



Report of the public consultation on the National Drugs Strategy 2026-2029

June 2026

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The views and opinions expressed in this report reflect those shared during the public consultation. They do not necessarily represent the views, positions, or policies of the Department of Health.

Foreword from the Minister

I welcome the publication of this report on the public consultation on the National Drugs Strategy 2026-2029, which I published in draft format in February 2026. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the 320 individuals and organisations who took the time to engage with the strategy and to provide thoughtful feedback. Your contributions will be helpful in finalising the strategy.

The report highlights strong support for the health-led approach to drug use and the vision and priorities set out in the strategy. We want to deliver a strategy that is an integrated, equitable and evidence-based response to drug and harmful alcohol use and that reflects the changing patterns of drug use, the associated health and social challenges, the interface with the criminal justice system, and the threats from a volatile and dynamic global drug market.

Public consultation is not simply a procedural step; it is an essential part of good policymaking and participative democracy. This process has enriched our understanding of the drug challenge, the contribution of civil society to drugs policy and the requirements for effective implementation of the national drugs strategy.

The public consultation is one of three initiatives I have taken to ensure a broad consensus on the next drugs strategy. The other two are the stakeholder engagement process on the regional governance structures for the strategy, under the HSE health regions, and the consideration of the report of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Drug Use.

Jennifer Murnane O'Connor TD

Minister of State for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy

Introduction

This report presents the findings from the public consultation on the draft [National Drugs Strategy 2026 - 2029](#), which sets out an integrated, equitable and evidence-based response to drug and harmful alcohol use.

To facilitate feedback on the contents of the strategy, a public consultation was undertaken. The intention was to ensure that everyone, including those with lived and living experience of drug use, families, communities, and service providers, could understand the proposals and share their views.

An online format for the public consultation was developed by the Department of Health and hosted on the EU Survey platform. It was open for a period of six weeks from the 26 February to the 10 April 2026. A total of 321 responses were received to the consultation.

The survey sought feedback on the main components of the strategy. Respondents were asked to evaluate, using Likert-type scales, their level of agreement with

- the health-led approach to drug use,
- the strategy's vision,
- the principles,
- the strategic pillars, and
- the enabling measures.

In addition, respondents were provided an opportunity to elaborate on their views through optional qualitative responses, to facilitate both structured and nuanced feedback. Analysis of the responses was collated by theme.

The concluding portion of the survey included questions on the involvement of individuals with lived or living experience of drug use, and the implementation of the strategy. It invited any additional comments on the strategy, ensuring that respondents could raise issues not addressed in earlier sections. The survey permitted participants to save their progress and return later, supporting considered and comprehensive submissions.

A number of additional submissions received directly by the Department of Health were also taken into consideration.

The report of the public consultation has been provided to the Steering Group, which is responsible for finalising the strategy, along with the Reference Group. The findings will also be shared with the Joint Committee on Drugs Use.

The Department of Health thanks the individuals and organisations who shared their views on the strategy through the public consultation.

Executive Summary

The main findings of the public consultation on the national drugs strategy are:







- 87% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed with a health-led approach to drug use
- Between 72% and 79% strongly agreed or agreed with the vision and principles in the national drugs strategy
- 71% strongly agreed or agreed that the strategic pillars were a comprehensive response to drug and harmful alcohol use, with between 69% and 78% strongly agreeing or agreeing with the five individual pillars
- 68% strongly agreed or agreed that the enabling measures help to create the conditions for the effective delivery of the national drugs strategy
- There is strong support for the involvement of those with lived and living experience in the design and implementation of the strategy
- The health system, families and communities, and society are all considered to be best placed to support the implementation of the strategy
- Other issues highlighted were the delivery of the national drugs strategy, the legal framework on drugs, and the role of community-based services and drug task forces.

Overall, the findings point to a high level of support for the strategy and the strategic priorities therein. In addition, there is an expectation that the strategy should be effectively delivered, locally responsive, and grounded in lived and living experience.

Findings

1. HEALTH LED APPROACH TO DRUGS USE







Question 1: To what extent do you agree/disagree with a health led approach to drug use?

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree(ID25)		215	66.98 %
Agree(ID26)		63	19.63 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID27)		20	6.23 %
Disagree(ID28)		12	3.74 %
Strongly disagree(ID29)		9	2.8 %
No Answer		2	0.62 %

Sixty seven percent strongly agree with a health led approach to drugs use, with a further 20% in agreement (total 87%). Less than 7% either strongly disagree or disagree.

