

Report on the Consultations with Young People for the Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use

November 2022 – March 2023



Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery
National Drugs Strategy 2017-2025

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MARCH 2023

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Acknowledgements

The report writer would like to thank the 64 young people who gave up their time to contribute to this report by sitting on the Youth Advisory Group, participating in the face-to-face group consultation event or completing the written survey.

Executive summary

About this report

This report sets out the key findings and overall messages from a series of consultations with young people about the impact of drug use on their lives, their families and communities that took place during the period November 2022 – March 2023.

The consultations conducted on behalf of the Department of Health aim to ensure that the voice of young people can be heard at the Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use scheduled for April 2023.

The consultations targeted two distinct groups of young people: young people drawn from the general population; and young people who are directly impacted by drug use on a variety of levels. Nine young people contributed to the work of the Youth Advisory Group in preparing for the consultations. A total of 22 young people drawn from the general population took part in a face-to-face group consultation event in the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in November 2022. A total of 33 young people who are directly impacted by drug use on a variety of levels completed a written survey in March 2023 facilitated by youth workers in three separate services.

The impact of drug use

The consultations show that the widespread availability and use of drugs in every part of Ireland has a significant and harmful impact on the lives of young people, their families and communities.

Young people recognise that drug use can cause them to experience mental illness and drop out of school, tear families apart, ruin friendships, diminish employment opportunities, deny them financial security, destroy their motivation and – when a parent is using drugs – cause them to suffer the consequences of neglect. Drug use negatively impacts the personal freedoms of young people and their ability to feel safe, welcome and enjoy themselves in the places where they live, learn and socialise. Many young people have witnessed the dangers associated with drug debt and young people are more fearful of becoming drawn into criminal

behaviour including dealing as a result of drug use than they are of becoming dependent on or addicted to drugs.

But while acknowledging the negative impact that drug use can have on almost every aspect of their lives, young people say that they use drugs because they are easily available to them, because they are influenced and/or pressured by their peers to do so, because there is nothing for young people to do in the communities where they live, because they believe drug use can sometimes help them to cope with anxiety and other symptoms of mental illness in the absence of available treatment and support services and because they believe using drugs can be enjoyable.

Despite the prevalence of drug use, young people struggle to access the information, treatment and supports they want and to get help when necessary. The adults in their lives – including parents in particular but also teachers and youth workers – are often unwilling to talk openly to them about drug use and do not know how to help young people when they are experiencing difficulties relating to drug use. Young people are also ill equipped to support each other in such circumstances with the result that drug use often results in social isolation.

What would help (in order of priority identified by young people)

Treatment and support

First and foremost, young people are calling for non-judgemental treatment for young people who use drugs and support for young people whose parents use drugs. They want this to include services that are school-based. They want treatment and support to be free/affordable for people of all ages who use drugs and they want confidential drug treatment and related supports for young people without the need for parental consent. To help keep all young people safe, including those who use drugs, they want to see investment in services that would reduce the harm caused by drug use such as 'back of house' drug testing and supervised drug use. To support their resilience, they are asking for investment in mental health services for young people as well as investment in services for young people generally.

Legal reform

Young people are calling for consideration to be given to the benefits of legalising the use of some drugs including cannabis in particular. They want possession of drugs for personal use to be decriminalised.

Education and awareness

Young people are asking for improved education and awareness raising regarding drug use and the treatment and services available. They want adults, including parents in particular, to be better informed and willing to engage in open conversations with them about drug use. They want to see a new approach to education about drug use that would provide young people with access to accurate, factual information about drugs and drug use and for this to be available to them in schools, in youth clubs and in other places where they go as well as online.

Things to do & places to go

They are calling for investment in facilities and community based activities for young people that would help prevent them from becoming involved in drugs by providing them with things to do and places to go. They are asking for public areas in neighbourhoods impacted by drug use to be better policed and kept clean including the removal of drug related waste.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The programme for government published in October 2020 contains a commitment to convene a Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use. In line with this commitment, in February 2023, the Government agreed to establish such an Assembly to consider the legislative, policy and operational changes the State could make to significantly reduce the harmful impacts of illicit drugs on individuals, families, communities and wider society, and to bring forward recommendations. The Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use will commence in April 2023 and will conclude its work by the end of the year.

As stated by Government Chief Whip and Minister of State with responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and the National Drugs Strategy, Hildegard Naughton T.D., from the outset, a high priority was placed on ensuring that the members of the Assembly are facilitated to take into account the voice of young people, as they can be particularly impacted by drug use. In accordance with this approach, the content of the Assembly was discussed by the National Oversight Committee for the National Drugs Strategy convened by the Department of Health and it was agreed that consultations with young people about the impact of drug use on their lives, their families and communities would be undertaken with the support of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. This report sets out the key findings and overall messages from these consultations which took place during the period November 2022 to March 2023.

The consultations targeted two distinct groups of young people: young people drawn from the general population; and young people living in areas that experience the impacts of drug use more acutely. In keeping with the 2017-2025 national drugs strategy entitled *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery*, the consultations adopted a health-lead approach that focuses on achieving better health and social outcomes for people impacted by substance misuse.

The consultations aim to ensure that the voice of young people can be heard at the Citizens' Assembly and in so doing, advance the first of six strategic priorities for the period 2021-2025

arising from the mid-term review of the national drug strategy which is: [t]o strengthen the prevention of drug and alcohol use and the associated harms among children and young people.

1.2 Contribution of this report to the Assembly's Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for the Citizens' Assembly agreed by the Oireachtas state that the Assembly shall consider and make recommendations in respect of changes the State might make to significantly reduce the harmful impacts of drugs use on individuals, families, communities and wider society. In its considerations the Assembly will be asked *inter alia* to take into account the implications for the health system, the justice system and the education system, as well as the lived experience of young people impacted by drug use. This report can speak directly to these Terms of Reference.

1.3 About this report

Section 2 of this report provides an overview of the face-to-face group consultation event involving young people drawn from the general population that took place in November 2022. It describes the formation, role and membership of the Youth Advisory Group; the recruitment and profile of the participants taking part in the consultation event; the format of the consultation event; and the data analysis process employed by the report writer. It also sets out a summary of the overall discussions at the event and the key findings to emerge from it. Section 3 of this report provides an overview of the survey targeting young people directly impacted by drug use on a variety of levels that took place in March 2023. It describes the development of the survey; the response rate and the methodologies employed by the report writer to analyse the survey data. It also summarises the views expressed by young people in responding to the survey and sets out the key findings to emerge from it. Section 4 of this report compares the key findings to emerge from the face-to-face consultation event with those from the survey. Section 5 highlights the overall messages to emerge from the consultations including both the face-to-face consultation event and the survey.

2. Face-to-Face group consultation event

2.1 Youth Advisory Group

The November 2022 face-to-face group consultation event was conducted by the National Participation Office at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth on behalf of the Department of Health. Preparations for the consultation event began in October 2022 with the establishment of a Youth Advisory Group.

The recruitment process for the Youth Advisory Group commenced with a general call out for expressions of interest issued by the National Participation Office to Comhairle na nÓg coordinators and a total of 33 external organisations, inviting each coordinator and external organisation to nominate one young person in the 15-17 age-range to join the Youth Advisory Group (see Appendix I Organisations targeted). Places on the Youth Advisory Group were then allocated by the National Participation Office with the aim of ensuring a diverse membership in terms of nominating organisation, geographic location, gender identity and age.

A total of nine young people joined the Youth Advisory Group including five females and four males (see Appendix II Youth Advisory Group demographic details). Seven of these young people were nominated by Comhairle na nÓg coordinators in Cork City, Dublin South, Fingal, C. Kerry, Co. Sligo, Co. Wexford and Co. Wicklow. One young person from Dublin was nominated by Jigsaw and another young person from Dublin was nominated by the Irish Girl Guides. The mean age of Youth Advisory Group members was 15 years and nine months.

The Youth Advisory Group met three times with members of the National Participation Office in advance of the face-to-face group consultation event: twice online and once in person. At the in-person meeting, the members of the Youth Advisory Group were tasked with piloting the draft methodology proposed for the face-to-face group consultation event to ensure it worked well. They also contributed to the development of the agenda for the consultation event, including identification of suitable ice-breaker games. A total of eight members of the Youth Advisory Group attended the event. Two members took on the role of MC on the day while the others co-facilitated the workshop sessions with experienced adult facilitators.

In February 2023, members of the Youth Advisory Group were also invited to review and give feedback on the language and design of the survey targeting young people directly impacted by drug use on a variety of levels (see section 3.1 below for further detail).

2.2 Profile of participants

As was the case in relation to recruitment of Youth Advisory Group members, the National Participation Office invited Comhairle na nÓg coordinators and 33 other organisations to nominate participants for the face-to-face group consultation event that took place on 18 November 2022 (see Appendix III Face-to-face group consultation event – participants’ demographic details). A total of 22 young people participated in the face-to-face group consultation event including six males, 13 females and three non-binary young people. The young people who participated were all nominated by Comhairle na nÓg coordinators including two young people from Ulster (Co. Monaghan), nine young people from Munster (Cork City, Co. Clare, Co. Kerry, Co. Limerick and Co. Tipperary), seven young people from Leinster (Co. Longford, Co. Kildare, Co. Kilkenny and Co. Meath) and four young people from Connacht (Co. Galway and Co. Roscommon). The mean age of participants at the event was 16 years. The youngest participant was 14 years old. The oldest participant was 18 years old.

2.3 Format of event

The purpose of the face-face group consultation event was to ensure that the views of young people from the general population on the following issues can be submitted for consideration as part of the deliberations on the topics for discussion at the 2023 Citizens’ Assembly on Drug Use:

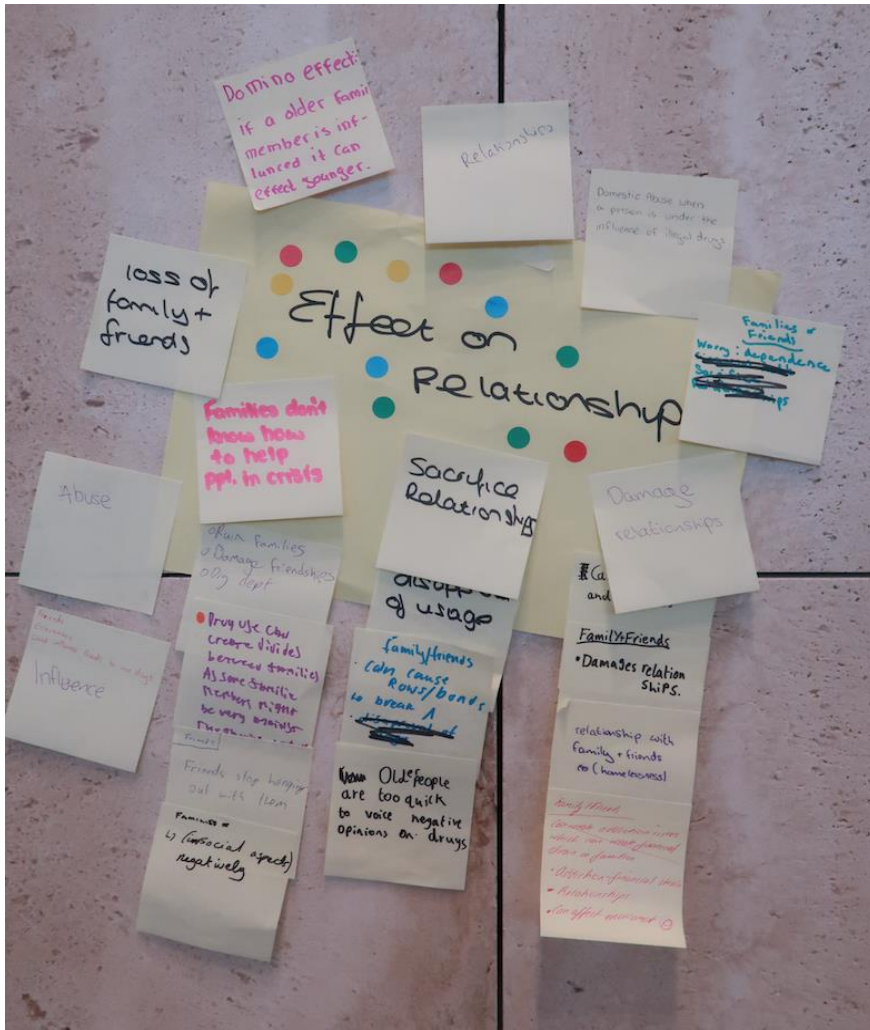
1. How drug use impacts their lives, and that of their families, friends and communities.
2. Their own views on the use of drugs; what is the best approach to deal with it.
3. What are their own issues and concerns around the use of drugs?
4. How could young people be better informed regarding drug use?

The face-to-face group consultation was opened by two members of the Youth Advisory Group who explained the purpose of the event to participants. The ground rules for the day

including child safeguarding measures were then outlined by a representative of the National Participation Office. There followed a number of Icebreaker games led by members of the Youth Advisory Group. After the games concluded, the event was addressed by a representative of the Department of Health who emphasised that the focus of the day was to hear the views of young people on how drug use impacts them, their families and communities. Participants were then split into groups and moved to six separate tables to begin the consultation activities.

The event adopted a blue sky, strengths based approach which recognised the young people participating as experts in their own lives and experiences and allowed them to identify the topics that they wanted to discuss on the issue of drug use and its associated harm. Age appropriate and creative methodologies were employed to elicit the views of the young people taking part as follows (see Appendix IV):

- Using the **Open Space** methodology, participants were given three Post-it notes each and asked to consider the following question: *How does drug use impact the lives of young people, your families and communities in Ireland?* Participants worked individually to write their responses on the Post-it notes (one idea per Post it) and affix them to a blank wall. Participants worked together in small groups to organise the Post-it notes into themes and name them.
- Using the **Sticky Dot Voting** methodology, participants prioritised the themes to identify the top three for further discussion during the World Café session that followed.



