



**MID WEST REGIONAL
DRUGS & ALCOHOL FORUM**

Clare • Limerick • N Tipperary

Strategic Plan

2024-2027

ABOUT MWRDAF

The Mid-West Regional Drugs and Alcohol forum (MWRDAF) is one of 10 Regional Drug & Alcohol Task Forces/Forums in Ireland set up by the government to facilitate a coordinated response to drug and alcohol issues within targeted areas and involve those directly affected within communities in the approach. The MWRDAF and its sub-structures bring together members representing the community, voluntary and statutory sectors, and key interest groups to co-ordinate a collective and integrated response to substance use in Clare, Limerick & North Tipperary.

MWRDAF FUNDED SERVICES

Project and Brief Description

Novas Family Respite House - Based in Newport, County Tipperary, the Respite House caters for families of drug users. Parents, children, siblings, grandparents, and grandchildren can use the respite service.

Novas Community Detox Limerick - This service facilitates people to reduce or stop their use of methadone or benzodiazepines through a formal non-residential process involving key workers and prescribing doctors. It also provides targeted in-reach to the HSE Primary Care Drug Assessment Clinics.

Northstar Family Support Project – Provides a non-judgemental and confidential support structure to families who have been adversely affected by a family member's addiction to drugs and/or alcohol. Parents and siblings are empowered to find appropriate solutions to the issues they face and to modify the behaviour of the substance user.

Community Substance Misuse Team (CSMT) – The CSMT delivers a multi-disciplinary service to under 18's and their families across the md-west where substance use impacts them. CSMT offer outreach at various centres throughout the region and do client home visits.

Bushy Park Cocaine Initiative –Bushy Park are funded by the MWRDAF to support clients with polydrug issues, run family support groups for concerned persons and upskill aftercare facilitators and staff working in various projects in the mid-west region. It also provides a service to clients in the mid-west for cocaine addiction through key working, counselling and group work.

Ana Liffey - A low threshold harm reduction service for people experiencing problem drug use issues in the mid-west region through contact, assessment, key working, case management and on-going referral for people who use drugs. Additional funding was secured in 2023 for the Law Engagement & Assisted Recovery (LEAR) project to support the most vulnerable crack cocaine users with harm reduction and accessing treatment.

Other Services in the MWRDAF Area

Coolmine Mid-West works with adult females with drug/alcohol issues by providing day programmes and residential treatment.

Saoirse Addiction treatment Centre provides an outpatient service to people with drug/alcohol/gambling addiction in the Mid-West.

