not progressed due to the vacancy of the Clinical Lead post. Following a pilot conducted in 2016/17, community HIV testing has been expanded to 5 NGO partners in Dublin, Cork, Galway and Limerick and continues to be funded by SHCPP. This work was disrupted by COVID-19 in 2020/21 due to travel restrictions and the closure of community testing venues. NGO partners adapted their services and provided free rapid HIV testing from their offices or alternative venues.</p> <p>Commissioned a pilot project in 2020 to assess the feasibility, acceptability and impact of an online (home) STI testing service that is integrated with public STI clinics in Ireland. Funding for the pilot was secured through the Government of Ireland's Sláintecare Integration Fund 2019 with co-funding from SHCPP. Online STI service provider is being piloted in the counties of Dublin, Cork and Kerry. The project commenced in September with the development of the online platform SH24.ie and integration with the participating public STI clinics. During the service delivery period from January to May 2021, over 14,000 free home STI test kits were delivered. A formal evaluation of the pilot project is underway and due to be completed by end August 2021.</p>
2	Complete and implement outstanding practice guidance from 2016 priority actions for STI testing, screening and treatment.	2017-2018	HSE SHCPP	<p>Updated the HSE STI antibiotic prescribing guidance in liaison with the Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP).</p> <p>Development of STI guidance and content for sexualwellbeing.ie.</p> <p><i>Your guide to STIs</i> patient information booklet developed, updated as required and translated into key languages for migrant communities. Patient Information Leaflets for all STIs and genital conditions</p>

				developed and available on www.sexualwellbeing.ie and to order through healthpromotion.ie .
3	Complete and implement outstanding practice guidance from 2016 priority actions for the use of antiretroviral therapy in HIV prevention to include PrEP, TasP and PEP.	2017-2018	HSE SHCPP	<p>PrEP (HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis)</p> <p>In November 2019, PrEP became available through the HSE, through approved PrEP service providers that meet the National Standards for PrEP, and is free of charge to those at substantial risk of HIV who meet clinical eligibility.</p> <p>There are currently thirteen public and nine private approved PrEP service providers in Ireland.</p> <p>By end Q1 2020, 2995 new individuals were registered for PrEP. By end 2020, 1779 individuals were dispensed PrEP at least once, through the national PrEP programme.</p> <p>In advance of national roll-out, the following guidance was developed in collaboration with a multisectoral PrEP Working Group to inform implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Standards for the Delivery and Management of HIV PrEP • Clinical Management Guidance for Individuals Taking HIV PrEP within the Context of a Combination HIV (and STI) Prevention Approach in Ireland • PrEP website and patient information leaflets <p>The national PrEP programme was informed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HIV PrEP estimates and cascade report, in collaboration with HPSC, providing estimates on the number of individuals likely to avail of HIV PrEP in the first year of availability. • Assessment of the the readiness of public STI services to implement PrEP to national standards and determine resources required for implementation. RCSI 2019. • HIQA Health technology assessment (HTA) that found that the successful implementation of a national PrEP programme for those at substantial risk of HIV in Ireland would be safe, effective and cost-saving. HIQA 2019. <p>TasP (HIV treatment as prevention)</p> <p>HSE recommendation on ART for all people living with HIV in Ireland signed off and published in July 2017.</p> <p>Patient information leaflet developed, translated and available on sexualwellbeing.ie/hiv or healthpromotion.ie.</p>