2. VISION & PRINCIPLES

Question 2: To what extent do you agree/disagree with the vision for the national drugs strategy?

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly agree(ID54)		137	42.68 %
Agree(ID55)		95	29.6 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID56)		46	14.33 %
Disagree(ID57)		27	8.41 %
Strongly disagree(ID58)		9	2.8 %
No Answer		7	2.18 %







Forty three percent indicated strong agreement with the vision of the strategy, with a further 30% in agreement (total of 73%). Just over 11% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the vision.

Is there anything you would like to add to the vision?

The most prominent theme to emerge is a preference for a health-led, person-centred vision. Respondents support approaches centred on prevention, harm reduction, and early intervention, alongside addressing structural determinants such as poverty, trauma, and inequality.

Another theme is the impacts of drug and alcohol use on individuals, families, and communities. A minor theme is the importance of equitable, community-based responses tailored to local needs, with particular recognition of the role of community-led services and local governance structures.

Question 3: *To what extent you support the principles for the national drugs strategy?*

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly support(ID15)		136	42.37 %
Support(ID16)		119	37.07 %
Neither support nor oppose.(ID17)		42	13.08 %
Oppose(ID18)		13	4.05 %
Strongly oppose(ID20)		7	2.18 %
No Answer		4	1.25 %

Forty three percent strongly supported the principles in the strategy, with another 37% in support (total 80%). Slightly over 6% either opposed or strongly opposed.







What, if anything, would you add to the principles for the national drugs strategy?

A major theme is a consistent emphasis for a health-led, harm-reduction approach, with strong acknowledgment of equity, lived experience, and cross-government collaboration.

A minor theme focuses on early intervention and community-based services and the value of coordinated, locally delivered supports to address complex and interrelated needs. A further minor theme reflects the need for change and responsiveness, including better alignment between policy and frontline experience.

3. STRATEGIC PILLARS

Question 4: *To what extent do you think that the strategic pillars are a comprehensive response to drug and harmful alcohol use in Ireland?*

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly Agree(ID32)		113	35.2 %
Agree(ID33)		114	35.51 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID34)		40	12.46 %
Disagree(ID35)		30	9.35 %
Strongly Disagree(ID36)		14	4.36 %
No Answer		10	3.12 %







A combined 70% either strongly agreed (35%) or agreed (35%) that the strategic pillars represent a comprehensive response to drug and harmful alcohol use. Just under 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

What, if anything, would you change or add to the strategic pillars?

Respondents broadly recognise the pillars as providing a strong, health-led and evidence-based foundation, while emphasising the importance of harm reduction, embedding community partnerships, local coordination, and place-based approaches. A further theme shows respondents considering how the pillars can be strengthened to better address current and emerging issues.

A minor theme focuses on drug use in relation to the criminal justice system and health supports, with respondents highlighting the need to prioritise health-based responses over criminalisation, and to ensure that supports are proportionate and appropriate to different patterns of use.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree with Strategic Pillar 1 - *Protect individuals, children, families and communities from the harmful effects of drug and alcohol use?*

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly Agree(ID11)		120	37.38 %
Agree(ID12)		123	38.32 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID13)		38	11.84 %
Disagree(ID14)		20	6.23 %
Strongly Disagree(ID22)		8	2.49 %
No Answer		12	3.74 %






A combined 75% either strongly agreed (37%) or agreed (38%) with Strategic Pillar 1, while just under 9% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Suggestions on how to strengthen this strategic pillar or its associated actions?

A major theme is the importance of grounding prevention measures in robust evidence, with a focus on quality standards, evaluation, and trauma-informed, age-appropriate approaches.

A further theme centres on impact of drug use on young people and reflects the need for inclusive strategies that consider the wider social context of drug use. A minor theme calls for strengthening prevention through more comprehensive frameworks, including early intervention, family support, and community development.