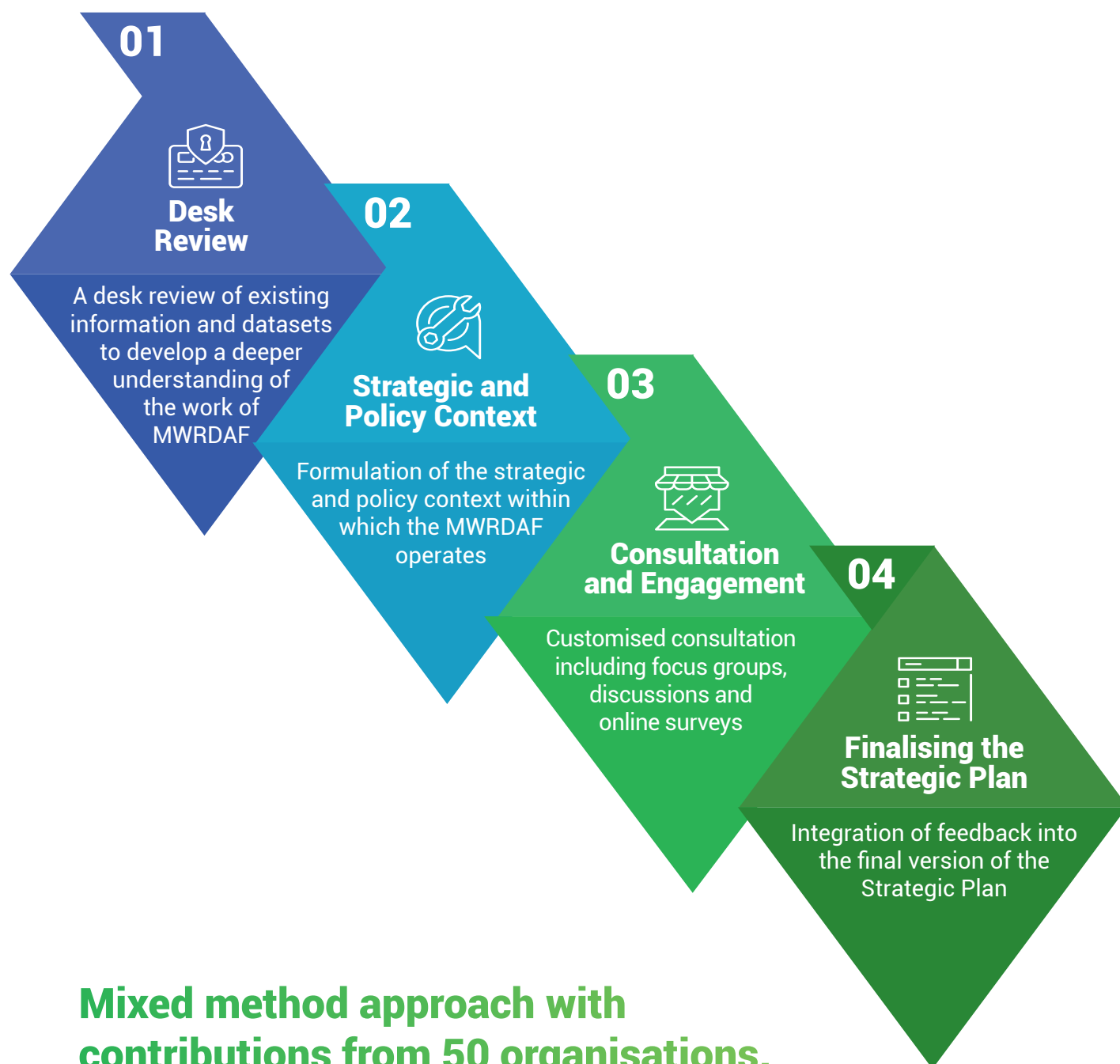
Cuan Mhuire Bruree provides residential treatment to adults with drug/alcohol/gambling addiction.

Bushypark Residential are funded under the HSE National Tier 4 Beds Programme to cover 13.5 episodes of residential treatment.

HSE Drug and Alcohol Service a range of supports based on the harm reduction model including methadone/suboxone programme, counselling, and outreach.

MWRDAF also distributes funding through annual small grants, education bursary and treatment schemes which in 2023 totalled €145,000 with 37 projects receiving funding across the three thematic areas.

DEVELOPING OUR STRATEGIC PLAN



AREA PROFILE

MWRDAF covers the catchment area of HSE CH03 comprising Limerick, Clare, and North Tipperary with a regional population of 412,444 (2022 Census)

Limerick City & County	209, 536
Clare	127,938
North Tipperary - including Nenagh, Thurles and Roscrea	74,970



The region’s population grew by 8% in the period 2016-22 broadly in line with national average increases

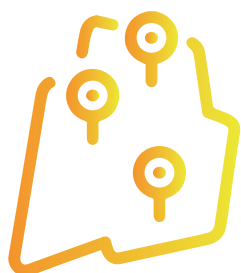
Analysing ten measures of disadvantage using the Pobal HP Deprivation index identifies changing deprivation levels


County	Year	Score	Year	Score	Change	Status
Limerick	2016	-1.31	2022	-0.83	+0.48	Marginally Below Average
Clare	2016	-0.22	2022	0.11	+0.33	Marginally Above Average
Tipperary	2016	-3.39	2022	-1.92	+1.47	Marginally Below Average

There is a correlation between disadvantage and drug problems with 2023 Health Research Board analysis concluding that treatment episodes for all drugs has a relatively linear relationship with deprivation - higher in more deprived areas.