				PEP (Post-exposure prophylaxis) PEP guidelines (EMI Toolkit) updated as required, in collaboration with HPSC.
4	Coordinate and facilitate audit of identified auditable outcomes (from practice guidance) on: a. Use of ART for HIV prevention b. HIV testing c. STI testing/management	2017-2020	HSE SHCPP	<p>HIV treatment and continuum of HIV care A national HIV treatment audit was conducted in 2018 in collaboration with a national steering group. Monitoring definitions for the continuum of HIV care were agreed for Ireland (based on ECDC definitions). The HIV treatment audit results and HPSC HIV modeling estimates were combined to provide the first complete continuum of HIV care for Ireland 2017.</p> <p>Further estimates were conducted by HPSC in 2019, providing an updated continuum of HIV care for Ireland 2018: An estimated 7,200 people were living with HIV at the end of 2018. Of these, approximately 90% are diagnosed; of whom 88% are on ART; of whom 95% are virally suppressed.</p> <p>HIV testing HPSC established a community HIV Testing monitoring system, data is collected routinely and reports are published annually.</p> <p>STI testing among MSM Collaborated in 2018 with HPSC and HIV services on an audit of STI testing among MSM attending HIV services.</p>
5	Continue to roll out agreed plan from 2016 for extension of HPV vaccine to at risk groups	2017-2020	SHCPP/ NIO/ and PH	<p>In October 2016, the HPV vaccine was made available to men and women living with HIV up to and including 26 years, attending public HIV services.</p> <p>In January 2017, the HPV vaccine was made available to gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) up to and including 26 years, attending public STI services. In July 2018, the HPV vaccine was extended to gbMSM (including gbMSM living with HIV) up to and including 45 years, in line with National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) recommendations. A HPV vaccination guidance document, posters and patient information leaflets were developed for HIV and STI services. These are available on www.sexualwellbeing.ie.</p> <p>By the end of 2020, a total of 7,415 men and women living with HIV and gbMSM had commenced the HPV vaccine course.</p>
6	Complete any outstanding elements of the priority action for designation of	2017	HSE SHCPP	In May 2017 the Department of Clinical Microbiology at St. James's Hospital was designated as the Interim Gonococcal Laboratory in Ireland with agreed roles

	appropriate laboratories as STI reference laboratory.			and responsibilities and appropriate allocation of interim resources. This interim designation remains in place, pending full designation of a Sexually Transmitted Bacterial Laboratory (STBRL). In September 2017 the HSE National Clinical Advisor and Group Lead, Acute Hospitals Division invited expressions of interest from all publicly funded Microbiology Laboratories in Ireland in relation to designation as the STBRL. Agreement was reached on the roles, responsibilities and resources required to designate a national STBRL in 2019. Submission made for resources through the HSE estimates process has been unsuccessful to date.
7	STI and contraception services a. Complete mapping and needs assessment of STI, contraception and laboratory services b. Identify resource requirements for the priority recommendations from the about a beautiful dark blue much, but and needs assessment c. Present priority recommendations and resource requirements to relevant parties and develop timelines and plan for implementation d. Implement recommendations.	Q1, Q2 2017 Q3, Q4 2017 Q3, Q4 2017 2018-2020	HSE SHCPP	The mapping of sexual health services included a Survey of STI and Contraception Services; a Survey of General Practice; and a Survey of Laboratories in relation to STI Diagnostics in Ireland. The report on “Sexual Health in Ireland” was completed and presents a collation of information on behaviour, sexual health outcomes and interventions to improve sexual health, including recommendations and areas for action. This was followed by a stakeholder consultation to discuss the actions arising from the reports in relation to how they can be achieved, timeframes and prioritisation. All reports are available on https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/ .
8	Partner notification (PN) in Ireland a. Undertake a baseline description of PN activity/resources in Ireland b. Informed by baseline description and international best practice develop and implement clinical practice guidance (including targets and auditable outcomes) for PN in Ireland c. Identify, prioritise and implement solutions to	2017 2018-2020	HSE SHCPP	Facilitated 20 participants each year in 2018, 2019 and 2020, to attend an online Sexual Health Advisor training course run by Staffordshire University. Participants include nurses working in a sexual health capacity in public STI/HIV services, student health services, primary care, prison and addiction services. Established the Sexual Health Advisors Association of Ireland in 2019 and provision of annual funding to support network activities. The network is led by a core group of dedicated Sexual Health Advisors (SHA) in Ireland and membership is open to all those working in an SHA capacity or with an interest in SHA. The network is under the governance of the Society for the Study of

