

National Drugs Forum 2021

Foresight: preparing for uncertainty in drug use, markets, and responses.



Virtual Event

23 November 2021



An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health



An Bord
Taighde Sláinte
Health Research
Board

Context

The public health crisis of the past 18 months has underlined the importance of planning for sudden and unexpected change. This year's National Drugs Forum is focused on future needs and what we have to do to anticipate changing patterns in drug use and supply, and to ensure our responses are robust and ready to meet the new challenges that will come with these changes.

This event is being held against the backdrop of the EU Council publishing the new European Drugs Strategy and Action Plan and the Department of Health completing the mid-term review of Ireland's national drugs strategy, *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery*. Work is now commencing on the implementation of the six strategic priorities arising from the review.

This year's forum provides an opportunity to reflect on the themes of preparation and foresight which are central to the European Drugs Strategy and Action Plan.

The National Drugs Strategy and the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan

The National Drugs Forum is designed to enable the sharing of knowledge and increase awareness of current evidence among stakeholders from every sector. It shares this objective with one of the new strategic priorities which aims to strengthen the performance of the national drugs strategy by promoting evidence-based and outcome-focused practices.

These concerns also align with the 'Research, Innovation and Foresight' cross-cutting theme in the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan 2021–2025. Strategic priority 10 within

this strategy sets out to build synergies to provide the EU and its Member States with the comprehensive research evidence base and foresight capacities necessary to enable a more effective, innovative and agile approach to the growing complexity of the drugs phenomenon, and to increase the preparedness of the EU and its Member States to respond to future challenges and crises.

Strategic Foresight

This year's National Drugs Forum will introduce participants to the concept of strategic foresight and explain its relevance for anticipating trends in the drugs area. Preliminary findings from the European web survey will give an insight into these trends and how societal and cultural shifts are influencing drug use behaviours. We will also hear recent evidence related to one of the new horizontal themes of the strategy involvement of service users in the design and

delivery of services based on a human rights perspective.

The event will also provide an opportunity to reflect on the lessons of Covid-19 and how it has encouraged new approaches and highlighted new challenges for drugs policy nationally and globally.

Strategic foresight is an approach to planning and policymaking that attempts to manage uncertainty by identifying a number of possibilities. Governments, institutions, non-governmental organisations, and other national and international collective entities can develop anticipatory capacity by making better use of what is known already.

The discipline of Strategic Foresight puts particular emphasis on harnessing existing knowledge, not just from datasets, but also from the minds of those most active, committed and thoughtful. The breakout session (detailed in the programme) will be led by Future Impacts, a consultancy that specialises in foresight capacity building, coaching, training and research. Future Impacts have worked extensively on European Commission foresight projects and advised the EMCDDA on a number of drug-related futures projects.

Megatrends Workshop

The workshop at the National Drugs Forum will involve identifying and analysing megatrends to explore global changes and their implications for local policy. The overall objective of the workshop will be to provide participants with an understanding of what foresight is and why it is important, as well as introducing wider changes in the environment that may have significant implications for drugs and drug monitoring in the future.

During the workshop, participants will be asked to complete one or two simple exercises that will provide them with hands-on experience of working with foresight and megatrends. The workshop will help to create a shared knowledge around foresight benefits and techniques with participants. It will provide participants with an 'experience of the future', while focusing the learnings on changes in the wider environment that will impact the future of drugs and drug monitoring in Ireland.

Keynote Speakers

Dr Jonathan Pratschke

Dr Jonathan Pratschke has worked in the field of applied social research for 25 years and has completed approximately 50 projects on social inequalities, deprivation and health in the academic and applied research arenas. He has published many journal articles and reports, as well as participating in evaluation projects concerning health and educational outcomes in the context of community-led implementation strategies and national programmes.

In collaboration with the late Dr Trutz Haase, Jonathan developed the Pobal HP Deprivation Index, which is used by Government Departments and by a wide range of public authorities, voluntary bodies, service providers and researchers to measure and monitor socio-spatial inequalities in Ireland.



Dr Jonathan Pratschke

Dr Deirdre Mongan Research Officer, Health Research Board

Dr Deirdre Mongan is a Research Officer at the Health Research Board, with responsibility for the Irish national drug and alcohol strategies. In this role, she manages the National Drug and Alcohol Survey, which measures the prevalence and patterns of drug use (including alcohol) in the Irish population. She is currently working on the Irish section of the European Web Survey on Drugs 2021, which aims to gather information on drug use patterns and behaviours across Europe.



Dr Deirdre Mongan

National Drugs Forum 2021 Programme

09:30 Opening of forum

Introduction: Mr Frank Feighan TD, Minister of State for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy

09:50 Keynote: Dr Jonathan Pratschke

Service user participation in the design and delivery of drug treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services: an evidence review.

The importance of service user participation in the planning, design, and delivery of drug treatment, rehabilitation, recovery, and harm reduction services has been a consistent theme in drug policy for several decades. Facilitating the involvement of service users and their families is identified as a core objective of drugs policy in *Reducing harm, supporting recovery*. The HRB commissioned an evidence review of the international evidence on efforts to increase participation of service users. The report is supplemented by a qualitative study with stakeholders including service providers, policymakers and service users. The HRB will publish this review in early 2022. This will be a valuable contribution to our understanding this important service and policy issue.

10:20 Keynote: Dr Deirdre Mongan, Health Research Board

Preliminary findings from the European Web Survey on Drugs 2021

Web-based surveys are a valuable addition to the suite of monitoring tools providing information on level and patterns of drug use in the population. During the summer of 2021, the HRB and the HSE worked on the European Web Survey on Drugs. The strong response to this survey and level of detail provided by participants will inform us about variations in use among different groups of people who use drugs. These insights into changing patterns of behaviour among people who use drugs expands the evidence base and supplements the information from prevalence surveys. The results of the web survey will be published in early 2022.

10:50 Q&A

11:00 Break

11:30 Foresight Megatrends Workshop Part I

There will be a 20-minute introduction to the concept of foresight and participants will join colleagues in breakout rooms to work through a number of exercises to identify megatrends of relevance to the changes in the drugs situation.

12:30 Break

National Drugs Forum 2021 Programme (cont.)

13:15 Foresight Megatrends Workshop Part II

During a second session in breakout rooms, participants will discuss the implication of the identified megatrends for the local situation. Each group will identify three key insights. This will be followed by a plenary wrap-up session to look at the insights from each group.

14:15 Closing remarks

14:30 Forum ends

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Report on National Drugs Forum 2021

Reports from the workshop will be compiled and these will be made available on the website of the National Drugs Library (www.drugsandalcohol.ie) and included in the Winter 2021 issue of *Drugnet Ireland*.