Pic 1. Example of Open Space categorising

- For the **World Café** session the room was split into two sections with three tables in each section. Participants at each table were asked to consider in further detail one of the three priority themes identified by the Sticky Dot Vote. Participants were invited to write their ideas under the following headings on large placemats at each table:

Tell us more about [theme]

What are the main concerns for young people in relation to [theme]

What supports would help address these concerns?

After 15-20 minutes, the participants at each table rotated to the next table in their section until all participants had contributed their ideas relating to all three categories.

- Each participant was given a total of nine sticky dots and invited to prioritise the supports suggested under each theme using the **Sticky Dot Voting** methodology.

- Participants were asked to give further consideration to the support that received the most votes at their table and work in small groups to develop a **key statement** for delivery to the Citizens' Assembly on that basis under the following headings:

Situation

Solution

Impact of the solution

A total of six key statements for the Citizens' Assembly were developed altogether (two for each theme).

- Participants at each table were then asked to agree one **key statement** from the day on the theme under consideration at their table to feed back to the Department of Health. Each group was given two minutes to introduce their key statement for the Department of Health to the room.
- Using the **Ballot Box Voting** methodology, participants prioritised the key statements for the Department of Health.
- Finally, participants were invited to contribute their views on the following topic by writing/drawing on a large **Wall of Ideas** poster: *How could young people be better informed regarding drugs?*

In line with best practice, an independent report writer was commissioned to record the views expressed by participants throughout the day and report them fairly, transparently and without undue interpretation or influence.



Pic. 2 Example of completed World Café placemat

2.4 Analysis of group consultation data

At the face-to-face group consultation event, photographs were taken of all Post-It notes in each category created during the Open Space exercise and all tablemats completed during the World Café session. Data from the Open Space exercise and the six World Café tablemats was transferred into summary tables and categorised by the report writer for further analysis. Copies of all key statements generated at the event were also retained by the report writer. In addition, detailed photographs of voting patterns during the Open Space exercise and the

World Café Session were also taken and a record of the votes cast during the development of key statements was kept. To avoid interpretation of the views of young people, quotes taken directly from their written contributions are also used to represent their views in this report.

Open Space

Using the Open Space methodology, young people participating in the consultation responded to the question: *How does drug use impact the lives of young people, your families and communities in Ireland?* A total of 94 Post-It note responses were contributed and these were grouped together by young people into 10 themes, three of which were then identified as priorities for the young people present using the Sticky Dot Voting methodology and discussed further in the World Café session that followed (see Table 1 below).

Table 1 Open Space themes

Theme	No. votes
Effect on mental health	16
Effect on relationships	12
Social environment	10
Peer pressure	6
Effect on physical health	4
Loss [death and suicide]	4
Education	4
Finances	3
Crime	3
Reputation	1

Analysis of the statements made under each theme demonstrates that none of the themes identified stand alone, since the statements included in one are often repeated in one or more of the others. Thus, many of the statements included in the three themes that received the most votes – ‘Effect on mental health’, ‘Effect on relationships’ and ‘Social environment’ – are also repeated in or reflective of statements included in the seven other themes. For example, statements about the negative impact of drug use in certain locations/areas included in the theme ‘Social environment’ closely reflect some of those included in the themes ‘Reputation’ and ‘Crime’. In addition, statements included in the theme ‘Social environment’ also address issues relating to peer pressure and peer influence that are reflective of those included in the theme ‘Reputation’ and ‘Peer pressure’. Thus, while the

voting pattern might indicate that the theme 'Reputation' in particular was not a priority for young people, in fact many of the issues in this theme went on to form a central part of the discussions during the World Café session.

Analysis of all the data generated by the face-to-face consultation event also demonstrates that almost all of the statements made during the Open Space exercise were returned to and expanded upon in the World Café session. The role of social media as a source of anxiety in relation to drug use was touched upon under the theme 'Reputation' during the Open Space exercise and it was suggested that video footage of young people using drugs could be used to publicly humiliate them but this issue was not returned to later in the day.

World Café

The World Café session generated a total of six tablemats, comprised of two tablemats on each of the three themes selected for further discussion: Theme 1 Effect on mental health; Theme 2 Effect on relationships; and Theme 3 Social environment. The discussions that took place under each theme were wide ranging, interconnected and overlapping. An initial analysis of the content of the tablemats identified a total of 15 issues across all three themes (in alphabetical order):

Crime	Mental illness
Dependency and addiction	Peer pressure
Education and awareness	Physical health
Exposing younger children	Reputation
Family and friends	School and jobs
Impact on freedoms	Safe places to go
Isolation	Treatment and support
Legal reform	

Table 2. below provides an overview of the issues identified by the report writer that were discussed under each theme in order of frequency of mention in response to each question. Issues listed in the same cell were mentioned with equal frequency.

Table 2. Issues discussed during World Café session

Tell us more		
1. Effect on relationships	2. Effect on mental health	3. Social environment
Family and friends	Mental illness	Peer pressure
Peer pressure	Isolation	Reputation
Isolation	Peer pressure Dependency/addiction	Crime
Crime School and jobs	Reputation School and jobs	
What are the main concerns?		
1. Effect on relationships	2. Effect on mental health	3. Social environment
Education and awareness	Family and friends	Impact on freedoms
Physical health	Treatment and support	Peer pressure
Mental illness	Isolation	Reputation
Family and friends Crime	Reputation Crime	Exposing younger children
School and jobs		Physical health
Peer pressure	Dependency/addiction	Crime
What supports would help address these concerns?		
1. Effect on relationships	2. Effect on mental health	3. Social environment
Education and awareness	Education and awareness	Safe spaces to go
Treatment and support	Legal reform	Treatment and support
Legal reform	Treatment and support	Education and awareness
		Legal reform

Following secondary analysis of the content of the tablemats, the 15 issues identified were further grouped into eight interrelated categories (in alphabetical order): Community life; Education and awareness; Health; Legal reform; Relationships; Reputation; School and jobs; Treatment and support (see Figure 1).

The category ‘Community life’ includes discussion of the impact that widespread drug use can have on the freedoms enjoyed by young people (even if they are not using drugs themselves), the concerns of young people regarding exposure of younger children to drug use and the

need for safe spaces for young people to go. The category 'Education and awareness' includes discussion of the absence of and need for easy access to factual and accurate information about drug use for young people in the places where they go including in schools in particular as well as education for parents, teachers and other adults. The category 'Health' includes discussion of mental illness as both a cause and result of drug use, the physical health risks associated with drug use and an exploration of drug dependency and addiction. The category 'Legal reform' includes discussion of the link between drug use and crime as well as the potential benefits of decriminalisation. The category 'School and jobs' includes discussion of the impact of drug use on young people's education and employment. The category 'Relationships' includes discussion of the impact of drug use on family and friends, the role of peer pressure in drug use and fear of isolation resulting from drug use. The category 'Reputation' includes discussion of the impact on young people of prejudice and stigma as a result of drug use. The category 'Treatment and support' includes discussion of the absence of and need for more treatment and support services not only for people that use drugs but also for impacted family and friends as well as other services in the community more generally. A sample of the statements made in all categories is attached as Appendix V World Café Categories: Sample of statements.

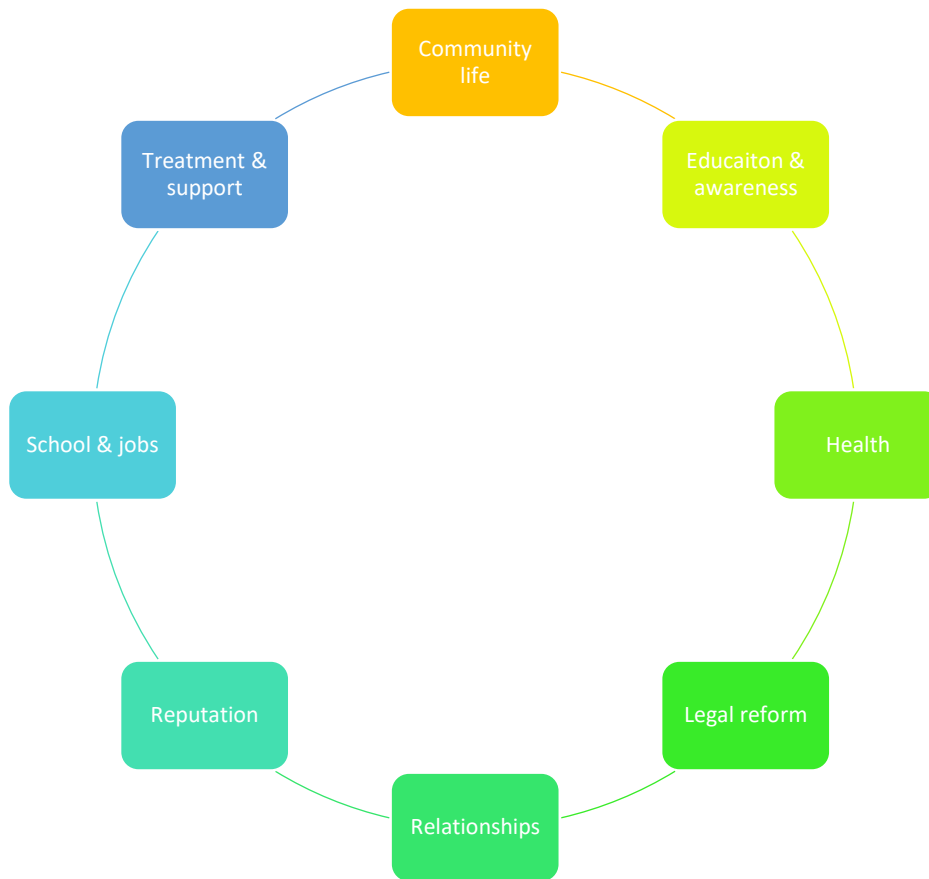
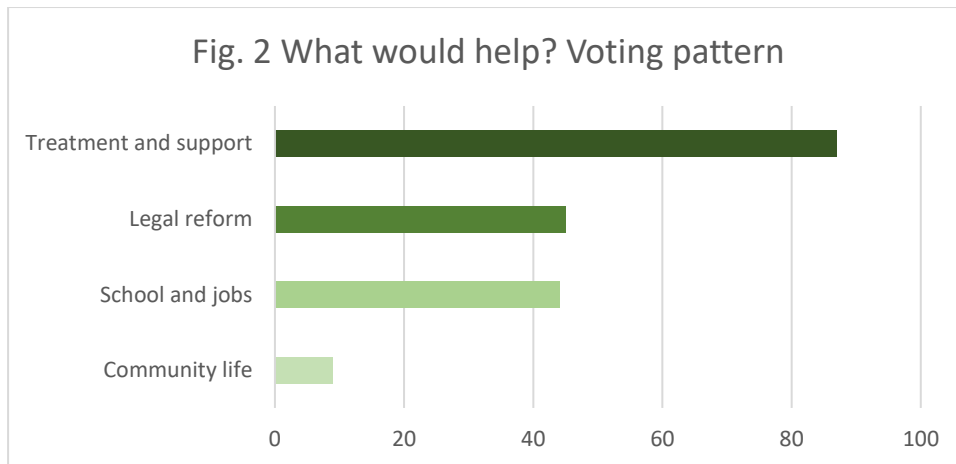


Fig. 1 World Café categories

The suggestions made by young people regarding what supports might help to address their main concerns relate to four of the eight categories identified by the report writer (in alphabetical order): Community life; Education and awareness; Legal reform; Treatment and support. Figure 2. below presents a summary of the Sticky Dot Voting pattern on the supports suggested grouped by category. A more detailed record of the voting pattern is attached as Appendix VI World Café voting pattern.



‘Treatment and support’ was identified as the top priority for young people with 47 % of the vote. This was followed by ‘Legal reform’ and ‘Education and awareness’ which attracted 24% of the vote each. ‘Community’ was of lesser importance with 5% of the vote.

Key statements

Young people developed a total of six key statements for the Citizens’ Assembly on Drugs and the Department of Health. Participants prioritised the key statements developed for the Department of Health using Ballot Box voting as follows:

1. Reduce harm, both health-wise and socially, relating to drugs in communities by providing a safe space or clinic to self-administer drugs and get access to clean needles and healthcare facilities.
2. Drugs are a taboo topic due to misinformation and lack of education. We suggest lowering the age of drug education to 16 without parents’ consent, drug seminars and workshops for teachers, parents and youth workers, and lowering to 16 with regards to one-to-one support from youth workers / teachers depending on circumstances.
3. We suggest legalisation of Cannabis and using the tax revenue to fund harm reduction centres and detox centres. We suggest decriminalisation for possession of hard drugs for personal use and offer free detox and mental health services for drug users and their families.
4. Partial legislation, meaning free access through GPs to clean, safe drugs. This requires investing in education for current GPs and GPs in training, including how to wean

people and reduce dosage safely. It would also include implementation of close monitoring of drug dispensing.

5. Decriminalisation will reduce the negative effects on mental health. It will help people open up about their drug use and get help in rehab centres.
6. Regulation is the best way to tackle drug use.

In line with the results of the Sticky Dot Vote on the supports suggested in World Café session, the key statement that received the most votes relates to the issue of treatment and support. Issues relating to the category 'Treatment and Support' are addressed in three key statements. Issues relating to the category 'Legal reform' are addressed in four key statements and issues relating to the category 'Education and awareness' are addressed in one key statement. The substance of all key statements developed is reflected in the relevant sections of the summary presented in section 2.5 below and a copy of each statement is attached as Appendix VII Key statements.

Wall of ideas

The need for education and awareness raising to ensure that young people are better informed about drugs was identified as a priority by young people taking part in the face-to-face group consultation event. The suggestions contributed to the Wall of Ideas on this topic are reflected in the relevant section of the summary presented in section 2.5 below under the heading *Education and awareness*.