DRUG PREVALENCE

In 2022
1,538
people in the
MWRDAF area
received an
intervention from
drug and alcohol
services.



58% Limerick City or County
(excluding East Limerick)
22% North Tipperary/East Limerick
30% Clare
39% Female 

AGE PROFILE

20% 30-34
17% 35-39
5% 19 YEARS OR YOUNGER

MAIN PROBLEM DRUG

39% **19%** **15%**



of treated cases were for problematic alcohol use
for cocaine use
reported heroin as their main problem drug

50% identified as having more than one problem substance
27% reporting three or more problem drugs
19% had children under the age of 18 living with them
2% of cases were recorded as 'Concerned Persons' which is used to denote a partner, child or sibling impacted by substance use of a family member

EXIT OUTCOMES

45% exiting services in 2022 were drug or alcohol free

8% reduced their drug or alcohol use



OUR WORK IN CONTEXT

This section looks at the strategic, and policy context which will inform the work of the MWRDAF and its funded services over the next three years.

National Drug Strategy

Six priority areas

1. Strengthen the prevention of drug and alcohol use and the associated harms among children and young people.

2. Enhance access to and delivery of drug and alcohol services in the community.

3. Develop integrated care pathways for high-risk drug users to achieve better health outcomes.


4. Address the social determinants and consequences of drug use in disadvantaged communities.



5. Promote alternatives to coercive sanctions for drug-related offences.

6. Strengthen evidence-informed and outcomes-focused practice, services, policies, and strategy implementation.

Reducing Harm,
Supporting Recovery

A health-led response to drug
and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025



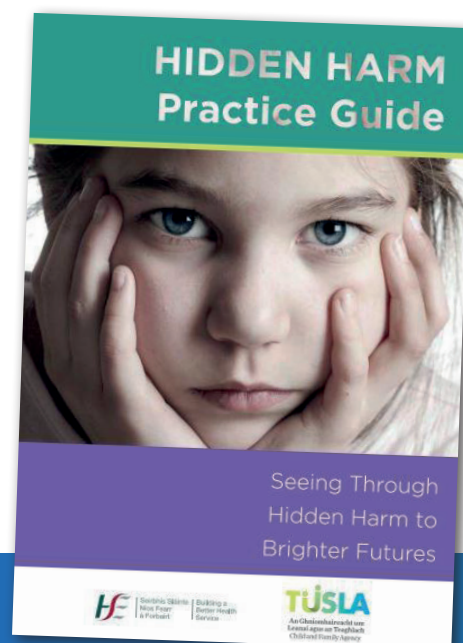


The National Drugs Strategy assigns 10 actions to Drugs and Alcohol Task Force which must form the basis of their annual reports.

1. Ensure that the commitment to an integrated public health approach to drugs and alcohol is delivered as a key priority.
2. Support the Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) programme.
3. Improve services for young people at risk in socially and economically disadvantaged communities.
4. Expand the availability and geographic spread of relevant quality drug and alcohol services based on identified need.
5. Respond to the needs of women who are using drugs and/or alcohol in a harmful manner.
6. Expand the range, availability and geographic spread of drug and alcohol services for those under the age of 18.
7. Improve the response to the needs of older people with long term substance use issues.
8. Continue to target a reduction in drug related deaths and non-fatal overdoses.
9. Support and promote community participation in all local, regional, and national structures.
10. Promote the participation of service users and their families including those in recovery, in local, regional, and national decision-making structures and networks to facilitate their involvement in the design, planning and development of services and policies.