	meet infrastructural and competency gaps.			Sexually Transmitted Infections in Ireland (SSSTDI) and is an all-Ireland network. The network held the first meeting of its members in February 2020 and had 34 members by the end of 2020. Research was conducted through EU Joint Action program INTEGRATE on partner notification (PN) in collaboration with the University College Dublin Mater group. This included a roadmap of PN process in Ireland, the findings of which were presented at the SHA meeting in February 2020.
9	HBV vaccination a. Undertake a baseline description of the coverage of HBV vaccination in various at risk groups b. Informed by the baseline description identify, prioritise and implement solutions to increase HBV vaccination coverage in at risk groups.	2018-2020	HSE SHCPP/NIO/AND PH	Not progressed
10	Develop and implement key performance indicators for HIV testing, STI services and contraception services.	2018/9-2020	HSE SHCPP	Not progressed
11	Develop priority clinical actions beyond 2020.	2019	HSE SHCPP/DOH	Recommendations and areas for action identified in mapping/needs assessment work will inform this.
12	Roll-out the 10-day HSE Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion as a national sexual health training programme, training 100 people per year who work with groups that are vulnerable to lower levels of sexual well-being and groups at increased risk of STIs and crisis pregnancy.	2017-2020	SHPO	The FPSHP is run approximately 10 times a year across the country. Between 2017 and 2020, 38 courses were run with 655 professionals completing the training. SHCPP carried out an evaluation of the programme in 2019 and the programme is currently being updated.
13	Explore options for delivery of the HSE Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion to establish the most sustainable and effective mode of delivery.	2018	SHPO	This work was started in 2020 but delayed by the pandemic response. SHCPP are currently working with HP & I and NGO colleagues to review and adapt the programme. The 6-day adapted programme is due for piloting in 2022.

14	Commission a training strategy to provide a strategic framework for training provided/funded by the HSE for professionals working with at-risk and/or vulnerable groups.	2017	HSE SHCPP	Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy 2019-2029 was published in 2019. SHCPP's Education & Training function is working to that strategy.
15	In partnership with Tusla, provide support/training on the development of RSE Policy Development for children's residential centres.	2017	HSE SHCPP	Policy development was not required of SHCPP by Tusla. However, SHCPP partnered with Tusla to respond to the findings of the 2016, SENYPIC study by developing and publishing the 'Healthy Sexuality and Relationship Development Toolkit' for foster parent, social workers and social care workers.
16	Improve the home-school links in RSE provision by developing a storybook for 5-6 year olds on the body, sexuality and growing up and continuing to disseminate the Busybodies booklet to Primary Schools and to parents.	2017-2018	HSE SHCPP	The SHCPP has gone beyond the initial brief to develop a range of booklets for parents under the brand title ' Making the 'Big Talk', many small talks . To date there are 3 booklets in the series, with a 4th due in 2021
17	Continue to offer in-service training on RSE for Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle to primary schools, post-primary schools and Youthreach centres through the PDST.	2017-2020	HSE SHCPP SHPO DES	
18	Review RSE resources at Primary level and update as appropriate.	2018-2020	DES (PDST)	SHCPP worked with HP & I CHO 4 to update and publish the Busy Bodies, Puberty and Adolescence booklet (2020). Trust. Growing Up LGBT, Busy Bodies videos are available for streaming and download and pdf versions of the manuals/booklets available on sexualwellbeing.ie
19	Review RSE resources (B4uDecide.ie, Trust, Growing Up LGBT) at Post-Primary level and update as appropriate.	2017 – 2020	HSE SHCPP DES	SHCPP is developing 3 RSE units to sit within an overall SPHE resource for Junior Cycle. RSE Unit 1 is currently published online.
20	Work in partnership with primary teacher training colleges to ensure that primary teachers receive good quality training in Relationships and Sexuality Education.	2018 – 2019	HSE SHCPP SHPO DES	Out of SHCPP's scope. However, SHCPP and Irish Research Council funded DCU under COALESCE research award scheme to complete research study, ' Teacher Professional Development and Relationships and Sexuality Education RSE: Realising Optimal Sexual Health and Wellbeing Across the Lifespan' to inform