2.5 Summary of discussions

This section of the report provides a summary of all the discussions generated by the face-to-face group consultation event including the Open Space exercise, the World Café session, the Key Statements session and the Wall of Ideas under each of the eight categories identified by the report writer on page 17 above in alphabetical order.

Community life

Young people described the impact of widespread drug use in the community on their personal freedoms and said they were not allowed to go to certain areas or and to go out after dark as a result. They described feeling scared of certain areas themselves. They said

drugs were easily available in all settings including schools and expressed concern about young children being exposed to drug use, including younger siblings. They described neighbourhoods littered with drug related waste where there are no safe places for young people to socialise.

They said people will continue to use drugs whether they are legal or not.

Not enough safe spaces for young people to go e.g. the fear of going into town and someone being on a high and it ruins the nights, don't know what to do.

Actual children are doing drugs.

Education and awareness

Young people described the difficulties they experienced in accessing the information they need about drug use. They said parents are unwilling to talk to them about it. They also said teachers, youth workers and other adults who work with young people are often badly informed. They said adults were unwilling to provide them with information about drugs and drug use because they believed that it would encourage them to use drugs.

Parents don't trust us enough – not allowed to be curious about drugs and what they are/risks involved.

No one wants to give info on drugs – risk of taking drugs.

Health

Young people said drug use could cause mental illness including depression, paranoia and hallucinations. They also associated drug use with aggression. They said that young people sometimes use drugs to cope with their feelings, including anxiety in particular, which can cause dependency and addiction. They said people who use drugs were at risk of self-harm, overdose and suicide. They said that drugs can often be 'laced' with other substances and that this made them much more unsafe. They also said that drug related waste in public places is a risk to health, including hypodermic needles in particular.

Young people at one table in particular discussed the ‘positives’ and ‘negatives’ of using drugs including cannabis, synthetic drugs and ‘shrooms’ (Psilocybin mushrooms) as well as alcohol. With regard to the perceived ‘positives’, they said that cannabis is used for socialising and can help with sleep, enhance appetite (‘munchies’) and therefore help with eating disorders as well as being used to self-medicate for anxiety including anxiety associated with ADHD and autism. They said that synthetic drugs and Psilocybin mushrooms can provide an energy boost which is good for socialising and parties. They said that synthetic drugs can also be used to self-medicate/as a form of escapism. They said that alcohol also helps with socialising.

With regard to the negative impact of drug use, they said that cannabis is sometimes considered to be a ‘gateway’ drug. They said that using cannabis can impact negatively on a young person’s reputation, that it is carcinogenic and that it impact the development of the brain. They said that synthetic drugs and Psilocybin mushrooms can also impact brain development. They said that the symptoms of withdrawal can cause anger and abuse and they said that people can be negatively impacted by having a ‘bad acid trip’. They expressed the view that alcohol has caused more damage in society than the use of illegal drugs.

No other way to cope with feelings, feel stuck.

Can rely on drugs to help with mental health problems.

Legal reform

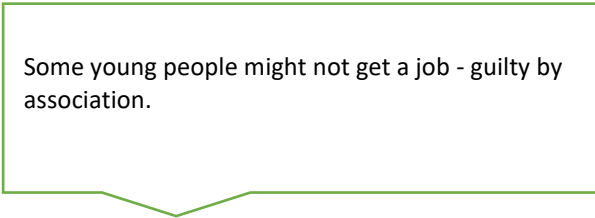
Young people discussed the negative impact of criminalising drug use on people who use drugs, their families, friends and communities. They talked about the link between drug use and crime and expressed fear of becoming involved in crime as a result of drug use. They said that young people who use drugs were sometimes in debt with dealers and had to ‘work for them’ or steal.

Get you hooked, price goes up, in debt, then you do other jobs (illegal).

Drug use is a crime this leads to criminals/gangs supplying, causing communities to be ruined.

School and jobs

Young people discussed the negative impact of drug use on education and as a result on their employment prospects including the possibility that having a reputation for using drugs can prevent a young person from being able to get a job. They said that young people who use drugs might drop out of school and that it might be very difficult for them to find a good job without qualifications as a result. They said that using drugs makes it hard to focus in school. They said that young people who use drugs might have to work to support their habit which would also impact their education because they would have less time for their school work. They also said that stress related to school work can cause young people to use drugs as a way to cope.



Some young people might not get a job - guilty by association.

Relationships

Young people discussed their concerns regarding relationship breakdown within families as a result of drug use and the impact of drug use on younger siblings, including the possibility that younger siblings might be influenced to use drugs themselves. They said that parents did not know how to help when a young person is using drugs. They said that drug use within families can lead to domestic abuse and homelessness. They said that people who use drugs can steal from family members and that drug use can lead to financial problems within households which damages relationships. They said that drug use within families has a negative impact on the mental health of all members. They also said that when a young person is doing drugs their friends are impacted and they do not know how to help.

Young people discussed the prominent role of 'peer pressure' as a factor in drug use. They said that in most cases young people influence each other to use drugs as opposed to explicitly pressuring each other, although the possibility of 'loosing friends by not taking drugs' was also discussed. They said that the widespread availability and use of drugs had normalised drug use and that this was also a key influencing factor. They also described some

of the perceived benefits of drug use, including making friends, feeling more relaxed in social settings and having fun.

Young people described their fear of isolation resulting from drug use when friendships and family relationships breakdown. They also said that supporting a person who is using drugs can be isolating for care givers.

People around becoming stressed by not knowing how to help them overcome it.

Not just peer pressure, the influence of seeing others do it even if they're not explicitly pressuring someone.

Can cause people to get cut out of friends and family because of stigma around 'choice' instead of realising it as an addiction.

Reputation

Young people talked about the negative impact of getting a bad reputation as a result of drug use on communities and individuals. They said that when an area becomes known for drug use it can quickly deteriorate as more and more people go there to buy and use drugs. They said that there is often a lot of prejudice and stigma attached to young people from these areas even if they are not using drugs themselves. They said that adults sometimes have a very negative attitude towards young people and assume they are using drugs when they see them in groups. They described how even rumours relating to drug use can impact the way a young person is perceived by others and lead important relationships to breakdown. They said that many people associate drug use with poverty but that young people from wealthy backgrounds also use drugs. They said that there is a lot of misunderstanding of drug use and that people do not often realise addiction is not a choice.

Places labelled as dangerous - stigma - communities there avoided/treated differently, that kind of atmosphere can be really damaging. Isolates the area and people there, attracts people looking for drugs to the area, young people living in the area could be discriminated against and it could impact their mental health, physical health, socially.

Treatment and support

Young people said that there are not enough free/affordable drug treatment programmes for people who use drugs. They described the mandatory reporting requirements regarding child protection concerns imposed by Children First as a significant deterrent to young people seeking help with problematic drug use. They described having no one to turn to with their concerns regarding drug use.

No enough people to reach out to and ask for help.

Can't get help without money to pay.

2.6 What supports would help?

This section of the report provides a summary of the supports identified by young people during the face-to-face group consultation event that they said would help address their concerns regarding drug use. Each of the four categories of supports identified by the report writer on page 19 above is addressed in turn in order of number of votes generated during the World Café session. Any additional suggestions proposed in the Key Statements session and the Wall of Ideas are also included under the appropriate heading.

Treatment and support (47% of vote)

Young people called for affordable/free treatment for people of all ages who use drugs. They called for investment in services that would reduce the harm caused by drug use to people who use drugs, their families, friends and communities including access to clean drugs through GP services and the establishment of 'harm reduction clinics' where people can take drugs under medical supervision. They asked for the provision of confidential treatment for young people who use drugs without the need for parental consent and for such services to be made available in schools, youth centres and other places where young people go. To support the resilience of young people and reduce the use of drugs as a coping strategy they also called for investment in service for young people generally including counselling services as well as shorter waiting lists for all services available to young people. Young people also called for investment in services for people suffering from domestic violence which was seen as both a cause and effect of drug use. In addition, they called for the roll-out of 'back of

house' drug testing services at events for young people similar to that piloted at the Electric Picnic in 2022 and free access to 'clean and safe drugs' through GPs.

Clinics where people can take drugs in safe spaces where doctors are available in case someone needs medical help - provide clean needles and other medical services.

Therapy for mental dependency – confidential – if tell parents can stop people sharing.

Legal reform (24% of vote)

Young people expressed the view that possession of drugs and drug use as distinct from drug dealing should be decriminalised including the use of cannabis in particular. They further suggested that drug use should be treated as a health issue rather than being addressed through the criminal justice system. They discussed how best to regulate drug use and it was suggested that drug use should be legal for over 18s only. They said young people in particular should not be prosecuted for possession of drugs or for drug use.

Decriminalisation of drugs – end gangs selling drugs, control what's in the drugs, make sure they're safe.

Change the law especially for young people.

Education and awareness (24% of vote)

Young people called for education and awareness raising in schools and other places where young people go, for example youth clubs and sports clubs. They asked for 'workshop' style events led by individuals that young people can identify with and who have actual experience of drug use. They also called for the promotion of peer-to-peer discussion. They said they wanted to receive information that is factual and not perceived as 'anti-drug'. This should include information about the different types of drugs available and the different supports available for people impacted by drug use. They said that this information should be available as part of the school curriculum and without parental consent as well as being accessible online. They said that there is also a need for education and awareness raising targeting

parents and adults who work with young people so that they are better equipped to provide young people with the information and support they need.

Change the way we teach people about drugs – always anti-drug.

Spreading the correct information about drug use – to many myths – fear mongering.

Community life (5% of vote)

Young people called for an investment to be made in cleaning up ‘rough looking areas’ and developing more infrastructure for young people. The need for special bins in public places for needles was also identified and it was suggested that security measures such as policing on public transport and supervision of parks and playgrounds would also help to minimise some of the negative impacts of drug use on young people and their communities.

More safe spaces and infrastructure for young people – could help to stop young people from trying drugs recreationally if they have nothing to do.

2.7 Key findings from the group consultation

Young people participating in the face-to-face group consultation event said that the widespread availability and use of drugs in every part of Ireland has had a significant and harmful impact on their lives, their families, friends and communities. It negatively impacts the personal freedoms of young people and their ability to feel safe, welcome and enjoy themselves in the places where they live, learn and socialise.

But despite the prevalence of drugs use, young people struggle to access the information, treatment and supports they want and to get help when necessary. The adults in their lives – including parents in particular but also teachers and youth workers – are unwilling to talk to them openly about drug use and do not know how to help young people when they are

experiencing difficulties relating to drug use. Young people are also ill equipped to support each other in such circumstances with the result that drug use can often lead to social isolation.

As a top priority, young people taking part in the face-to face consultation event are calling for free/affordable treatment for people of all ages who use drugs including confidential drug treatment and related supports for young people without the need for parental consent. To help keep all young people safe, including those who use drugs, they also want to see investment in services that would reduce the harm caused by drug use such as 'back of house' drug testing and supervised drug use. They want possession of drugs for personal use to be decriminalised. They want to see a new approach to education about drug use that would provide young people with access to factual information about drugs and drug use and for this to be made available in schools, in youth clubs and in other places where they go as well as online. They are calling for investment in services for young people generally to support their resilience.

3. Survey

3.1 Survey development and roll out

The purpose of the survey was to ensure that the views of young people directly impacted by drug use on a variety of levels can be submitted for consideration as part of the deliberations on the topics for discussion at the 2023 Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use alongside those of young people from the general population.

The survey was developed by Hub na nÓg during the period February-March 2023 in collaboration with three services working specifically with young people directly impacted by drug use on a variety of levels and with advice from the Youth Advisory Group established prior to the face-to-face consultation event. Hub na nÓg is a national centre of excellence on giving children and young people a voice in decision-making established by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in 2018.

About the services

Two of the services involved in developing and implementing the survey described their work as detached street work. These services target young people in street locations who are impacted by substances on a variety of levels. The third service is a youth diversion program. This service works to divert young people from becoming involved or further involved in anti-social or criminal behaviour. All the services describe their role as working to positively engage with young people to empower them through personal development and education.

In February 2023, the services in question took part in a focus group with representatives of Hub na nÓg. They outlined the nature of their work and it was agreed that as the best way to capture the views of the young people using their services was to invite them to complete a short written survey on how drug use impacts their lives, their families and communities as well as what they think could be done about the impacts of drug use.

A draft survey was developed and – for a number of reasons including timelines, accessibility, and continuity – rather than establish a new panel of young people to review and give feedback on the language and design of the survey, the decision was taken to invite members of the initial Youth Advisory Group to undertake this task. Five young people from the Youth Advisory Group responded to this invitation (four from Comhairle na nÓg and one from the Irish Girl Guides) and three were available to participate in an online session in February 2023.

At the online session, the participating members of the Youth Advisory Group were facilitated to give their views on the wording of the survey questions and introduction and suggest amendments. They also gave feedback on the design, look and feel of the survey and changes were made to the survey based on their feedback.

The final survey asked respondents to answer the following questions (see Appendix VIII Drug impact survey):

- What are the impacts of drug use on the lives of young people?
- What are the impacts of drug use on families?
- What are the impacts of drug use on communities?
- In an ideal world, what do you think could be done about the impacts of drug use on young people, their families and communities?

The surveys were distributed to the three participating services in March 2023 along with detailed guidelines that outlined best practice for facilitating the surveys with young people. Members of Hub na nÓg met with the youth workers from the services in question and went through the guidelines, highlighting that the young person’s best interests were paramount. In this regard, it was advised that if completing the survey could potentially cause harm or distress to a particular young person, consideration should be given to not inviting them to participate. It was also advised that appropriate support should be put in place in case any young person became distressed as a result of completing the survey. To ensure confidentiality, young people completing the survey were asked to provide information about

their age and gender only and youth workers explained that they should not disclose personal stories within their responses.

A total of eight outreach workers facilitated young people accessing the services they worked in to complete the survey over the course of a week in March 2023 in street locations in two urban settings, with a third setting using electronic devices in a service building.