Hidden Harm

The National Hidden Harm Project was established by the HSE and the Child and Family Agency (TUSLA) to inform service planning and improve services for children in relation to Hidden Harm. The project intends to bridge the gap between adult and children's services and deliver a more family-focused approach that considers the needs of dependent children and other family members.



Programme for Government (PFG) – Our Shared Future

The MWRDAF Strategic Plan must also reflect the priorities within the PFG relating to substance use and local needs.



Research Undertaken

MWRDAF has directly commissioned or collaborated on a range of research initiatives to provide further context for their work.



STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

62 contributors from MWRDAF committees, their funded projects, statutory agencies, community organisations and external stakeholders participated.

Current situation and impact on communities

76% of contributors felt that substance use and associated harms had worsened over the past three years

Cocaine (including crack), cannabis and alcohol were identified by respondents as the three main problem drugs

“In the last couple of years, drug trends have changed with crack cocaine being sold to vulnerable people in the mid-west. This is having more of a negative impact due to the highly addictive nature of crack and will lead to more criminal offences and poor health outcomes for the individual.”

Daily use of cannabis has become normalised – especially amongst young people

Edible jellies and e-cigarettes are replacing smoking and vaping is being used to disguise/facilitate drug (not nicotine) use – Government legislation has been enacted to address this concerning trend

Polydrug use has become embedded

The visibility of drug dealing/consumption, anti-social behaviour, intimidation and violence from drug debt and feuds is accelerating and fuelling fear across some communities in the mid-west region and presents a serious community safety issue

Increased homelessness places additional pressures on drug and alcohol services

“There has been more investment in services and agencies are working more collaboratively for the good of the client. Aspects of outreach are working well but providing coverage across the vast mid-west area remains challenging”

Identified risk factors and causes

Many factors can add to a person's risk for drug and alcohol abuse – stakeholders identified the following as the most prominent:

- Socio-economic factors including high unemployment, high levels of homelessness and accommodation issues, poverty and crime
- Low educational attainment, early school leaving and NEETs (young people not in employment, education or training)
- Lack of facilities for those not involved in sport leading to boredom
- Marginalised families experiencing multi-generational substance use issues
- Relationship breakdowns resulting in single parent families and or parental neglect of children

“Many young women are impacted and families are having to pick up the pieces with grandparents taking on responsibility of very young children. In some cases the children are being separated and missing the natural bond siblings have”

- Link between mental health and addiction - social risk factors such as peer pressure, bullying and the rise of social media can have a negative impact on personal development and mental health. Young people with fragile mental health are more vulnerable to gang affiliation and influence

Suggested priorities for MWRDAF 2024-27 Strategic Plan

This section reflects what contributors felt should be priorities in the MWRDAF strategic plan. Many relate to continuation of what MWRDAF is already doing and improving on these through investment of additional resources.

Treatment and Rehabilitation – there is a need for greater access to treatment centres and a holistic approach to treatment and recovery that includes stabilisation, maintenance, detoxification programmes via day provision, counselling and support with community integration.

Education & Prevention - the narrative of acceptable levels of cannabis, cocaine and alcohol use must be challenged. Working collaboratively with schools, Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and third level institutions not exclusively on education and prevention but also to better understand the reasons children and young people use substances should be explored.

Improving Access across the Mid West - nearly two thirds of treated cases were for people residing in Limerick City or County area which is the area with the highest population density. MWRDAF funded services must continue to be supported in their outreach efforts across the region and where rurality is a barrier.

Family Support - family is often deeply involved in the struggle with the addiction of their partner, child or sibling which necessitates their involvement in recovery and rehabilitation. Some MWRDAF funded services deliver family support and respite but there remains further unmet need.

Dual Diagnosis - The National Dual Diagnosis Clinical Programme (NDDCP) and accompanying framework is designed to strengthen collaboration between mental health and addiction services. The MWRDAF must keep apprised on future opportunities to embed the dual diagnosis programme in the mid-west.