				developments in RSE teacher training at Primary level.
21	Work in partnership with post-primary teacher training colleges to ensure that post-primary teachers receive good quality training in Relationships and Sexuality Education.	2018-2019	HSE SHCPP HSE HP & I DES	Out of SHCPP's scope.
22	Support schools and YouthReach centres in providing a safe and supportive school climate for LGBT young people.	2017 – 2020	DES HSE SHCPP	SHCPP supported the development of the Safe and Supportive Schools Model by BeLonGTo and Health Promotion and Improvement, CHO1.
23	Track implementation of the RSE Programme and other key indicators of quality RSE delivery through the Lifeskills Survey in Primary Schools, Post-Primary Schools and in YouthReach Centres in 2017 and 2019.	2017 & 2019	DoE HSE SHCPP DOH	Action not continued by DES
24	Develop information for parents of 12-18 year olds to support them to have conversations with their children on sexuality, human development and growing up.	2017	HSE SHCPP SHPO HSE Child Health	The development of the 4th booklet in the parent series, Making the Big Talk many small talks: 13-18 years in underway and due to be published in 2021. Delayed because of issues with initial contractor, so being developed in-house.
25	Coordinate sexual health communications work of the HSE and non-statutory organisations to ensure joint resources are used in the most effective manner.	2017-2020	HSE SHCPP HSE Communications NGOs	The Sexual Health Communications Group was established and met to discuss communication targets between 2017 to 2019. The group stood down in late 2019 as the broader planning piece was completed and our main focus was on planning stand-alone projects. Advisory groups were established for specific campaigns. A Migrants communication sub group was set up in 2018 to discuss access to Asylum seeking centres to promote crisis pregnancy counselling and condom distribution services. This group remains active.
26	Develop and implement an annual public communication plan in partnership with the HSE National Communications Unit.	2017-2020	HSE SHCPP HSE Communications NGOs	Annual plan developed with HSE Programmes and Campaigns team. Plan developed based on previous year's campaign measurements. SHCPP agrees media buying spend on MyOptions, Man2man and Sexualwellbeing.ie annually. Based on quarterly campaign evaluations; spend,

				platforms and messages are adapted to advertise our campaigns.
27	Develop and implement a national sexual health wellbeing brand and website for all in consultation with non-statutory organisations.	2017	HSE SHCPP	Sexualwellbeing.ie brand was developed and used across our digital, OOH and native advertising platforms to. New digital social media calendars and assets were developed in 2018 to highlight messages on consent, STI testing /prevention and contraception choices using the hashtag #Respectprotect. The website continues to perform well with growing recognition and increased use since its launch in 2018- 42% of 18-30 year olds surveyed in 2020 reported being aware of the website, compared to 35% in 2019 and 19%
28	Provide targeted information and campaigns to at-risk groups and evaluate annually to ensure effectiveness.	2017-2020	HSE SHCPP HSE Communications NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual wellbeing campaign #respectprotect replaced ‘Johnny’s Got You Covered’ in 2018. #Respectprotect is a digital and social media campaign to promote condom use and good sexual health. The campaign is aimed at those who are at increased risk of STIs and/ or crisis pregnancy, 18-30 years old; STI rates highest among 20-24 year olds and men who have sex with men (MSM). This new campaign is visible on social media platforms Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. • Managed a national public awareness campaign around emergency hormonal contraception (EHC) in partnership with the Irish Pharmacy Union. The aim of the campaign is to increase public awareness that the EHC pill is available to women directly from a pharmacist up to five days (120 hours) following unprotected sex. • Launched a national out of home and digital condom campaign ‘Because’ targeting young adults to remind them to use a condom every time they have sex to avoid an STI and an unplanned pregnancy-31% of young adults surveyed in 2020 said they were aware of the campaign. • Launched ‘Sex: Fact or Fiction?’ a series of videos aiming to debunk myths around sexual health in an engaging fashion. The videos show real people responding to statements relating to sexual health and reinforce the importance of condom use to reduce the risks of STIs-35% of 18-30 year olds surveyed in 2020 reported seeing ‘Fact or Fiction’ adverts. • Launched a partnership with some of Ireland’s top podcasters to discuss the topic of sexual consent – the 2 Johnnies, I’m Grand Mam and Owing It. The

