

6th January 2026
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PQ 73716/25

To ask the Minister for Health if the HSE has a policy on drug addiction prevention; and if so, if a policy document is available; and if she will provide the same.

The Health Service Executive have been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response.

The HSE does not have one specific policy on drug addiction prevention. The HSE has responsibility for public health actions mandated within the National Drug Strategy, the Programme for Government and the HSE National Service Plan, all of which recognise a health-led response to substance use.

The current National Drugs strategy is 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 – 2025' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/reducing-harm-supporting-recovery-a-health-led-approach-to-drug-and-alcohol-use-in-ire.pdf>. The strategy included a Goal to 'Promote and protect health and wellbeing' within society and to this end, one of the objectives was 'To prevent use of drugs and alcohol at a young age'. To support this objective, a number of strategic actions were recommended, including supporting the SPHE programme in schools.

To date, the HSE has co-developed and published a suite of eleven resources for Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle SPHE in partnership with the Department of Education, the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). These support young people to develop resilience, critical thinking, and the confidence to make informed decisions. All resources are freely available to download through both HSE and education channels.

For Senior Cycle, the HSE, the Department of Education, and the Drug and Alcohol Task Forces jointly developed 'Know the Score', Ireland's national evidence-based substance use prevention education programme. This provides 14 interactive and experiential lesson plans designed to help young people make conscious and informed decisions about alcohol and drugs. A comprehensive independent evaluation, led by Trinity College Dublin, is currently underway and will inform updated content aligned to the new Senior Cycle curriculum. This evaluation is one of five initiatives funded by the Department of Health's Drug Prevention and Education Funding Programme.

The HSE and Department of Education and Youth provide teacher professional learning, reaching approximately 1,000 teachers each year, including training on 'Know the Score', skills for facilitating SPHE, and new training in mental health and emotional wellbeing education, developed with NEPS and NCCA.

In higher education settings, the HSE supports implementation of the Higher Education Authority's Healthy Campus Charter and Framework. Another initiative funded by the Department of Health's Drug Prevention and Education Funding Programme is the E-SHIELD programme led by University

College Cork, which supports students and higher education institutions to reduce harms experienced through drug use and reduce the number of students choosing to take drugs.

The HSE funds numerous other Section 39 partner organisations that deliver prevention initiatives. These organisations deliver a range of services, ranging from information and awareness raising, through to training, youth clubs, community mobilisation and other targeted interventions.

To design an effective and equitable national approach to prevention, we must understand both the underlying causes of drug and alcohol use in Ireland and the strengths and limitations of current responses. Public Health in the HSE is currently leading on a National Needs Assessment for Drugs and Alcohol prevention in order to answer these questions. It will be concluded in 2026 and will inform the HSE's prevention efforts and support the implementation of the forthcoming National Drug Strategy and Healthy Ireland Strategy.

This new National Drugs Strategy will be published in 2026 and will build on work from previous strategies to ensure that effective evidence-based interventions are provided to those most in need within our society. The work of HSE Addiction Services, including any prevention initiatives around preventing drug and problem alcohol use, will be informed by the recommendations from the strategy.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Eamon Keenan
National Clinical Lead for HSE Addiction Services