Inter-Agency Working - MWRDAF must maximise their influence through representation on committees and forums such as the DRIVE regional steering committee and Regional Homeless Forums. There remain gaps in representation on the MWRDAF with no members from Clare and Tipperary Council Councils, Local Development Companies and CYPSCs. A case management protocol is needed to ensure full integration of services.

Recovery Community & Service User Involvement - strengthening recovery capital in the community through education, training, employment, and peer support opportunities in partnership with funded services is integral to the recovery process. Involving previous clients in service delivery that advocates and supports user's rights and empowers them to tackle adversity, such as financial, housing, and mental health issues while simultaneously raising self-esteem and worth, was identified as an unmet need. MWRDAF, through collaboration with funded services, should introduce service user involvement initiatives in their operations.

Alcohol Specific – Alcohol remains the most problematic substance presenting to services. To address this, there is an integrated alcohol service in the region. Education on alcohol remains a priority, given the misconception and understanding around alcohol unit content and the corresponding harmful effects of excessive use.

Profile - increasing MWRDAF's profile locally and its influence at the policy and strategic level was deemed a priority. MWRDAF should develop a communications strategy which optimises social and digital media and website - involving service users in the design and delivery of this strategy will be integral to increasing awareness and influence.

SCOT ANALYSIS

All the inclusions in the Strengths, Challenges, Opportunities and Threats (SCOT) analysis below emerged from and are evidenced from the consultation and desk review.

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working model with good interagency collaboration • Local knowledge and experience • Competent and committed MWRDAF staff and members • Numbers accessing treatment have increased • 53% of those exiting treatment are drug/ alcohol free or have reduced use • Evidence based work • LEAR Project • Tier 2,3,4 funded services including u18s • Grants scheme • Community Development approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No increase in funding of core budgets • Administrative burden relating to funding • Pressures on funded services to meet increased need with same resources • Ensuring service coverage across the mid-west region • Gaps in MWRDAF membership from Clare & Tipperary • Recruitment and retention of staff in funded services • Profile & visibility of the MWRDAF • Normalisation of substance use • Apathy of society in respect of drug use • Terms and conditions for section 39 worker
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For growth and development of funded services • To strengthen interagency working with key influencers in the mid-west • To increase, strengthen and reenergise MWRDAF representation and sub committees • For improved visibility of MWRDAF • To make the case for increased HSE funding and to attract new funding from Dormant Accounts, Sláintecare, Healthy Ireland • Presented by Planet Youth • From the Citizens Assembly Report • To work with Prisons • From the Strategic Implementation Groups (SIGS) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less national prominence of drugs & alcohol compared with homelessness and mental health • Lack of progression and housing options for those exiting services • Increased need, complexity, and demand for services despite net reduction in resources • Geographic area covered by MWRDAF • Not getting the resources, new members, skills, and energy required to lead the strategic plan. • Services being resistant to change • Challenges such as anti-social behaviour and normalisation of drug use • Funding

MWRDAF STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-27

Our Mission

To lead a coordinated area-based response to the harms of substance use to enable healthier and safer communities across the Mid-West area.



Our Vision

People in the Mid-West region are healthier, safer, and resilient to the impact of Drugs and Alcohol.

MWRDAF guiding principles and values:

PERSON CENTRED	We will ensure that the lived experience of people who use drugs and alcohol and family members is reflected in the work we do.
RESPECT:	All the people and organisations that we work with are treated with respect and dignity
COMMITTED:	We will advocate for the provision of equitable services and resources to reduce alcohol and drug related harm across the mid-west region.
ACCOUNTABILITY:	MWRDAF will be accountable for the use of public monies provided to them.
EVIDENCE DRIVEN:	We will ensure that our approach, programmes, and services are underpinned by a strong evidence base.
PARTNERSHIP:	We will continue to develop strong connections with partners, organisations, and the communities we serve to deliver better services and outcomes

Strategic Themes

The data collated from the stakeholder consultation and desk review has facilitated a clear understanding of the priorities while the policy context helps to shape direction in response to a changing external environment. MWRDAF's work over the life course of this strategic plan will be focused on four strategic themes supported by a total of 31 actions.