				<p>campaign had 268,700 listens across all podcast episodes-30% of the target audience had heard discussions about sexual consent on podcasts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2020 we partnered with the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) to launch a new sexual health campaign 'Play it Safe!' The aim of the campaign was to provide young adults with access to helpful information to support them in safeguarding their sexual health and wellbeing during the pandemic. The campaign involved making 100,000 sexual health protection packs available in 1,820 pharmacies nationwide. These packs included an information leaflet and a free HSE condom-37% of 18-30 year olds surveyed said they had seen the campaign, with almost half reporting having seen it in a pharmacy • From 2017, we continued to work in partnership with the Gay Health Network to develop Man2Man.ie and HIV/STI testing campaigns targeting gay and bisexual men. Developed a PEP creative, a STI testing campaign 'Get Your Bits out for the Labs' and 'Foreign Bodies' campaign messages which continue to be displayed across man2man social media sites-41% recall seeing the 'Get Your Bits Out For the Labs' campaign in 2020, up from 30% in 2019 and 21% in 2018. • In 2020 we supported the development of a new digital strategy to help drive traffic to the www.man2man.ie website-55% of gbMSM surveyed in 2020 said they were aware of the Man2Man website, compared to 40% in 2018. • All campaigns are measured annually to assess performance.
29	Respond to STI outbreaks from a communications perspective in a timely manner in conjunction with HSE Public Health and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre.	2017-2020	HSE SHCPP HPSC HSE Communications NGOs	<p>Up to Q4 of 2019 communications planning support was provided to local Public Health Departments and the HPSC to respond to STI outbreaks in the North East, West and South East region. In partnership with HIV Ireland and the GHN we placed condom use and STI testing messages on dating/hook up sites and the 'Manpower' Community Outreach channel for gbMSM.</p> <p>In response to STI outbreaks among the student population we placed STI testing and condom use messages on regional Union of Student (USI) social media channels.</p> <p>In March 2020 in response to COVID-19 public health service restrictions, we worked with HIV Ireland and GHN to</p>

				develop a strategic HIV/STI prevention communications plan to encourage the gbMSM to use condoms to prevent STI transmission.
30	Provide information and advice to parents on communicating about relationships and sexuality with their children.	2018	HSE SHCPP HSE Child Health	In addition to information provided above, Information and advice for parents of 0-12 year olds available on www.sexualwellbeing.ie
31	Update B4uDecide.ie to reflect the new RSE curriculum and other topics relevant to young people's lives and promote as an information source for all young people.	2017	SHPO HSE SHCPP	In 2019 research was commissioned to seek the views of young people aged 14-16 on the relevance and functionality of www.b4udecide.ie and to inform decision-making regarding the future direction of the site. In the same year following on from the work of CORE, Spunout were commissioned to complete a scoping exercise on the current site. Recommendations from the coping exercise led to the development approx. 30 factsheets. In line with the HSE Digital Roadmap, the B4udecide new content factsheets will now be hosted on the HSE.ie website. An Advisory Group with membership from the DoH, NCCA, NYCI, HSE Communications and Belong2 will advise the SHCPP on the approach to place content and development of a communications plan going forward.
32	Conduct a review of all sexual health information provided/funded by the HSE with a view to identifying gaps and updating/combining resources as required.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP NGOs	Review of the THINK contraception is complete and a new leaflet 'Your Contraceptive Choices' (YCC) setting out all of the contraception options is available in maternity hospitals, GP surgeries and community organisations- 148,014 leaflets have been ordered from 2019 to 2020. A Plain English version of this resource together with work being carried out to translate the leaflet into several languages is on hold due to staff redeployment in 2020-2021. We developed and disseminated the STI leaflet; General information on STIs and genital conditions. This leaflet is available in five additional languages- 201,580 leaflets have been ordered from 2017 to 2020. We developed and disseminated patient information leaflets for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and genital conditions. A total of 132,525 leaflets in this range have been ordered since 2017. The Emergency contraceptive leaflet was updated in 2018 in line with a national public awareness campaign around emergency hormonal contraception (EHC)