3.2 Response rate

A total of 33 young people responded to the survey including 14 males and 15 females. One young person preferred not to declare their gender and three young people did not complete the sections relating to age and gender. Respondents were aged between 16 and 21 with an average age of 17 years and one month. A total of seven young people responded to the survey online. A total of 26 young people responded to the hardcopy survey in writing. Of the 33 young people that responded to the survey, 30 completed all four questions in the survey. Three young people completed questions one and two but did not complete questions three and four.

3.3 Survey analysis

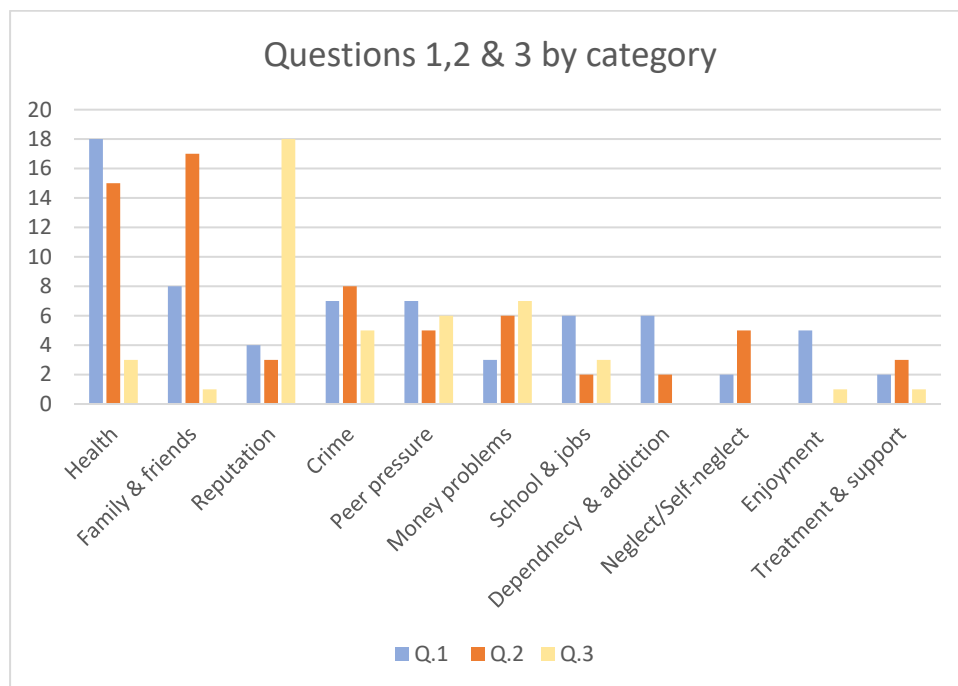
All qualitative data generated by the survey was entered into a database, categorised and analysed thematically. Content analysis strategies were employed to achieve a fair representation of the data collected and to measure the frequency of emerging themes. To avoid interpretation of the views of young people, quotes taken directly from their responses are also used to represent their views on the themes identified in this report.

The responses provided by young people to questions 1-3, which explore the impact of drug use on young people, their families and communities, can be divided into 11 overlapping and interconnected categories (in alphabetical order):

- Crime
- Dependency/addiction
- Enjoyment
- Family and friends

- Money problems
- Health (mental and physical)
- Peer pressure
- Reputation
- Neglect/self-neglect
- School and jobs
- Treatment and support

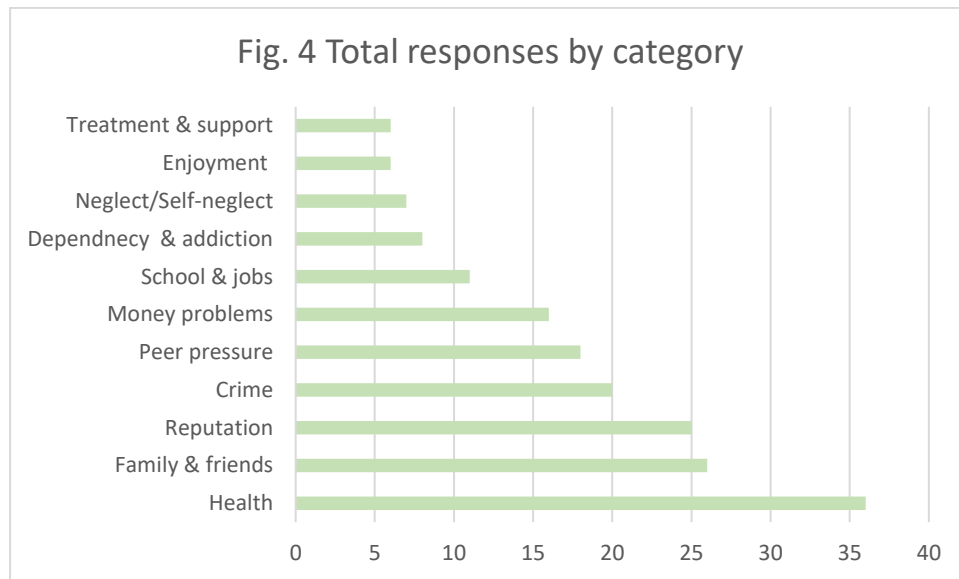
Figure 3. below sets out the number of responses received in each category to each of questions 1, 2 and 3.



- Q. 1 What are the impacts of drug use on the lives of young people?
- Q. 2 What are the impacts of drug use on families?
- Q. 3 What are the impacts of drug use on communities?

As set out in Figure 4. below, the category with the highest total number of responses to questions 1, 2 and 3 combined was 'Health' (36 responses out of 96). This was followed: by 'Impact on family and friends' (26 responses); 'Prejudice and stigma' (25 responses); 'Drug use and crime' (20 responses); 'Peer pressure' (18 responses); 'Money problems' (16 responses) and 'Schooling and employment' (11 responses). Responses included in the

categories 'Dependency and addiction' (8 responses) 'Neglect/Self-neglect' (7 responses) 'Enjoyment' (6 responses) and 'Treatment and support' (6 responses) were less prevalent.



The responses provided by young people to question 4, which asks what could be done about the impacts of drug use on young people, their families and communities, can be divided into four categories (in alphabetical order):

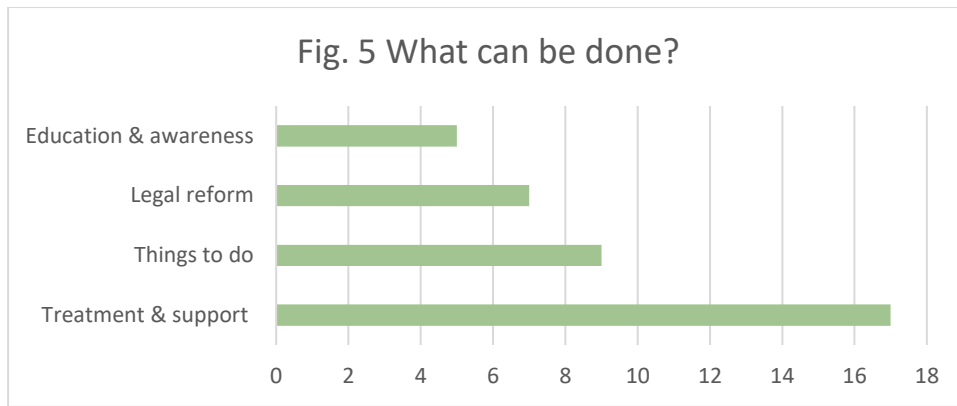
Education and awareness

Legal reform

Things to do

Treatment and support

Figure 5. below sets out the number of responses received in each of these categories to question 4.



According to the results of the survey, the provision of ‘Treatment and support’ for people who use drugs and their families is the clear top priority for young people with a total of 18 out of 38 suggestions made in this category (46%). This was followed by ‘Things to do’ (9 suggestions, 24%) ‘Legal reform’ (7 suggestions, 18%) and ‘Education and awareness’ (5 suggestions, 13%). A randomised list of responses received to all four survey question is attached as Appendix IX.

3.4 Impact of drug use on young people, their families and communities

This section of the report presents a summary of the issues raised in response to questions 1-3 of the survey regarding the impact of drug use on young people, their families and communities. Each of the 11 categories identified by the report writer on page 32 above is addressed in turn in order of frequency of mention.

Health

The impact of drug use on mental health and health in general was referred to in 36 of the 96 responses received to questions 1-3 (38%). Of these 36 responses, 27 responses said that drug use had a negative impact on mental health. Although many young people did not specify particular symptoms or problems in this regard, the following challenges were mentioned by some young people including: being unable to sleep; becoming confused, frustrated and angry; periods of depression; post-traumatic stress disorder; and mental health problems within families including experiencing hurt, upset, stress and fighting. A small number of responses said that drug use could resulting in death or loss of a family member.

As well as identifying some of the negative effects of drug use on mental health, some responses (6 out of 36 categorised under 'Health') also said that using drugs can help to alleviate some mental health problems including anxiety in particular and they said that young people often use drugs to self-medicate for such conditions. Others (3 out of 36 categorised under 'Health') emphasised the fact that the way in which drug use impacts young people depends on both the individual and the drug in question.

You get really bad lows following the high.

Mothers are so stressed and then dads get cross and they fight all the time.

Wonderful impacts depending on the drug e.g. weed it can make you happy when you're feeling down, calm you down when you are stressed.

Family and friends

The impact of drug use on the family and friends of people who use drugs was referred to in 26 of the 96 responses received to questions 1- 3 (26%). Of these, 20 responses commented on the negative impact of drug use on families. Many young people simply said that drug use destroys, ruins or tears apart families. Some young people also said that parents who use drugs can influence their children to do likewise and thereby diminish their chances of recovery.

A total of six responses commented on the negative impact of drug use on friends and one response commented on the negative impact of drug use on relationships generally.

You lose your friends and you fall out with family.

Drug use in families destroys families in so many ways such as having their children taken away from them.

In some cases a parent does drug or drugs and they don't think there is anything wrong. It's hard coming back from treatment if you have a parent that drinks.

Drugs can change people so it can alter relationships.

While recognising the harm caused by drug use, a small number of young people also said that using drugs can help young people to get on better with family.

It helps me to relax and my ma likes me better when I smoke weed and I get on better with my family.

Drugs can destroy families. Drugs can make family events fun.

Reputation

The negative impact of prejudice and stigma as a result of drug use was referred to in 25 of the 96 responses received to questions 1-3 (26%). Young people commented on feeling fearful and unsafe in neighbourhoods where drug use is prevalent and they talked about the impact of reputational damage on young people, their families and communities as a result of drug use. They described the shame and embarrassment felt by family members when young people are using drugs as well as by young people themselves. They said that young people also feel shame when their parents are using drugs. They described how widespread drug use in certain areas means that facilities and activities for young people are often closed down. They also said that drug use can ruin communities and make them filthy.

While recognising the negative impact of drug use on communities, one response also said that drugs can 'help people in communities not to live in poverty'.

If their parents do drugs then they are around people that aren't good for them. They can be embarrassed and not get feed at home and won't go to school. If the young person is doing drugs then their mental health is affected. They can do embarrassing things and loose friends. They can get in trouble with the Gardas and have a bad name.

The local teenager disco stopped in our town because of drug use and young people being drunk. There is not many things for young people. If your family do drugs no clubs want you to go their clubs. In a small town everyone knows everything about you and they treat you bad.

You do dangerous things, unsafe sex with older men, sometimes you don't even know if you have had sex. You can get really bad name as a female You lose your friends and you fall out with your family.

Crime

The link between drug use and crime was referred to in 20 of the 96 responses received to questions 1- 3 (21%). Young people described in vivid terms how getting into drug related debt can place young people and their families in danger and force them to become involved in crime including dealing in particular. Young people also said drug debt could result in exposure to threats and intimidation by dealers.

Drugs cause a lot of trouble in my area, houses get burned down or smashed up over them if money is owed which is very frightening.

Young people sell drugs to pay for their drugs but then they have a drug debt and the family get threatened.

You start to deal to pay for your drugs and then you end up owing dealers favours that are illegal and dangerous. The Gardas get involved. Some of them are helpful others just want to know the dealer's name which is hard when you know you and your family are in danger if anyone finds out you snitched.

Very bad because many young people go into debt and their families have to deal with it which can result in people being physically hurt, people losing their house, losing family member over debt.

Peer pressure

A total of 18 out of 96 responses (19%) received to question 1-3 highlighted the role of peer pressure and peer influence in young people's drug use. Young people spoke about the wide availability of drugs in every setting, normalisation of drug use and the role played by peers in encouraging drug use, including the role of social media in glorifying drug use. One young person also talked about the use of 'vapes' to take drugs in public without being caught including Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC) in particular.

If you are trying not to use drugs it's hard because they are everywhere. You get sent snap chats if people have some. If you meet up with friends someone has drugs in the group. It's hard to avoid them if you want to.

The impact of drug use on young people is very bad they are seeing the older boys standing at the shops with designer brand clothing and thinking you have to sell drugs to have them type of things.

Money problems

A total of 16 out of 96 responses (17%) received to questions 1-3 said that drug use can sometimes cause severe financial problems for people who use drugs and their families. Young people said that drug use can be expensive and that as a result people who use drugs may not have enough money for food, rent and other necessities possibly driving them into poverty and homelessness. They said that people who use drugs sometimes also steal from family members which also causes financial problems.

Boys and girls at young ages can take money from their family, foster parents or mother or father which could lead to bad financial problems.

They could use all their money on it and have none left to feed themselves. Money for necessities may be spent on drugs.

School and jobs

A total of 11 responses out of 96 received (12%) to questions 1-3 said that drug use has a negative impact on the general motivation, education or employment prospects of people who use drugs. A total of nine responses said that drug use makes young people more lazy and robs them of opportunities in general. Seven responses said that drug use causes young people to drop out of school and five responses also said that drug use can prevent young people from being able to get a job.

No jobs. Unemployable. Sleep all day. Not in sports or activities.

