**Press Release**

HRB publishes latest figures on treated drug use in Ireland 2009 – 2015

Embargo: Thursday 11 May 2017 00.01. Latest drug treatment figures from the Health Research Board (HRB) show that a total of 61,439 cases were treated for problem drug use in Ireland between 2009 and 2015. Treated cases increased from 7,479 cases in 2009, to 9,892 in 2015.

Commenting on some of the trends over time, Dr Suzi Lyons, Senior Researcher at the HRB said;

‘Overall numbers of cases continued to increase until 2014 and then stabilised in 2015. However there are changes related to types of drugs reported and a decrease in new cases presenting for treatment’.

‘Looking at the types of drugs first - opiates remained the main problem drug for treated cases over the period, however they decreased as a proportion of all cases treated. In 2009, more than 6 out of 10 cases reported opiates as their main problem, while in 2015 less than five in 10 cases reported opiates. But we can see from the figures that other drugs have increased, mainly cannabis and benzodiazepines’.

‘Cases treated for benzodiazepines as their main problem drug almost trebled from 306 in 2009, to 873 in 2015. There was also an increase in cases where benzodiazepines were an additional problem drug. In 2009 there were 1,451 cases taking benzodiazepines as an additional drug and it was the fourth most common additional drug. In 2015 this had increased to 2,258 cases and it had become the first most common additional drug,’ explains Dr Lyons.

‘Reported problem use of new psychoactive substance cases peaked in 2010 at 2.5% of all cases, but dropped to 0.4% of all cases in 2012, reflecting new legislation around Head Shops. There has been a slight increase in 2015 to 0.9%.

‘The figures also show a decrease in the proportion of new cases, or people presenting for treatment for the first time. However, this means there has been an increase in the proportion of previously treated cases, or people returning for treatment, which is an indicator of the chronic, relapsing nature of addiction’.

**Key findings**

**Main problem drug**

* **Opiates** (mainly heroin): most commonly reported drug. While the number of cases treated for problem opiate use remained stable over the period, the proportion of cases treated decreased from 60.6% in 2009 to 47.8% in 2015.
* **Cannabis:** 2nd most common drug among those treated. The number of cases increased by 72%, from 1,616 in 2009, to 2,786 in 2015.
* Cannabis is the most common drug reported by *new* cases.
* **Cocaine:** remains 3rd most common drug reported. In 2015, 10.4% of cases reported problem cocaine use, the highest proportion since 2010.
* Proportion of cases reporting **benzodiazepines** as a main problem drug increased by 185% from 306 cases (4.1%) in 2009 to 873 cases (8.8%) in 2015.
* Number of cases treated for **Z-drugs** (a type of sedative) has increased from 9 in 2009, to 154 in 2015.
* Reported problem use of **novel psychoactive substances** (NPS) peaked in 2010, at 2.5% of

all cases treated, and dropped to 0.4% of all cases treated in 2012. Since then it has increased to represent 0.9% of all cases treated in 2015.

**Polydrug use**

* Majority of cases reported problem polydrug use (63.5%) over the period.
* Proportion reporting polydrug use has decreased slightly from 68.4% in 2009 to 60.9% in 2015.
* Up to 2013, alcohol was the most common additional drug reported. Since 2014 benzodiazepines have become the most common additional drugs reported.

**Socio-demographics**

* **Median age** of cases has increased from 28 years in 2009, to 30 years in 2015.
* Majority of cases, 7 in every ten, were **male**.
* Proportion of cases who were **homeless** increased from 5.6% in 2009, to 9.2% in 2015.
* Proportion of **Travellers** treated increased from 1.9% in 2009 to 2.9% in 2015. The proportion of Travellers in the general population is 0.7% (2016 Census).

**Injecting behaviour**

* Proportion of all cases treated who reported **ever injecting** remained relatively stable over the reporting period at around one third of all cases.
* Proportion of **new cases reporting ever injecting** has decreased from 19.7% in 2009 to 14.5% in 2015.

A copy of the HRB Bulletin *Drug Treatment in Ireland 2009 – 2015* is available on the publications page of our website [www.hrb.ie](http://www.hrb.ie)

**ENDS**

**For more information, infographics or interviews please contact:-**

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