				<p>in partnership with the Irish Pharmacy Union.</p> <p>We worked in partnership with Migrant Community Organisations to provide the translation of information for people whose first language is not English to translate the MyOptions resource into 11 languages.</p> <p>We continue to support the translation of contraception and emergency contraception and unplanned pregnancy advice in five languages for the www.Healthconnect.ie app in partnership with Cairde.</p>
33	Expand the central condom and lubricant distribution service to statutory and non statutory agencies/bodies and NGOs.	2017-2020	HSE SHCPP SHPO	<p>We continued to oversee the management of the National Condom Distribution Service in late 2015. 199,349 condoms and 1,241,124 lubricant sachets have been ordered by 155 organisations nationally. In 2019 condoms were made freely available in 25 third level institutions</p>
34	Implement condom outreach programmes targeting young adults and men who have sex with men and disseminate 100,000 condoms annually.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP NGOs	<p>In 2017 we held 45 activation events, beginning with SHAG week in February, continuing with festival and concert appearances during the summer and nightclub/pub engagements in the autumn and winter.</p> <p>In 2017, 211,000 condoms were ordered by the GMHS outreach service and via Headcase Marketing for distribution via the 'Johnny's Got You Covered' sexual health promotion outreach campaign. In 2018 we held 29 activation events, beginning with Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance (SHAG) Week in February 2018, continuing with festival and concert appearances during the summer and nightclub/pub engagements in the autumn and winter of 2018.</p> <p>In 2018, 163,583 condoms were ordered by and distributed via the GMHS outreach programme and Headcase Marketing</p> <p>In 2019, we held 38 outreach events targeting young people aged 18–30 to promote consistent and correct use of contraception. The outreach team held an event in partnership with the Union of Students in Ireland (USI) to mark Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance (SHAG) Week in February and continued with festival and concert appearances during the summer and nightclub/pub engagements in the autumn and winter of 2019.</p> <p>In 2020, 51,800 condoms were ordered by the MPOWER Community Outreach</p>