You have no options if you do drugs.

Young people don't go to school because their parents are asleep.

Dependency and addiction

A total of eight responses out of 96 (8%) received to questions 1-3 said that drug use impacts young people, their families and communities by causing people who use drugs to become dependent on or addicted to them. Most young people did not comment on the consequences of drug addiction and dependency. Those that were mentioned included poor mental and physical health and unemployment.

Young people can be impacted by drugs like end up with a bad future in life with bad health and no way of income because they can't get a job because they are addicts.

They can have a positive and negative impact on young people it varies from person to person. Some people can casually do them and have fun while others have fun at the start but they start to get addicted and get dependant on them.

Neglect/Self-neglect

A total of seven of the 96 responses received (7%) to questions 1-3 said that when young people and/or their family members use drugs this can result in neglect and self-neglect. Some young people commented that when parents use drugs they can neglect their children by not feeding them or sending them to school. They also said that sometimes young people who use drugs don't wash or feed themselves. Some young people said that children can be taken into care as a result of drug use.

If their parents do drugs then they are around people that aren't good for them. They can be embarrassed and not get fed at home and won't go to school.

Children go into care. Parents get stressed and fight. No food at home. Young people don't go to school.

Enjoyment

A total of six of the 96 responses (6%) received to question 1-3 highlighted the enjoyment that young people can get from using drugs. The young people who made these comments also recognised the negative impact of drug use in their responses.

It can cause lots of trouble but we have fun when we smoke weed. Other drugs like heroine and crack cause a lot of problems.

Treatment and support

A total of six responses to questions 1-3 from a total of 96 (6%) received discussed the absence of adequate treatment and support for people who use drugs including young people as well as people negatively impacted by the drug use of others. Young people described their fear of asking for help, the absence of support from parents and the challenge of rehabilitation in the face of the widespread availability and use of drugs and alcohol.

Young people are afraid of getting help because social workers get involved and their families get cross over this. So young people don't get help.

Drugs are everywhere. Even people who don't come from families that use drugs are using them. It creates a lot of mental health issues and there are no services available. Even people in school are going in stoned and the schools ignore it.

No help from your family when you're in trouble.

There is not much support for parents and sometimes they want to ignore it.

3.5 What could be done?

This section of the report presents a summary of the suggestions made in response to question 4 of the survey, which asks young people what could be done about the impacts of drug use on young people, their families and communities. Each of the four categories identified by the report writer on page 34 above is addressed in turn in order of frequency of mention.

Treatment and support

Although treatment and support did not feature prominently in response to questions 1-3 regarding the impact of drug use on young people, their families and friends, far more proposals were made in this category in answer to question 4 than in any other, totalling 18 responses altogether (46% of responses).

Young people called for more treatment and support services in schools in particular for young people who use drugs and for young people whose parents use drugs. They asked for

more investment in drug rehabilitation services as well as mental health services and other services that would prevent young people from becoming involved in drug use. They said that they valued non-judgemental support and a detached street work approach. One young person called for more drug treatment and support services specifically for young people in transition to adulthood. One young person said that it would help if social workers did not put young people into care because they or their parents use drugs.

More support for the children of parents that use drugs. [Youth service] has really helped me understand drugs and where to get help. They also don't make me feel bad if I ask for help.

If there was more counsellors and supports for young people and families. I don't think there is enough treatments for people to go to. I know someone that couldn't go because there was no beds and they were full and they had no money to pay for it.

More support for young people who have gone through treatment and relapse would help or to help them not relapse. I don't like AA meetings, I would prefer if there was something that was like [youth service] to meet people.

More support for young people who have gone through treatment and relapse would help or to help them not relapse. I don't like AA meetings, I would prefer if there was something that was like [youth service] to meet people.

More money for mental health support. Most young people that I know that use drugs do because they have mental health issues are they are trying to slow their brain down.

Things to do

Young people said that the provision of better facilities and more community based activities for all young people had an important part to play in protecting them from the harmful effects of drug use in 24% of responses received to question 4 (9 responses). They called for more things to do and places to go for young people in their communities including both indoor and outdoor group activities, sports and other hobbies. To make public spaces safer for young people, one young person called for better policing and another called for 'neighbourhood watch'. One young person highlighted the difficulties involved in trying to avoid drugs and

alcohol while socialising following a period of drug treatment due to the absence of alcohol free venues suitable for young people.

I attend [youth service] and that is good but there is nowhere to go when you are an adult to meet up and hang out with friends. I would love if I could meet up with other 18-20 year olds and not have to drink. If I wanted to meet a friend for a coffee after 6pm it is a pub because no coffee shop is opened then.

We like when people set stuff up for us. People should come out to see us more often because we don't like going into buildings.

More places/things for young people to do to keep them away from drugs/dealing.

There could be neighbourhood watch and a lot of street workers who could help a lot of kids get off the street and get them into sports and hobbies.

Legal reform

In response to question 4, a total of 7 young people (18% of responses) said that drug use or the use of some drugs should be legalised and a health led approach to drug use should be adopted instead. By contrast, one young person said that 'more strict laws on drugs and drug use' was part of the solution.

I also think it would be good if drugs were a health issue and not a crime. If you went to see someone for help not go to court.

I think legalise them so then no one will be experiencing [the impact of drug use] because you're allowed them.

The legalisation of them given in correct place and time.

Education and awareness

In response to question 4, a total of five young people (13%) said that the provision of education and awareness raising should be among the steps taken to reduce the impact of drug use on young people, their families and communities. They called on adults to engage in 'open conversation' with young people about drug use and for the Gardaí to be involved in educating parents about drug use. They said people should be made aware of the treatment and support service available so that they would know where to turn to for help if needed.

I think more awareness of the services that are available in the area should be made known

Have activity groups around that people can go and educate people on drugs.

It should be talked about more between adults and people my age.

Shared lived experience about drugs – open conversation.

3.6 Key findings from the survey

Young people responding to the survey recognise the harmful impact that drug use can have on their health, on their relationships and on how they are perceived. They have witnessed the dangers associated with drug debt and are more fearful of becoming drawn into criminal behaviour including dealing as a result of drug use than they are of becoming dependent on or addicted to drugs. They acknowledge that drug use can cause young people to drop out of school, diminish their chances of employment, deny them financial security, destroy their motivation and – when a parent is using drugs – cause them to suffer the consequences of neglect. But while acknowledging that drug use can have a negative impact on almost every aspect of their lives, they said that young people use drugs to self-medicate for mental illness including anxiety in particular and because they believe that using drugs can be enjoyable.

Young people said that drugs are easily available to them in every setting including schools and they are not being provided with opportunities to develop and engage in alternative interests and activities that would support rather than harm their mental and physical wellbeing. In combination with peer pressure and peer influence, this has resulted in drug use being normalised for young people who encounter drugs where ever they go in their daily lives. But despite the widespread availability of drugs and the harmful impact of drug use, they said that treatment and support for those negatively impacted by drug use falls far short of what is needed.

First and foremost, young people responding to the survey are calling for more treatment for young people who use drugs and support for young people whose parents use drugs. They want this to include services that are school-based and non-judgemental. In addition to investment in rehabilitation, they are also asking for investment in mental health services and other services for young people that would prevent them from becoming involved in drugs, including the provision of better recreational facilities and more community based activities

for young people. They are calling for consideration to be given to the benefits of legalising the use of some drugs. They are asking for improved education and awareness raising regarding drug use and the treatment and services available. They want adults, including parents in particular, to be better informed and willing to engage in open conversations with them about drug use.

4. Comparative analysis

4.1 Overarching concerns

Following analysis of all the data generated by young people taking part in the face-to-face group consultation event and the survey regarding their concerns relating to drug use as distinct from the measures suggested to address these concerns, it is possible to identify nine overarching categories of concerns. These categories are set out in Figure 5 below in order of frequency of mention. Concerns that featured in *both* the consultation event and the survey are entered in white. Concerns that featured in *either* the consultation event *or* the survey are entered in grey.



Fig. 5 Overarching concerns

Many of the same concerns relating to the impact of drug use on young people, their families and communities were identified as significant by participants in the face-to-face consultation event and the survey. In particular, the way in which participants in the consultation event framed their concerns relating to the impact of drug use on health and the priority afforded to this concern is reflective of the views expressed by young people on the same topic in the survey.

Other concerns that were identified by young people participating in both the face-to-face consultation event and the survey and framed in a similar way include the following: the impact of drug use on relationships with family and friends; the prominent role of peer pressure and peer influence in young people's drug use, the impact of reputational damage as a result of drug use on young people and their communities; young people feeling fearful and unsafe in their communities as a result of drug use; the wide availability of drugs and its role in young people's drug use; the absence of activities and recreational facilities for young people in their communities; the impact of drug use on education and employment; stealing to buy drugs; falling into poverty and homelessness as a result of drug use; the lack of accessible and available treatment and support for people who use drugs and those impacted by drug use; the lack of investment in services for young people generally; dealing to pay for drugs; threats and intimidation as a result of drug use; and being forced into criminal behaviour as a result of drug use.

It is notable that in addition to describing their concerns, young people participating in both the consultation event and the survey also commented not only on the use of drugs to self-medicate for mental illness but also on the enjoyment that some young people say they get from taking drugs.

The fact that young people participating in the consultation event and the survey did not focus on the impact of drug use on their friendships and peer relationships is also notable although it is possible that this resulted from the way in which the topic for the consultation

event and questions for the survey were worded, with families and communities explicitly mentioned in both cases but not friends or peers.

Despite the many similarities between the views expressed during the consultation event and the survey, there are also significant differences between them in terms of the issues raised. First, it is notable that concerns around drug related education and awareness were a focal point for discussion during the consultation event but arose in the survey as a topic only in response to question four regarding what could be done about the impacts of drug use. It is also notable that the following concerns were discussed in some detail during the face-to-face consultation event but did not feature in the responses provided to the survey: fear of isolation as a result of drug use; the impact of drug use on the freedoms enjoyed by young people; the risk of exposing younger children to drug use posed by the wide availability of drugs; the cost of treatment for people who use drugs; and the absence of confidential treatment for young people who use drugs due to mandatory reporting of child safety concerns. Likewise, a number of concerns were raised by survey respondents but did not feature in discussions during the consultation event including: the impact of parental drug use on young people including the risk of young people being placed in care as a result of parental drug use; the risk of neglect/self-neglect as a result of drug use; the shame experienced by young people as a result of drug use including drug use by family members; the impact of drug use on young people's general motivation and energy levels; the link between food poverty and drug use; threats and intimidation as a result of drug debt.

4.2 Overarching suggestions

Following analysis of all the data generated by the face-to-face consultation event and the survey it is possible to group suggestions made by young people to address their concerns into four overarching categories in order of priority/frequency of mention: 'Treatment and support'; 'Legal reform'; 'Education and awareness'; 'Things to do and safe spaces to go'.

As demonstrated in Table 4 below, 'Treatment and support' was identified as a top priority for young people in both cases. However, young people responding to the survey focused on rehabilitation services for people who use drugs whereas participants in the face-to-face

consultation event paid equal attention to the need for support for people who are negatively impacted by the drug use of others.

Face-to-face consultation	World Café vote %	Survey	Survey responses %
Treatment and support	47%	Treatment and support	46%
Education and awareness Legal reform	24%	Things to do	24%
Community life (Safe spaces to go)	5%	Legal reform	18%
		Education and awareness	13%

Table 4. What would help?/What can be done?

The issue of legal reform, in particular decriminalisation of drug use, was also identified as important by both participants in the consultation event and the survey, however greater attention was paid to it during the consultation. Decriminalisation arose in the context of the survey only in response to question 4, with 18% of young people proposing legalisation of some drugs as a step that should be considered. By comparison, the potential benefits of decriminalisation was a prominent feature of the discussions throughout the face-to-face consultation event and proposals in this regard attracted 24% of the Sticky Dot votes cast by young people during the World Café session. Legal reform was also address in four of the six Key Statements developed for the Department of Health during the consultation event.

As stated above, during the face-to-face consultation, the absence of easily accessible, factual and accurate information about drugs and drug use as well an awareness of the supports available was raised as a concern for young people early in the event and identified as a factor that not only contributed to young people’s drug use but also exacerbated the associated risks. Moreover, proposals that addressed the need for education and awareness raising regarding drug use attracted 24% of the Sticky Dot votes cast by young people during the World Café session. By contrast, education and awareness raising arose in the context of the survey only in response to question 4 regarding what could be done about the impact of drug use, with 13% of young people making proposals relating to the issue.

The need for investment in mental health services and other services for young people that would help to prevent them from becoming involved in drugs featured in both the consultation event and the responses provided to the survey. However, survey respondents placed far greater emphasis on the need to divert young people from using drugs by providing them with better recreational facilities and more activities in their communities. A total of 24% of young people responding to the survey made suggestions categorised under 'Things to do' whereas suggestions relating to 'Community life (Safe places to go)' attracted only 2% of the vote following the World Café session at the consultation event.