Question 6: Please indicate to what extent you agree with Strategic Pillar 2 - **Provide equitable access to high quality drug and alcohol services across health regions and population groups?**

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly Agree(ID48)		135	42.06 %
Agree(ID49)		114	35.51 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID50)		34	10.59 %
Disagree(ID51)		31	9.66 %
Strongly Disagree(ID52)		0	0 %
No Answer		7	2.18 %







Forty-two percent strongly agreed with Strategic Pillar 2, with a further 35% agreeing (combined,78%). Less than 10% disagreed, while no one strongly disagreed.

Suggestions on how to strengthen this strategic pillar or its associated actions?

Respondents consistently emphasise the importance of equitable, timely access to high-quality, evidence-based drug and alcohol services across all communities. There is a strong focus on person-centred care, harm reduction, and addressing wider social vulnerabilities.

A further theme centres on mental health, addiction services, and dual diagnosis, with respondents underscoring the need for integrated care pathways. A minor theme is the significance of community-led governance and service delivery, with emphasis on strengthening, rather than diminishing, existing local structures.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree with Strategic Pillar 3 - *Champion recovery in drug and harmful alcohol treatment, community services and in public policies?*

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly Agree(ID63)		146	45.48 %
Agree(ID64)		104	32.4 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID65)		49	15.26 %
Disagree(ID66)		10	3.12 %
Strongly Disagree(ID67)		4	1.25 %
No Answer		8	2.49 %







Almost 78% either strongly agreed (45%) or agreed (32%) with Strategic Pillar 3. Less than 5% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Suggestions on how to strengthen this strategic pillar or its associated actions?

The analysis highlights a strong emphasis on recovery, lived experience, and service provision. The most prominent theme shows respondents consistently stress the importance of community-based supports, recovery-oriented services, and the integration of housing and social supports.

A further theme reflects broader perspectives on drug use and its social context, with respondents highlighting the links between substance use, homelessness, and wider socio-economic challenges. A minor theme emphasises the importance of community organisations and long-term recovery supports, including access to education, employment, and social inclusion initiatives.

Question 8: *To what extent do you agree with Strategic Pillar 4 - **Prioritise health supports for people in contact with the criminal justice system due to drug use?***

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly Agree(ID78)		148	46.11 %
Agree(ID79)		91	28.35 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID80)		32	9.97 %
Disagree(ID81)		21	6.54 %
Strongly Disagree(ID82)		14	4.36 %
No Answer		15	4.67 %







Forty-six percent strongly agree with Strategic Pillar 4, with 28% agreeing. Almost 11% either disagree or strongly disagree.

Suggestions on how to strengthen this strategic pillar or its associated actions?

Respondents strongly emphasise the need to shift from punitive approaches towards a more health-led model, recognising drug use as linked to wider social, structural, and trauma-related factors. There is a clear call for policies that prioritise treatment, early intervention, and community-based supports over criminalisation. Another theme highlights addiction services and the needs of people who use drugs, with respondents stressing the importance of accessible, adequately resourced services and equitable access to care, particularly for those facing complex challenges.

A minor theme focuses on criminal justice responses and related harms, with an emphasis on diversion measures, continuity of care between custody and community, and the need to address issues such as child exploitation through coordinated, multi-agency approaches. Another minor theme focuses on examining specific policy measures, including cautioning schemes and approaches to cannabis, reflecting differing perspectives on appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks.

Question 9: To what extent do you agree with Strategic Pillar 5 - *Prepare for and respond effectively to a more dynamic and global drugs market?*

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly Agree(ID39)		107	33.33 %
Agree(ID40)		116	36.14 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID41)		41	12.77 %
Disagree(ID42)		20	6.23 %
Strongly Disagree(ID45)		25	7.79 %
No Answer		12	3.74 %

Thirty three percent strongly agree with Strategic Pillar 5, with slightly more (36%) agreeing (combined 69%). Fourteen percent either disagree or strongly disagree.

Suggestions on how to strengthen this strategic pillar or its associated actions?

The most prominent theme is the importance of strengthening monitoring systems, expanding drug checking services, and ensuring timely public health responses. There is also a clear call for improved communication, international collaboration, and community-level interventions to address the evolving nature of drug markets, particularly in relation to high-potency and synthetic substances.

A further theme centres on harm reduction and drug testing approaches, reflecting a range of views on how best to reduce risks associated with substance use. This includes discussions on testing practices and broader approaches to minimising harm. A minor theme focuses on drug supply and regulatory responses, with respondents highlighting the need for flexible, evidence-informed approaches to different substances and consideration of how policy impacts market dynamics and user behaviour.