				<p>Service and Headcase Marketing (on behalf of the HSE SHCPP).</p> <p>In 2020, eight activation days took place during Q1 2020. This work was paused due to COVID-19 restrictions.</p> <p>We continue to support the HIV Ireland Manpower Community Outreach Service to disseminate condoms via the peer sexual health outreach workers to gbMSM.</p>
35	Promote the availability of free crisis pregnancy counselling services and supports and free-post abortion counselling and medical check-ups through information campaigns and local service promotion and evaluate annually.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP	<p>From 2017 to 2018 we continued to promote crisis pregnancy and post abortion supports. In 2018 there were 15,908 visits to the www.positiveoptions.ie website and 11,381 visits to www.abortionaftercare.ie</p> <p>In 2019 we worked with the HSE Communications Programme and Campaigns team to launch the My Options service, a new HSE unplanned pregnancy support service provided by the SHCPP. In 2019 there were 334,590 visits to the MyOptions website. An evaluation of the campaign showed that one in four 18 – 44 year olds are aware of the My Options service.</p> <p>In 2019 we distributed 27,912 My Options leaflets via GP surgeries and www.healthpromotion.ie including all language options and placed My Options Helpline digital screen displays nationwide in 1,200+ healthcare locations</p> <p>In 2020 we saw 545.6k visits to the website, a 53% increase on the previous year. GP advertising was paused due to COVID-19 restrictions.</p>
36	Issue the national 'Sexual Health News' newsletter bi-annually.	2017 - 2020	HP&I HSE SHCPP NGOs	<p>In 2017, 2018 and 2019 we published 2 editions of Sexual Health News (SHN) in partnership with Health Promotion and Improvement (CHO5) and 500 print copies were distributed to approximately 2,000 health professionals and 245 health services nationally.</p> <p>In 2020 we issued one edition of the SHN due to COVID-19 staff redeployment.</p>
37	Undertake a baseline description of surveillance activity to inform the development of clinical indicators for sexual health.	2017	SHCPP, HPSC, NGOS, Academic Institutions	<p>Complete by RCSI under SHCPP and Irish Research Council COALECSE research award scheme. Research completed and report published on sexualwellbeing.ie</p> <p>Work ongoing to develop a final set of indicators.</p>
38	Agree a set of clinical and behavioural indicators to enable the measurement of progress; to detect	2017 - 2018	SHCPP, HPSC, NGOS, Academic Institutions	<p>The process of agreeing the final set of indicators was delayed due to COVID-19 and is progressing now.</p>

	clinical and behavioural changes over time and to make comparisons internationally.			
39	CIDR Recommendation. Based on the feasibility and pilot study* implement new STI module in Computerised Infectious Disease Reporting (CIDR).	2017 - 2020	HPSC, SHCPP, Public Health	The development of the STI/HIV module for CIDR commenced in 2016 and phase 1 was completed in 2016. Phase 2 (technical design and development) and phase 3 (development of local notification management system) were completed in 2018. Phase 4 (full system testing, user acceptance testing and pilot implementation) was delayed initially due to staff resources in HPSC, then by COVID-19). This will be re-visited post COVID.
40	Assess and implement mechanisms to improve reporting of core dataset for STI notifications.	2019	HPSC	Not progressed
41	Review agreed set of indicators (informed by baseline description and clinical practice guidance) to inform the development of a monitoring system including the measurement of progress and service impacts. Identify resources and coordination that will be required.	2019	SHCPP	Not progressed
42	Carry out baseline description of research activity to inform the development of behavioural indicators and identify research gaps.	2017	HSE SHCPP & HPSC	Carried out as part of SHCPP Irish Research Council COALESCE research award by Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI), 'STIs and HIV in Ireland: developing a national second generation surveillance system' provides critical data and evidence on the national surveillance of STIs and HIV in Ireland. Conducted a mapping of existing clinical sexual health services (contraceptive, sexually transmitted infection (STI) and laboratory services) which informed an assessment of service need in Ireland. Needs assessment and follow up consultation report identified key research gaps.
43	Carry out research prioritisation exercise to inform commissioning of research.	2017	HSE SHCPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needs assessment and follow up, consultation report identified key gaps Scoping study for general population involved stakeholder consultation which identified priority area