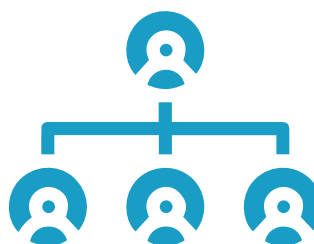
Education &
Prevention



Treatment
& Recovery



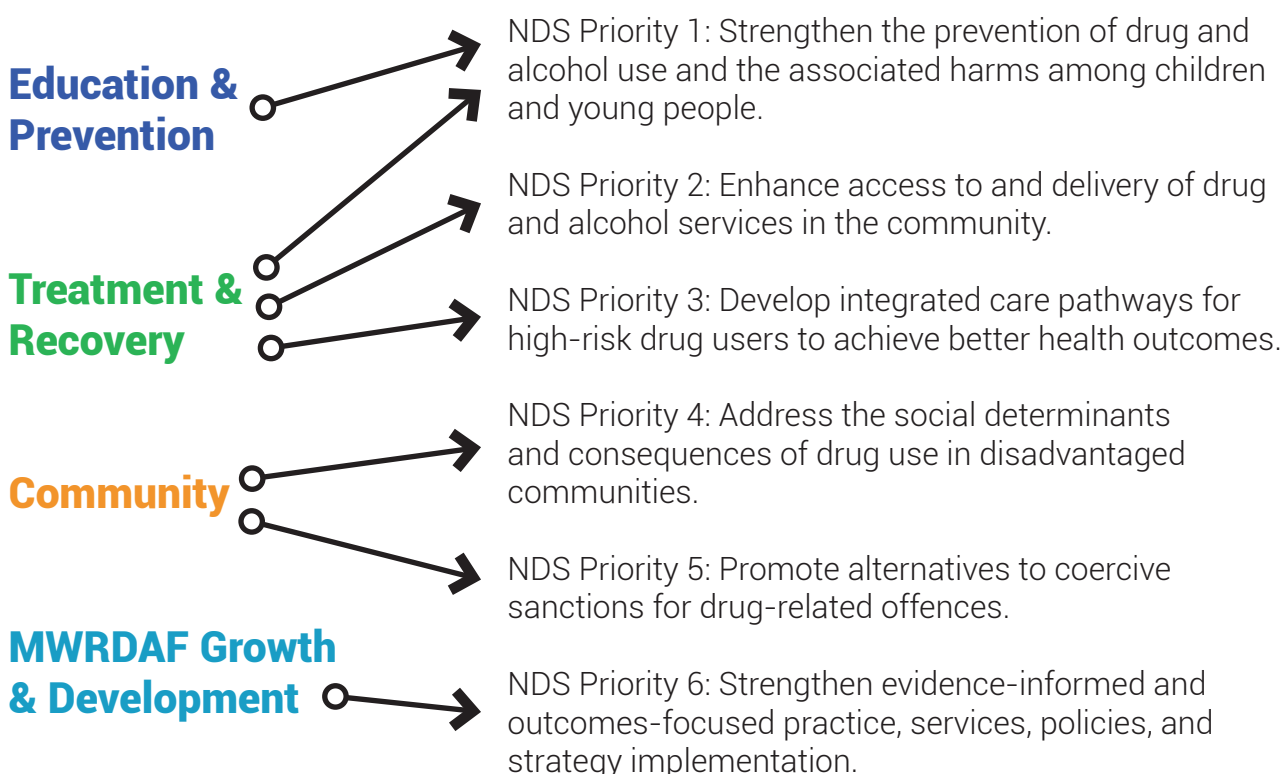
Community



MWRDAF Growth
& Development

Strategic Alignment

The six priorities of the National Drug Strategy reflect the lessons and stakeholder feedback from the mid-term review and capture the commitments in the Programme for Government (PFG). They are designed to reinforce the health led approach to drug and alcohol use and are consistent with the Sláintecare Implementation Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2023 and the Healthy Ireland Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025. They also align with the relevant areas in the EU Drugs Strategy and Action Plan and UN policies on drugs, children, and sustainable development. Alignment of MWRDAF strategic plan themes with the six NDS priorities is set out below. The strategic themes also reflect the 10 actions within the National Drug Strategy where Drug and Alcohol Task Forces are assigned a role.



Theme 1 – Education & Prevention

Actions	Measures of Success	By
1. Contribute to the roll out of national and regional campaigns to enhance drug prevention and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No. of awareness campaigns contributed to, and audience reached - MWRDAF allocation of resources to Education & Prevention reviewed annually - Evaluation of MWRDAF grants 	Ongoing as and when campaigns are designed and launched
2. Support schools, youthreach and third level education institutions to increase awareness on drug education and prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased awareness of the harms of drugs and alcohol in education settings - Schools and teachers are better informed about substance use by supporting the Let's Learn project - Co-ordinated response to drug & alcohol issues within the third level student population in place. - Putting the pieces together programme 	2025
3. Promote and support access to Parenting Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased access to Strengthening Family, Parents Under Pressure and Triple P programmes 	Ongoing
4. Support the roll out of Planet Youth in North Tipperary and across the MWRDAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Planet youth rolled out across the MWRDAF area - Data and evidence from Planet Youth used to inform policy and practice 	2025
5. Develop the MWRDAF website as an effective platform for drug education and prevention information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - More people using the MWRDAF website - Increased awareness of MWRDAF's work - Improved information and awareness of education and Prevention - Promote HSE Education officers training calendar 	2025

Theme 2 – Treatment & Recovery

Actions	Measures of Success	By