5. Overall messages

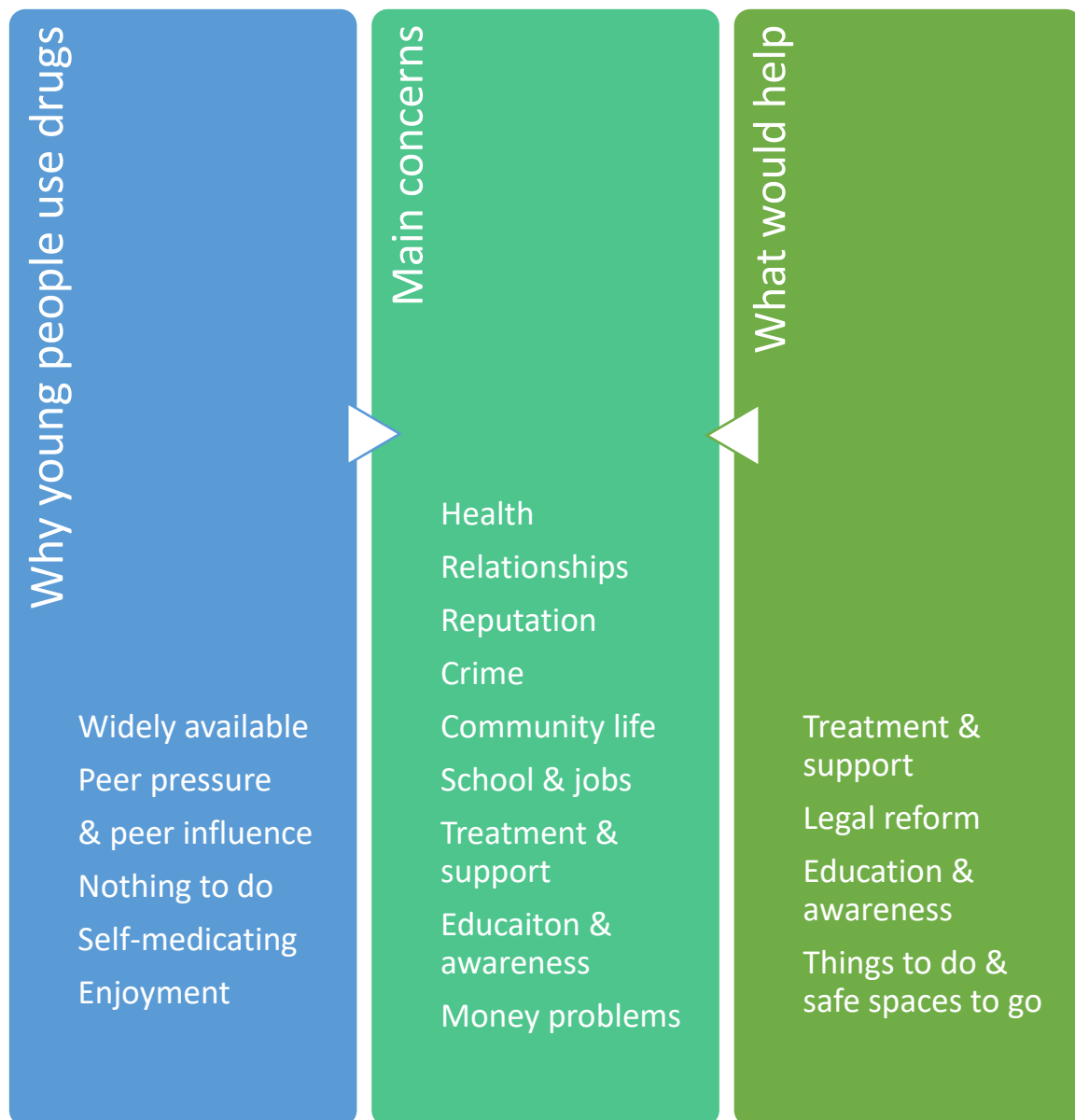


Figure 6. Overall messages

Why some young people use drugs

Survey respondents and participants in the face-to-face group consultation event said that young people use drugs for a variety of reasons including because they are easily available to them in every setting, because they are influenced and/or pressured by their peers to do so, because there is nothing for young people to do in the communities where they live, because they believe it can help them to cope with anxiety and other symptoms of mental illness in

the absence of treatment and support and because that believe that using drugs can be enjoyable.

Main concerns

The main concerns of young people identified by survey respondents and participants in the group consultation are as follows (in order of frequency of mention):

- Health - The impact of drug use on health including mental illness, poor physical health, the risk of overdose and suicide, dependency and addiction.
- Relationships - The impact of drug use on relationships including breakdown in family relationships in particular but also friendship breakdown with peer pressure and peer influence playing a significant role in young people's drug use. Fear of isolation as a result of drug use as well as the impact of parental drug use on young people including the risk of child neglect and being placed into care. Self-neglect as a result of drug use.
- Reputation - The impact of prejudice and stigma on young people as a result of drug use including reputational damage to young people who use drugs, to areas known for drug use and to people who live in these areas. Shame as a result of drug use including drug use within the family.
- Crime - The risk of being coerced into criminal behaviour as a result of drug use including dealing in particular. The negative impact of the criminalisation of drug use on people who use drugs. Drug debt as a cause of criminal behaviour. Threats and intimidation as a result of drug use.
- Community life - The wide availability of drugs in all communities. The lack of recreational facilities and things for young people to do in their communities. Communities becoming filthy and run down as a result of drug use and drug related waste. Fear of going to certain places as a result of drug use. The impact of drug use on the freedoms enjoyed by young and the risk of exposing younger children to drug use.
- School and jobs - The impact of drug use on young people's education and employment including dropping out of school, unemployment and lack of motivation/low energy.

- Treatment and support - The absence of accessible treatment and support services for young people who use drugs and all young people negatively impacted by drug use. The lack of investment in services for young people generally. The cost of drug treatment and the fact that under 18s cannot access confidential drug treatment due to mandatory reporting requirements.
- Money problems - Stealing from family and friends to fund a drug habit and the risk of poverty and homelessness as a result of financial problems caused by drug use.
- Education and awareness - The absence of accessible, factual and accurate information about drugs and drug use for young people in the places where they go including schools. The fact that adults including parents, but also teachers, youth workers and other adults who interact with young people professionally are often not well informed about drugs and drug use. Lack of awareness of the services already available.

What would help (in order of priority/frequency of mention)

Treatment and support

First and foremost, young people are calling for non-judgemental treatment for young people who use drugs and support for young people whose parents use drugs. They want this to include services that are school-based. They want treatment and support to be free/affordable for people of all ages who use drugs and they want confidential drug treatment and related supports for young people without the need for parental consent. To help keep all young people safe, including those who use drugs, they want to see investment in services that would reduce the harm caused by drug use such as 'back of house' drug testing and supervised drug use. To support their resilience, they are asking for investment in mental health services for young people as well as investment in services for young people generally.

Legal reform

Young people are calling for consideration to be given to the benefits of legalising the use of some drugs including cannabis in particular. They want possession of drugs for personal use to be decriminalised.

Education and awareness

Young people are asking for improved education and awareness raising regarding drug use and the treatment and services available. They want adults, including parents in particular, to be better informed and willing to engage in open conversations with them about drug use. They want to see a new approach to education about drug use that would provide young people with access to accurate, factual information about drugs and drug use and they want this to be available to them in schools, in youth clubs and in other places where they go as well as online.

Things to do & safe spaces to go

Young people are calling for investment in recreational facilities and community based activities for young people that would help prevent them from becoming involved in drugs by providing them with things to do and safe places to go. They are asking for public areas in neighbourhoods impacted by drug use to be better policed and kept clean including the removal of drug related waste.

Appendix I: Organisations targeted

The following 33 organisations were targeted for participation in the Youth Advisory Group and 18 November 2022 face-to-face group consultation event:

- An Óige
- Belong To Youth
- Candle Trust
- Catholic Girl Guides
- Church of Ireland Youth Dept.
- Crosscare
- ECO-UNESCO Clubs
- Exp. In International Living
- Feachtas
- Foróige
- Girls Friendly Society
- Girls Brigade
- Gaisce
- Involve CLG
- Irish Girl Guides
- Irish Methodist Youth & Children's Dept.
- Jigsaw
- Junior Chamber International
- Localise Youth & Community Service Ltd
- Macra na Feirme
- National Federation of Arch Clubs
- National Youth Council of Ireland
- No Name Club Ltd.
- Ógras
- Order of Malta
- Scouting Ireland Ltd.
- SpunOut.ie
- The Boys Brigade
- Voluntary Service International
- Young Irish Film Makers
- Young Men's Christian Association
- Youth Theatre Ireland
- Youth Work Ireland

Appendix II: Youth Advisory Group demographic details

Nominating organisation	Role at face-to-face group consultation event	Age	Gender
Cork City Comhairle (MC)	MC	15	F
Dublin South Comhairle (MC)	MC	15	M
Fingal Comhairle	Co-facilitator	16	M
Jigsaw, Dublin	Co-facilitator	17	F
Kerry Comhairle	Co-facilitator	15	M
Irish Girl Guides, Dublin	Co-facilitator	16	F
Sligo Comhairle	Unable to attend	17	M
Wexford Comhairle	Co-facilitator	16	F
Wicklow Comhairle	Co-facilitator	15	F

Appendix III: Face-to-face group consultation event - participants' demographic details

Nominating organisation	Age	Gender
Clare Comhairle	17	F
	17	F
	17	M
Cork City Comhairle	15	M
Galway County Comhairle	15	F
	17	F
	18	F
Kerry Comhairle	17	F
	15	F
Kildare Comhairle	15	F
	15	M
Kilkenny Comhairle	14	F
	17	M
Limerick Comhairle	16	NB
Longford Comhairle	16	F
	15	F
Meath Comhairle	16	F
Monaghan Comhairle	16	F
	17	NB
Roscommon Comhairle	15	M
Tipperary Comhairle	16	M
	17	NB

Appendix IV Methodology: Youth Voice on Drug Use Second-level consultation

Purpose

The Department of Health wants to gather the views of young people on the issue of how drug use affects their lives.

The types of questions they want to hear from young people about are:

1. How drug use impacts their lives, and that of their families, friends and communities
2. Their own views on the use of drugs; what is the best approach to deal with it
3. What are their own issues and concerns around the use of drugs?
4. How could young people be better informed regarding drug use?

A paper will be produced from this consultation which will be submitted to the Department of the Taoiseach for consideration as part of the discussions of the Citizens Assembly on Drug Use.

11:30 Welcome and introduction

- Welcome and outline of purpose (YAG)
- Housekeeping (child safeguarding, ground rules, etc.)
- Ice-breakers – TBC could be extreme rock/paper/scissors plus others (YAG)
- Split young people into six groups and move to round tables (YAG)

12:00 Open-space exercise

(30 min)

This approach puts the young people as the experts in their own lives.

Key Question:

How does drug use impact the lives of young people, your families and communities in Ireland?

On wall this question will be broken into three questions: (1) **young people**, (2) **families/friends**, (3) **communities**

- Every young person gets three post-its
- The facilitator at their table calls out the question(s)
- The young people take the time to **think** through their answers
- The **rules** are: 3 - 6 words only on each post-it, spelling doesn't matter, only one idea per post-it

- Young people place their **post-its on the wall**
- A volunteer is chosen from each table to assist the YAG to **sort** out the post-its into “categories”
- The volunteers **name** the categories
- Young people **vote** to prioritise the categories to get the top three which are then used in the world café

12:30 World café

(60 min with lunch in middle)

Each placemat will represent a different category (as chosen during the open-space)

The aim of this activity is to go deeper into the issues and supports needed for each category. In the world café format, every group gets the opportunity to add their views to each placemat.

- Placemat Questions:
 - 1) Tell us more about _____
 - 2) What are the main concerns for young people in relation to _____
 - 3) What supports would help address these concerns?
- 3 rounds, timed as follows:
 - Round one 20

13:05 LUNCH

13:50 World Café – Part II

- Round three 15

14:05 Prioritisation

- Each person gets opportunity to vote **on each table**

14:20 Movement Break

(15 min)

- YAG to support game if energy boost needed

14:30 Developing key statements for the Citizen Assembly from each table (40 min)

- Give the volunteer the feedback sheet to make notes (if they wish)
- Key Statement Sheet:
 - As a group work through the top voted issue (from prioritization session)

from the world café and break it down into the three sections (Situation, Action, Solution)

- Agree as a table on the top ONE key statement on this category to feed back to the DOH today
- Agree on a wording for the volunteer to feedback the key issue.
- Run through and gain agreement from the table.

15:00 Feedback of key statements to the room from each table

- 2 minutes per table

15:15 Closing exercise - full room vote

Ballot box vote on the three categories

&

Wall of Ideas

On a 5ft long graphically designed poster

How could young people be better informed regarding drugs?