44	Commission research in line with the research prioritisation requirements. Where possible, develop strategic partnerships with other organisations to achieve greater efficiencies and better value for money.	2018 - 2020	HSE SHCPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scoping study completed for the 'Knowledge, attitudes and behaviours survey on sexual health and crisis pregnancy among the general population living in Ireland'. The general population survey will be commissioned in 2022. • Worked with the Health Protection Surveillance Centre and the Gay Health Network to oversee the analysis of the European men who have sex with men internet survey Ireland (EMIS) 2017 dataset for Ireland and launched the report. • In partnership with Tusla, the SHCPP commissioned and published a comprehensive research study on the sexual health and education needs of young people in care. This directly informed the development of resource for Tusla staff launched in 2021. • Commissioned and published qualitative research study exploring the needs of parents of children aged 4 to 9 with regard to having conversations with their children about relationships, sexuality and growing up. This directly informed the development of educational resources. • Established a joint research programme with the Economic and Social Research Institute to investigate Health and Wellbeing in Adolescence using data from the national longitudinal dataset Growing Up in Ireland. • Established research award scheme with Irish Research Council relating to the SH strategy • Commissioned large-scale qualitative research study into women's experiences of abortion and unplanned pregnancy support services since the implementation on the Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 on 1 January 2019 is due to be published in 2021
45	Commission qualitative research study in post-primary schools to examine Relationships & Sexuality Education delivery.	2017 - 2018	HSE SHCPP, DES	This project was not completed due to quality issues identified in the process
46	Develop knowledge transfer plans to share research findings to inform service provision, policy and practice.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge translation activities were put into place for the SENYPIC study and the research study with parents of children of 4-9 years olds – both resulting in education resources, • Knowledge transfer plan developed for the ESRI 'Talking about sex and sexual behaviour of Young People in Ireland'

				<p>research report. Dissemination activities from this plan are underway.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge Translation Bursary in development to support the dissemination and translation of high quality research relating to sexual wellbeing and crisis pregnancy.
47	Facilitate implementation of action plan developed from the 'Sexual Health Needs Assessment of Young People in Care' research project.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP, Health Promotion, Tusla	<p>Knowledge translation activities were put into place for the SENYPIC study, including the development and launch of a toolkit with Tusla aimed at practitioners working with young people in care. Training development planned in 2022.</p>
48	Develop knowledge transfer plan for MISI 2015 and ensure findings are used to inform practice	2017 - 2019	HSE SHCPP, HPSC, GMHS, GHN	<p>A number of journal articles were published in academic journals relating to the MISI findings.</p>
49	Keep current sexual health indicators in the Healthy Ireland survey under review and develop and expand as appropriate.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP & HPSC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexual health questions have been removed for recent waves due to; a. query over the value of the small number of questions and b. competing priorities for inclusion in this survey. • General population survey to be initiated in 2022 and will use sexual health indicators to ensure appropriate data is collected on sexual health and wellbeing and crisis pregnancy.
50	Systematically monitor and report on crisis pregnancy indicators and emergent trends related to crisis pregnancy nationally and internationally.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teenage pregnancy trends report to be published in June 2021 to highlight the decline in teen births and abortions since 2000. • UK abortion figures reporting on women from Ireland accessing the service; and abortion pill orders from online providers were tracked until abortion services were introduced in 2019.
51	Continue to fund the provision of equitable access to high quality crisis pregnancy and post abortion counselling services.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP, NGOs	<p>Funding arrangements in place with eleven service providers to provide counselling. Service arrangement also in place for the provision of the national MyOptions telephone counselling and support service.</p>
52	Implement the recommendation of the 2016 'Review of Crisis Pregnancy Counselling Services' in relation to models of funding/ expenditure and new service delivery models including telephone counselling.	2017 - 2018	HSE SHCPP	<p>Findings implemented including the operation of the new telephone counselling service MyOptions</p>
53	Respond to training needs of those working	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP	<p>Masterclasses previously delivered by Maynooth University currently on hold due to pandemic restrictions. Updated training</p>

	in the area of crisis pregnancy.			on post abortion counselling to be delivered to funded services in 2021.
54	Continued implementation of the Self Assessment Framework and development of quality improvement plans to enhance quality in crisis pregnancy counselling services.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP	Same continuing within all CP services, a review of the framework is due to take place in 2022.
55	Continue to support initiatives that assist those who need additional supports to continue with the pregnancy and with parenting.	2017 - 2020	HSE SHCPP, NGOs	Services who provide support in this area continue to be funded through service agreements.
56	Continue to support initiatives that promote crisis pregnancy prevention with stakeholders such as ICGP.	2017 - 2020	HSE, SHCPP	Meeting with ICGP new director scheduled for May 2021; no programmes currently funded through ICGP.