6. Fund effective drug and alcohol services in the MWRDAF area to address the needs of adults affected by drug and alcohol use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased proportion of service users achieving positive treatment outcomes (stabilisation, reduced use, drug free) - Increased numbers accessing MWRDAF funded services and achieving care plan goals - Services funded from the treatment funding pool - Evaluation of MWRDAF grants 	Ongoing Evaluation of MWRDAF grants in 2025
7. Enhance supports to assist families to deal with substance use issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased understanding of the impact of substance use in families - Support roll out of 5 step model 	Ongoing
8. Increase meaningful progression opportunities (education, aftercare, community integration) and champion a culture of recovery across services and communities in the MWRDAF area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved progression opportunities - Increased Recovery Capital - Education Bursary funding - Number of Smart Recovery groups - Kilrush multiagency initiatives - Roll out of the Restorative practice in Clare - Increased education and awareness in communities including research 	Ongoing
9. Support the development of dual diagnosis services and champion a culture of dual recovery across the MWRDAF region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dual diagnosis services and protocols in place 	End of 2024
10. Develop pathways to services for hard to reach groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote services digitally and in person - Increase awareness of services - Service user involvement - Engagement by the Traveller drug and alcohol network group 	2025

Actions	Measures of Success	By
11. Support the NDRF case management framework (inter agency, outreach, street work) in line with Slaintecare, NDS and NDRF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Case Management framework in place - Number of cases managed using the protocols 	2025
12. Engage with the HSE and advocate for funding to identify gaps in service provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved access to Residential Treatment - Improved Service User Outcomes 	Annually
13. Advocate for additional resources for funded services to address workforce development challenges and inflationary pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stronger front line service provision - Increased capacity to address emerging need - More effective services 	Ongoing
14. Support projects through training and information on how to progress people to residential treatment and the funding process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved access to Residential Treatment 	2025
15. Identify gaps in provision and work with services to address blocks and challenges through the treatment and recovery group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Better insight into need presenting in the MWRDAF area 	Ongoing through Treatment & Recovery Group and annually through SLA meetings