15:20 Close of Consultation

- Closing comments
- Evaluation link
- Restate what will happen the views and ideas collected today

15:40 Facilitator debrief – safeguarding check-in

Appendix V World Café Categories: Sample of statements (young people’s own words)

Tell us more/Main concerns
Community life
<p>Impact on Freedoms: Limiting youth spaces – people doing drugs in skateparks etc. means people aren’t likely to go enjoy these places Stops young people from going to places socialising Not aloud being out after dark Scared something bad will happen if they enter a certain area Being restricted on going outside because of drug use</p>
<p>Drug use and crime: Drug use is a crime, this leads to criminals/gangs supplying, causing communities to be ruined They get you hooked, then you have to do jobs for them Forced to deal for drug dealers People could get into relationships with dealers to have access to drugs – much older, not healthy Being criminalised or forced into penalisation can cause more addictions They don’t want to get caught so they don’t ask for help</p>
<p>Exposing younger children: Actual children are doing drugs Young kids getting their hands on things they shouldn’t Kids having vapes – selling in schools and on Snapchat Prepping drugs in parks for kids All over schools Cannabis in school bathrooms Younger siblings coming home with drug related waste asking about them Kids accidentally taking edible drugs</p>
<p>Safe spaces to go: Not enough safe spaces for young people to go e.g. the fear of going into town and someone being on a high and it ruins the nights, don’t know what to do Families afraid to go places because of drug use Specific hotspots have drug related waste – baggies and needles</p>
Education and awareness
<p>Education only does so much – people can’t access it Parents don’t trust us enough – don’t feel allowed to be curious about drugs and what they are/risks involved Parents making 'drugs' a taboo topic Teachers/youth workers don’t know No one wants to give info on drugs – risk of taking drugs It can push people to find false info elsewhere – not safe By asking parents about drugs they might think we would like to do drugs Confidentiality</p>
Health
<p>Mental illness: Can cause hyper aggression or hyper depression Can cause mood swings Low mood, paranoia, hallucinations Aggressive emotions</p>
<p>Risks to physical health: Needles in public places</p>

Overdose and death
Risk of self-harm
Laced drugs
Risk of suicide of themselves or loved ones

Dependency and addiction:

Can rely on drugs to help with mental health problems
Repetitive cycle – way of coping with feelings/thoughts – feeling guilty – low mood and paranoia
Self-medicating
People might turn to drugs after being abused or mistreated
No other way to cope with feelings, feel stuck

Prejudice and stigma

Places labelled as dangerous - stigma - communities there avoided/treated differently, that kind of atmosphere can be really damaging. Isolates the area and people there, attracts people looking for drugs to the area, young people living in the area could be discriminated against and it could impact their mental health, physical health, socially.
Bad reputation, people assume that because you're from somewhere you could be taking drugs
Large groups of young people being perceived as doing drugs
Young people get harassed by strangers for hanging around in groups
Being blamed - misunderstandings, not knowing reasons for drug use - problems with relationships
Rumours of drug use around the school affect mental health - may not be true about a person and still spread - can cause like depression and exclusion
Shame
People associate drugs with poor people, its mostly upper middle class who have the money for cocaine addictions
Private school kids use lots of drugs

Relationships

Impact on family and friends:

People around becoming stressed by not knowing how to help them overcome it
Family members (siblings) feel scared, upset, angry when someone acts differently because of drugs
Parents can blame themselves if child doing drugs, can cause even more problems at home
Homelessness of family
Domestic abuse
Arguments about use of drugs, mood swings, money, could cause domestic violence
Younger family could be influenced, they see it as something normal, cycle
Young person doing drugs, the friends don't know how to help them, affect their mental health

Peer pressure:

Peer pressure - parties, school, all social settings really
Loosing friends because of use or not using
Not just peer pressure, the influence of seeing others do it even if they're not explicitly pressuring someone
Kids seeing older people using drugs making them think that it's Okay to do it
Influence (domino effect) - one person doing drugs causes another to do them too
Helps to make friends (similar situation)
Socialising
Feeling like using drugs would make spending time with friends more enjoyable
'Doing drugs with the boys'
Drug use in my area normalises drugs
More people talking it up – online
It's almost seen as uncool not to do drugs

Isolation:

Can cause people to get cut out of friends and family because of stigma around 'choice' instead of realising it as an addiction
Getting into arguments with others causing them to be left alone
Kicked out of houses by parents

Shunned by family and friends
 People stop talking because they don't want to be involved with drugs
 Become hated on
 Loss of relationships (all types)
 Social stigma around drugs can separate family and friends - leads to loneliness and stress leading to more drug use
 Sometimes isolating for people trying to help others with addiction

Schooling and employment

Impact on education and employment:

Some young people might not get a job - guilty by association
 Young people in education may drop out
 Not having a not having a qualification leading to financial issues
 Impact on exam/studying, [drug use] leads to stress, leads to more drug use
 Having to get a job to pay for it – less time for school
 Can't focus

Financial problems:

Drug debt
 They get you into debt so you have work for them
 Money – borrowing money, stealing money, feeling guilty
 Financial issues affecting family relationships

Treatment and support:

People going into treatment and coming out with more addictions
 Not getting support needed
 Rehab costs more than drugs
 Can't get help without money to pay
 How many people with money struggle with drug addiction?
 No enough people to reach out to and ask for help
 Confidentiality

What supports would help?

Treatment and support:

Solving the social issues that lead to drug use
 Access to clinics where people can take drugs in safe spaces where doctors are available in case someone needs medical help. Provide clean needles and medicine resources if they need it
 More supports for people on drugs rather than support for people not on it from seeing it
 Having clinic to do drugs in and dispose of paraphernalia
 Treating drug use as a health issue not a law issue
 Therapy for mental dependency - confidential – if tell parents can stop people sharing
 Have more support in schools for addiction issues or youth centres
 Better understanding and welcoming for young people
 More affordable free services for people that can't genuinely afford it
 Safe ways to manage drug use like at electric picnic
 Lots of free harm reduction officers and centres
 Better domestic violence supports, end stigma for women and men
 Create a safe space for those who have been neglected/abused/mistreated by people who use drugs

Legal reform:

Pro regulation – because if it's just decriminalised there will be loads of overuse i.e. 18 and over like alcohol
 Treating drugs as a health issue rather than a law issue
 Stop criminalising addictions and start helping them
 Change the law especially for young people
 Decriminalisation of drugs – end gangs selling drugs, control what's in the drugs, make sure they're safe

Education and awareness:

Education in schools – positives and negatives

Substance education being a school topic

Change the way we teach people about drugs – always anti-drug

SPHE – improvement in education, less science class way of teaching people

Spreading the correct information about drug use – to many myths – fear mongering Education on how to help

Raising awareness among young people of the supports available

Teaching parents and children about drugs

Educational videos - not just anti-drugs

Teachers, youth workers with correct education, ethical response

Promote peer discussion – at home, youth centres, schools

Community life:

Clean up rough looking areas

Bins for needles

More safe spaces and infrastructure for young people – could help to stop young people from trying drugs recreationally if they have nothing to do

Upkeep of towns and communities, making sure it still looks nice

Gardaí on public transport

CCTV – violence detected

More street lamps

Gardaí around areas small children would play

Appendix VI World Café voting pattern	
Category	Number of votes
Treatment and support	87 (47%)
Free services [for drug users and others impacted by drugs]	17
Free access through GPs to clean drugs	11
More supports for people on drugs	9
Clinics where people can take drugs in safe spaces where doctors are available in case someone needs medical help - provide clean needles and other medical services.	8
Harm reduction	7
Confidential treatment for <18s	6
More support in schools/youth centres for addiction	5
Better domestic violence supports	5
Legal drug dispensaries with pure and safe drugs	4
Universal rehabilitation centres	3
Safe ways to manage drug use like at electric picnic	3
Better understanding and welcoming for young people [in services related to drug use]	2
Substance abuse/reduction services for all ages	2
Shorter waiting lists	2
Financial supports for breadwinners if addicted	1
Counselling	1
More rehab services	1
Legal reform	45 (24%)
Regulation - because if it's just decriminalised there will be loads of overuse i.e. 18 and over like alcohol	14
Treating drugs as a health issue rather than a law issue	14
Stop criminalising addictions and start helping them	10
Change the law especially for young people	5
Decriminalisation of drugs	2
Education and awareness	44 (24%)
Education in schools	14
Spreading the correct information about drug use	14
Education on how to help people who use drugs	5
Raising awareness among young people of the supports available	4
Teaching parents and children about drugs	4
Educational videos	2
Teachers, youth workers with correct education, ethical response	1
Community life	9 (5%)
Clean up rough looking areas	4
Bins for needles	3
More safe spaces and infrastructure for young people – could help to stop young people from trying drugs recreationally if they have nothing to do	2

Appendix VII Key statements (in order of number of votes)

1. Social environment – key statement for the Citizens' Assembly

Situation: Kids and young people seeing people using drugs. Seeing drug waste and could be in danger because of it - i.e. heroine needles being left out in the streets, other drug paraphernalia injuries resulting from this. People having to use dirty needles, no other choice.

Solution: Offering clinics where people can take drugs safely, have access to clean needles, be able to get drugs tested to ensure they're not laced etc. Having a doctor onsite to have care if needed, for example overdoses or other health concerns. A place to provide information on helplines, rehab and other services relating to drug use. Wouldn't be arrested, confidentiality within said clinic, safe space.

Impact of Solution: Clear the streets. Less deaths related to drug use and overdoses. Reduce HIV spread. Impact on community areas – could keep people from doing drugs on the street or public spaces allow young people access to parks, playgrounds etc.

Associated key statement for the Department of Health:

1. Reduce harm, both health-wise and socially, relating to drugs in communities by providing a safe space or clinic to self-administer drugs and get access to clean needles and healthcare facilities.

2. Effect on relationships – key statement for the Citizens' Assembly

Situation: As drugs are such a taboo topic this restricts young people from talking to parents/teachers/youth workers about it due to misinformation and lack of education.

Solution: Proper education for all:

Lower age of drug education to 16 years old – not getting consent from parents depending on circumstances.

Drug seminars and workshop for teachers, youth workers and parents.

Lower age to 16 in regards to one to one support from youth workers.

Impact of solution: Better understanding /awareness, positives, negative and impacts of drugs. Safe space to learn about positives, negatives and impacts

Associated key statement for the Department of Health:

2. Drugs are a taboo topic due to misinformation and lack of education. We suggest lowering the age of drug education to 16 without parent's consent, drug seminars and workshops for teachers, parents and youth workers, and lowering to 16 with regards to one-to-one support from youth workers / teachers depending on circumstances.

3. Theme: Effect mental health – key statement for the Citizens’ Assembly

Situation: Stigma around drug use. Due to cannabis being illegal this leads to people assuming that people who use cannabis are criminals. People assume that those who use hard drugs are bad people but it is likely that they are struggling and need help.

Solution: Legalise cannabis to over 18s and use the tax money from this to fund harm reduction centres, information and research. Keep distribution of hard drugs illegal but decriminalise possession for personal use. If found in possession of illegal substances they will be confiscated and a free detox or mental health service offered.

Impact of the solution: Takes power away from organised crime. Less people in prison. More revenue to be put into harm reduction services. More employment. Being legal will stop from being gateway drug. More research – more access to information. Regulated = safer for the rebellious aspect, takes away the attraction. Destigmatisation. Less people in prison/people helped not punished, Gardaí more focussed on the big man (organised crime). Life changing help to people struggling with drug use and their families.

Associated key statement for the Department of Health:

3. We suggest legalisation of Cannabis and using the tax revenue to fund harm-reduction centres and detox centres. We suggest decriminalisation for possession of hard drugs for personal use and offer free detox and mental health services for drug users and their families.

4. Effect on mental health – key statement for the Citizens’ Assembly

Situation: Drugs aren’t safe, aren’t clean and are illegal. Illegal drugs can cause paranoia, hyper-aggression, hyper-depression depending on the person or drug. Can cause anxiety and depression to family members worried about a person on drugs. Drug use victims are criminalised which can add to the stress of the drug user, [those who] know drug users and community.

Solutions: Partial legislation, meaning free access through GP s to clean safe drugs:

Invest in GP training on drugs – dosage and effects (current GPs and GPs in training)

Close monitoring systems for drug dispensing.

Facilities, education and supports for people that are taking the drugs e.g. when on a high so they don’t endanger others.

GPs trained to wean people off drugs

Impact of the solution: Lower the stress of knowing someone on drugs because they have safe access, not in danger. Lower being in debt for drugs, financially and owing criminals money and forced to commit crimes. Know the drugs are safe, not being watered down by rat poison, which reduces the chances of adverse physical and mental reactions. Dosage is managed therefore reduces chance of overdose. Less anxiety for drug user as not constantly worried about a source – accessible. Drug users don’t have to worry about getting arrested asking for help, therefore they are more likely to get the help they need.

Associated key statement for the Department of Health

4. Partial legalisation, meaning free access through GPs to clean, safe drugs. This requires investing in education for current GPs and GPs in training, including how to wean people and reduce dosage safely. It would also include implementation of close monitoring of drug dispensing.

5. Effect on relationships – key statement to the Citizens’ Assembly

Situation: Someone using drugs to cope with feelings could be prosecuted and it could make their situation worse and once they’re released they may turn straight back to drugs or it could have a criminogenic affect.

Solution: If someone is using drugs instead of prosecuting them get them the help they need (treatment, rehab, etc). Decriminalisation of drugs.

Impact of solution: Creates an open space for people depending on drugs to talk about their relationship with rugs. Gardaí can focus on other issues. Employment opportunities
Less Stigma around drug users – makes it easier to talk to family about drug problems.
Help decrease economic and social issues in areas with high drug use.

Associated key statement to the Department of Health

5. Decriminalisation will reduce the negative effects on mental health. It will help people open up about their drug use and get help for them in rehab centres.

6. Social environment – key statement to the Citizens’ Assembly

Situation: We live in a state where (to an extent) it can be criminalised but it is generally not penalised.

Solution: Regulation on certain subjects”

Being able to measure the quantities being sold and sold and used can:

Spread enough knowledge

Creates healthier substances

Lower crime rates – time can be spent on other things – cheaper for taxpayer

Impact of solution: Safer for everyone. Regulation can encourage others to get help. Studies should be done which substances are more dangerous and which should be regulated. Or introducing medical cards e.g. US.

Associated key statement to the Department of Health:

6. Regulation is the best way to tackle drug use.

Appendix VIII Drug impact survey

Drug Impact Consultation

UIN: _____

Assent:

There will be a Citizens' Assembly this year and Hub na nÓg are running consultations (meetings or surveys) with young people aged 16 to 18 across Ireland to get their views and insights on what the impacts of drugs are on young people, their families, and communities.

We are asking young people to complete this survey. Your answers will be used to create a report that will be presented to the Department of Health. The views within the report will be completely anonymous, no names or details about you will be used. This report may be used as part of the discussion in the Citizens' Assembly to help to inform the government about solutions to the impacts of drug use in Ireland.

We really value your views and opinions, but please do not share personal stories. Answer only as many questions as you want, this survey is completely voluntary.

Age: ____ Gender: *female / male / other / prefer not to say*

Q1. What are the impacts of drug use on the lives of young people?

Q2. What are the impacts of drug use on families?



Q3. What are the impacts of drug use on communities?

Q4. In an ideal world, what do you think could be done about the impacts of drug use on young people, their families, and communities?



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Appendix IX Randomised drug impact survey responses

Q.1 What are the impacts of drug use on the lives of young people?

- Don't go to school. Can't sleep. Get lazy. No money, drug debt. Don't wash themselves. Loose friends.
- Dropping out of school. Then you lose your friends. CALMS wont medicate you for anxiety because you have a problem with addiction. If you are trying not to use drugs it's hard because they are everywhere. You get sent snap chats if people have some. If you meet up with friends someone has drugs in the group. It's hard to avoid them if you want to. This makes after care of treatment hard.
- You get a good feeling when doing them.
- Some young people use drugs for their mental health and it has helped them. Others it has not helped them. They have dropped out of school and have no education. You can't even get an apprenticeship without a leaving cert now so you will end up on the dole.
- Young people do not understand full capability of drugs. They do not know the long term effects on which they can harm you.
- It depends on the person.
- Losing out on school. Dropping out on school. Getting involved with the wrong people.
- If their parents do drugs then they are around people that aren't good for them. They can be embarrassed and not get fed at home and won't go to school. If the young person is doing drugs then their mental health is affected. They can do embarrassing things and lose friends. They can get in trouble with the Gardas and have a bad name.
- No jobs. Unemployable. Sleep all day. Not in sports or activities.
- Addiction / become lazy / no motivation/ mental health / frustrated / angry
- Bad impacts are picking up bad habits at a young age. If they are using drugs they are obviously spending a lot of money on it so that they wouldn't have money for other hobbies.
- I thought at the start it was good but it destroyed my life. It causes a lot of problems/mental problems.
- Many young people are now smoking weed as young as 10. Some people I know haven't gone to secondary school and are now 14 and not in school. THC is being used in vapes. It has no smell so nobody knows. You can get drugs anywhere. It is everywhere.
- Young people can be impacted by drugs like end up with a bad future in life with bad health and no way of income because they can't get a job because they are addicts.
- Drugs have a very negative impact on people my age as some of them can be very easily influenced or think it's cool to start doing drugs themselves. They want to fit in with their friends and sometimes get slagged if they don't do them too. I think once they start its very hard to stop and it can lead them down the wrong path.
- Drugs can make you feel good about yourself. Drugs can help when I have a difficult day. Drugs can make young people lazy. Drugs can make me not care about others.
- Drug use has a major impact on the lives of young people such as peer pressure. As young people are doing drugs in nightclubs and at house parties and also smoking weed 'normally' on a daily basis. I don't think they realise the effects I has on your physical and mental health. Although some people use drugs to make them feel better

such as smoking weed, some will say this reduces anxiety and helps them get through their day-to-day life.

- They can have a positive and negative impact on young people it varies from person to person. Some people can casually do them and have fun while others have fun at the start but they start to get addicted and get dependant on them.
- Lots of people would be getting into lots of trouble. Your health gets worse. Drugs can sometimes help by relaxing and calming people.
- Drugs have a big impact on people's life. Personally I seen it growing up in [location]. It's tore my family apart, people especially kids don't know what the drugs are laced with.
- When young people use drugs it affects their mental health. You get really bad lows following the high. You do dangerous things, unsafe sex with older men, sometimes you don't even know if you have had sex. You can get a really bad name as a female. You lose your friends and you fall out with your family. You start to deal to pay for your drugs and then you end up owing dealers favours that are illegal and dangerous. The Gardas get involved. Some of them are helpful others just want to know the dealer's name which is hard when you know you and your family are in danger if anyone finds out you snitched. Treatment is good but you only get so many chances.
- The impact of drugs are a very bad impact because it is very damaging and destroys so many people's families.
- Drugs can be beneficial in many different fields. But in my opinion they stop us from achieving full potential. How they can help and how they can sabotage people should be taken more into consideration.
- It helps me sleep. I feel myself when I smoke weed. It calms me down and I can talk better with my friends.
- It can lead to life of addiction or crime.
- They could get used to it and try it.
- The impacts are falling into homelessness, poverty and in worst case death. Mental health issues.
- The impact of drug use on young people is very bad and most young people do them.
- Young people can see this going on and want to get involved. Can lead to violence. Leads to people feeling unsafe.
- Scared to walk alone outside. New fears from what they have seen or heard. Ruins lives.
- Wonderful impacts depending on the drug e.g. weed it can make you happy when you're feeling down, calm you down when you are stressed.
- The impact of drug use on young people is very bad. They are seeing the older boys standing at the shops with designer brand clothing and thinking you have to sell drugs to have them type of things.
- It ruins mental health and kills motivation once you depend on it. If you use it for a good time then the effects are enjoyable.

Q.2 What are the impacts of drug use on families?

- Separation. Abuse – mentally and physically. PTSD.
- It is horrible. Mothers are so stressed and then dads get cross and they fight all the time. In some case a parent does drug or drugs and they don't think there is anything wrong. It's hard coming back from treatment if you have a parent that drinks.
- They're bad both ways.
- They break families up and cause a lot of hurt and pain especially when you see your parents hurt and upset.
- Money debt. Anger and confusion. Why? Worry.
- Arguments. Being kicked out. No help from your family when you're in trouble. Addictions. Stress and depression.
- They ruin families when the addiction is stronger than the persons mind. And the drug is in control of the mind.
- Very bad because many young people go into debt and their families have to deal with it which can result in people being physically hurt, people losing their house, losing family member over debt.
- Children go into care / parents get stressed and fight / no food at home / young people don't go to school because their parents are asleep.
- Boys and girls at young ages can take money from their family, foster parents or mother or father which could lead to bad financial problems.
- Families aren't too happy about drugs when it's a member of the their family using them.
- Relationship break up / children not happy / children not been cared for / influence children to do drugs / parents dealing / bills not been paid / homelessness
- It tears families apart and can wreck homes.
- Drugs can destroy families. Drugs can make family events fun.
- Hurt and upset families. Family breakdown.
- There are many different impacts of drug use on families one being they tear families apart and children can be taken away from their parents due to drug use. Families also suffer hurt and the pain of seeing their loved one so caught up in their own world of using drugs with no intention to change.
- Drugs destroy families.
- Money for necessities may be spent on drugs. Drugs can change people so it can alter relationships. Can bring danger to the house.
- You have no options if you do drugs. It can cause a lot of health problems. You can fall out with your parents and end up in care. Your younger brothers and sisters will be embarrassed for you. You will rob from your family and they will have to pay any drug debt you have. I know someone who's younger brother got bet up because he owed a dealer money. When I was in primary school other children whose parents used drugs were bullied at school. That is unfair. Schools didn't help them either.
- Drug use in families destroys families in so many ways such as getting their kids taken away from them. There is a lot more.
- It can ruin so many families. Families fall apart when a member goes to prison. It ruins so many relationships.

- It tears family apart, causes mental and physical draining. It's not a good role model to look up to.
- It can be stressful on parents and a person's brothers and sisters. They worry where they are, if there safe, if there with nice people, if they robbed for drugs. Brothers and sisters can be embarrassed or they can think it is cool and do the same or want to so the same.
- They ruin families. Drugs not only affect the person doing them but also the people around them. A child of an addict has more of a chance of becoming on themselves.
- You fight with your family and they fight with themselves. Your family can be ashamed of you and become stressed with all the issues they have to deal with. No parent wants to hear that their child has an issue with drugs and is dealing. There is not much support for parents and sometimes they want to ignore it.
- Loss of family members. Mental health issues.
- It helps me to relax and my ma likes me better when I smoke weed and I get on better with my family.
- Drugs cost a lot of money. Young people sell drugs to pay for their drugs but then they have a drug debt and the family get threatened. Young people are afraid of getting help because social workers get involved and their families get cross over this. So young people don't get help.
- They could use all their money on it and have none left to feed themself.
- I think drugs can cause a lot of trouble with families. Parents don't want their kids to do them, but I think people my age don't listen and do the opposite. Some people my age get in trouble with drug dealers so this can cause stress on families and tear them apart.
- Families lose a lot of people over drugs.
- The impact of drug use on families is bad it can ruin relationships.
- It can cause fights or disagreements.

Q3. What are the impacts of drug use on communities?

- All young people are labelled as the same. Young people in hoodies, hanging around town using drugs. Some young people don't use drugs. Parents give out about this all the time.
- The impact of drugs on communities is bad as some people are scared to walk to certain places in their own as there are people using drugs there I take the long way home from school to avoid this.
- Every party has drugs. Any event I go to there is drink and if you are an addict you can't even drink it is so hard. You have no social life and can't meet a boyfriend. For younger people it is harder especially in a small town with nothing to do, everything is around the pub.
- Junkies everywhere robbing people also lots of homeless due to drug abusers leading to crime.
- Makes your community look bad. Affects people around drug users.
- The local teenager disco stopped in our town because of drug use and young people being drunk. There is not many things for young people. If your family do drugs no clubs want you to go their clubs. In a small town everyone knows everything about

you and they treat you bad. If you are known to have used drugs you can find it hard to get a part time job.

- Drugs are everywhere. Even people who don't come from families that use drugs are using them. It creates a lot of mental health issues and there are no services available. Even people in school are going in stoned and the schools ignore it.
- The effect is bad, it's the new normality and people don't understand the effect.
- People get scared. People get discussed.
- Drug use can lead to poorness and can leave a lot of people homeless.
- Communities or people in them. Places are stereotyped. They become no go areas. Drug dealing.
- Intimidating / people do not want to go downtown because they're afraid of the people hanging around/ nice things don't happen in the town because people ruin them / like the community garden got closed because people are doing drugs in there.
- It's a bad impact because it influences other kids to start abusing them and selling them.
- Trouble on the streets. Fall out amongst friends.
- Bad because people see people using drugs and they fall into the same route because many communities don't try to help the people try to change how they think and what they want to do with their lives.
- Drugs can destroy communities that nobody will enter. Drugs can help people in communities to not live in poverty.
- They portray communities in a bad way and ruin its reputation. More action needs to be taken and more help and support needs to be put in place.
- It can cause lots of trouble but we have fun when we smoke weed. Other drugs like heroine and crack cause a lot of problems.
- They bring communities down and give the people less opportunity.
- Again there are many different impacts of drug use on communities such as the stigma associated with drug users. As a young person and if you have a family member who is on drugs it can be embarrassing sometimes. Also it can influence young people to do drugs seeing people smoking weed etc.
- Anti-social behaviour. Communities being vandalised. Mental health issues.
- More litter/dirty looking. More people on the dole, less money going into the community. Homelessness.
- A lot of money is made by drug dealers but a lot of it is lost by bad addicts.
- Communities are all messy from them.
- In my town young people are doing drugs now. It's not nice to see. They hang around in big groups and act stupid. My dad gives out about them because my nanny won't go down town any more. The shop owners give out because they are annoying customers. Then all young people get told they are the same.
- Lots of fights over drugs.
- Made the place look filthy.
- Drugs are everywhere nowadays. I see it all the time even when I'm walking to school I see some of my classmates buying drugs. They are so easy to get. As well I think drugs give some places a bad name as its more out there in some places because people don't care. Drugs cause a lot of trouble in my area, houses get burned down or smashed up over them if money is owed which is very frightening. Can make the

community a less safe space. More people on social welfare/not working. Increased homelessness.

- It can make the area look worse or filthy.

Q.4 In an ideal world what do you think could be done about the impacts of drug use on young people, families, and communities?

- I attend [youth service] and that is good but there is nowhere to go when you are an adult to meet up and hang out with. I would love if I could meet up with other 18-20 year olds and not have to drink. If I wanted to meet a friend for a coffee after 6pm it is a pub because no coffee shop is opened then. I also think more support for young people who have gone through treatment and relapse would help or to help them not relapse. I don't like AA meetings, I would prefer if there was something that was like [youth service] to meet people.
- 24 hour mental health centre in [location].
- More support for the children of parents that use drugs. More activities for young people. More supports in school for young people. [Youth service] has really helped me understand drugs and where to get help. They also don't make me feel bad if I ask for help.
- More education and awareness. Better drug policies. Maybe legalise drugs. Shared lived experiences about drugs – open conversation.
- If a young person had a problem with drugs that social workers don't put them in care. If schools had drug councillors. I think legalise them so then no one will be experiencing them because your allowed them.
- There could be neighbourhood watch and a lot of street workers who could help a lot of kids get off the street and get them into sports and hobbies.
- More money for mental health support. Most young people that I know that use drugs do because they have mental health issues or they are trying to slow their brain down. I also think it would be good if drugs were a health issue and not a crime. If you went to see someone for help not go to court.
- I think more help should be given to people who take drugs so they can be shown that there is a better life.
- Their families can be helped. If the young people went to [youth service] they will be helped. or if the schools were to give food to the children that have no food.
- Some sort of social work with youth work and youths.
- Try to stop as much as a I can. Try to help as much as I can.
- Stop making them.
- Legalisation of certain drugs could work if it was also regulated. Social media glorifying it.
- Stop taking drugs. Help young people not get involved in drugs. More rehab centres. More help from communities. Have activity groups around that people can go to and educate people on drugs.
- We like when people set stuff up for us. People should come out to see us more often because we don't like going into buildings.
- I think there should be more strict laws on drugs and drug use to help reduce the amount of drugs being done. It should be talked about more between adults and

people my age. There should be more groups to attend for young people with addictions that feel like safe space and not being judged.

- I think there should be more for young people to do in communities.
- More help and support, it's just addiction, it's an illness.
- I think if there was more things for young people to do in the town. If there was a place to hang out especially when it is raining. If there was more counsellors and supports for young people and families. I don't think there is enough treatments for people to go to. I know someone that couldn't go because there was no beds and they were full and they had no money to pay for it.
- More guards teach adults about signs their kids may be taking or selling drugs.
- More support to try help people to change how they think. More support for drug abusers.
- Legalise it to a certain amount. Kids want drugs to be cool.
- More resources to help addicts come off drugs. More places/things for young people to do to keep them away from drugs/drug dealing.
- People should stop doing them.
- The legalisation of them given in correct place and time. By helping poorer areas grow drugs are more common in council estates.
- More rehab centres to help people come off drugs.
- I think more awareness of the services that are available in the area for people should be made known. There are already a lot of services in [location] but I don't think people know enough about them. I also think more treatment centres should be put in the country as sometimes it takes a long time to get into treatment which can result in the person changing their mind by the time their chance comes.
- Guards do a better job in stopping drug use. Resources.