Theme 3 – Community

Actions	Measures of Success	By
16. Strengthen the voice of the community through (i) ensuring area wide representation of community reps on MWRDAF committees and (ii) the hosting of events and conferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community wide representation on the MWRDAF providing a voice on issues and consequences of substance use in the community - One conference/community event held per year - Pre development and facilitation to support community reps - Link with community organisations, keep up to date with drug/alcohol issues 	Ongoing and reviewed annually
17. Continue to fund the UL Diploma in Drug & Alcohol Studies, NUI Certificate in addiction studies and Community Addiction Studies Training (CAST) for participants residing or working in the MWRDAF area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Numbers completing the qualifications - Improved understanding of substance use - Career Development opportunities 	Ongoing
18. Support the roll out of the DRIVE programme in the MWRDAF area in partnership with An Garda Síochána and Department of Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MWRDAF liaison person for DRIVE - Formation of drive implementation group 	Ongoing and reviewed annually
19. Facilitate service user (SU) involvement through a service user forum in partnership with the HSE and MWRDAF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Service users forum established to ensure SU involvement in the development of services - Better understanding of service user needs - More effective services through co-design - Enhanced collaboration between projects 	By end of 2024

Actions	Measures of Success	By
20. Participate in the national Hidden Harm (HH) programme and explore the potential for the area wide roll out of the Trauma Informed Care (TIC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Representation on HH groups - Roll out of TIC - Improved understanding of trauma across all services supporting children and young people - Trauma Informed MWRDAF community 	Ongoing
21. Work with probation, and other relevant bodies in relation to arrest referral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arrest referral protocol in place 	Commencing in 2024 and then ongoing
22. Provide a co-ordinated response to drug litter in the mid-west.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cohesive Drug Litter working group - Reduced harm to the public - Safer disposal of drug litter 	Ongoing

Theme 4 – MWRDAF Growth & Development

Actions	Measures of Success	By
23. Update terms of reference for committee and subgroup membership with role descriptions	- ToR for TF committee and subcommittee membership in place	End of 2024
24. Incorporate data on drug use in the MWRDAF region from the NDTRS into a reporting template to be updated annually upon release of statistics from HRB	- NDTRS data included in MWRDAF annual report	End of 2024 based on NDTRS 2023 data
25. Explore new and emerging trends (drug of choice, high risk groups, socio-economic profiles, ethnic origin) through a reporting template to be updated annually	- Increased insight into need and emerging trends - Robust data to inform funding allocations	2024
26. Support specific MWRDAF training incorporating the training needs of forum staff, members, and those of funded services if relevant	- MWRDAF training plan in place and reviewed annually	End of 2024 based on NDTRS 2023 data
27. Ensure MWRDAF representation on/links with, local regional and national structures to garner influence and knowledge on relevant policy and strategy	- MWRDAF representation on local, regional, and national forums (SIGs, TF Coordinators and Chairs National Group, Healthy Ireland, Sláintecare, Healthy Communities, Community Safety Partnerships, CYPSC),	
28. Use the MWRDAF website and digital and social media as platforms to increase awareness of MWRDAF and the harms of drugs and alcohol	- Live website and digital and social media platforms in place - Increased online traffic on MWRDAF platforms	Ongoing

Actions	Measures of Success	By
29. Reflect on the Citizens Assembly's report on Drug Use and map where findings and recommendations can be applied across the Mid-West Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report findings applied to MWRDAF area 	End of 2024
30. Provide a mechanism to engage all MWRDAF stakeholders on the next national drug strategy and decriminalisation debate and articulate the findings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved community involvement - Shared understanding & cohesive approach - Improved stakeholder engagement 	When necessary
31. Set out research and evaluation requirements for the period 2024-27.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enhanced understanding of need in the MWRDAF area 	2024



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