4. ENABLING MEASURES

Question 10: *To what extent do you agree that these enabling measures help to create the conditions necessary for the effective delivery of the national drugs strategy?*

A: *Provide leadership and investment to implement the national drugs strategy*

B: *Use evidence to inform, monitor and evaluate drug policies and practices*

C: *Develop collaborative and enabling partnerships to address the global drugs challenge.*

		Answers	Ratio
Strongly Agree(ID73)		125	38.94 %
Agree(ID75)		93	28.97 %
Neither agree or disagree(ID83)		43	13.4 %
Disagree(ID84)		36	11.21 %
Strongly Disagree(ID85)		8	2.49 %
No Answer		16	4.98 %

Sixty eight percent responded that they either strongly agree (39%) or agree (29%) with the enabling measures while almost 14% either disagree or strongly disagree

Do you have any suggestions on how to strengthen these enabling measures?

Respondents strongly emphasise the importance of sustained, multi-annual funding across the continuum of care, alongside strong alignment between national, regional, and local implementation. There is a clear focus on recognising the role of community and voluntary organisations, particularly drug task forces, as key delivery partners supported by adequate resourcing, data, and ongoing evaluation.

A further theme reflects broader perspectives on drug use and policy approaches, with respondents engaging with how evidence should inform policy decisions, including differing views on prohibition, regulation, and public health strategies. A minor theme highlights the importance of local partnerships, governance, and community participation, with calls for clearer accountability, defined roles, and funding models that reflect deprivation, complexity and need.






5. OTHER QUESTIONS

Question 11: *To what extent does the strategy capture the lived and living experience of individuals and their families?*

Respondents stress that the strategy does not sufficiently reflect the realities of individuals, families, and communities most affected by drug use, including issues of trauma, poverty, and social exclusion. There is a clear call for deeper engagement with lived experience to ensure the strategy captures the complexity of these challenges.

Another theme centres on lived experience in relation to policy and service design, with respondents emphasising the need for meaningful involvement of people who use drugs in shaping services and broader strategic direction. A minor theme reflects perspectives on drug use and health-led responses, with respondents highlighting the need for balanced approaches that address different patterns of use and their impacts on individuals and communities.

Question 12: *Who in your opinion is best placed to support the implementation of the national drugs strategy?*

		Answers	Ratio
Health system(ID122)		114	35.51 %
Criminal justice system(ID123)		11	3.43 %
Families and communities(ID131)		92	28.66 %
Society(ID132)		77	23.99 %
No Answer		27	8.41 %

The responses indicate a slight preference for the health system (35%) as being best placed to support the implementation of the national drugs strategy. Families and communities were the second choice (29%), while society was seen as playing a key role (24%). In contrast, the criminal justice system received minimal support.

Would you like to add anything to your response?

Respondents strongly emphasise the central role of families, local communities, and community services in prevention, support, and recovery, alongside the need for formal

recognition and adequate resourcing of these actors. There is a clear expectation that community involvement should be embedded within implementation structures. A further theme focuses on the role of services and task forces.

Question 13: *Is there anything you would like to add to the national drugs strategy?*

Respondents broadly acknowledge the strategy as a strong framework for addressing drug and alcohol-related harm, while emphasising the need to better connect policy with real-world delivery. Another theme reflects wider perspectives on drug users and policy approaches, including discussion of regulation, cannabis, and the effectiveness of current legal frameworks. Responses indicate varying views on how best to address drug use and associated harms.

A minor theme highlights references to Citizens' Assembly recommendations and policy direction, with respondents questioning whether the current approach fully reflects previous consultation outcomes.

Question 14: *Is there anything else you would like to tell us before you complete this survey? You may include any views, concerns, suggestions, or reflections that you feel are important.*

Analysis of responses highlights mental health, services, and strategy implementation as the dominant theme. Respondents emphasise the importance of equitable access to high-quality drug and alcohol services, alongside the critical role of community-based supports in addressing gaps in provision.

A further theme centres on task forces, governance, and alignment with prior recommendations, with respondents expressing concern about the future role of drug task forces and the extent to which the strategy reflects key recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly.



A further theme reflects perspectives on drug use and policy approaches, including discussions on cannabis and broader health-led responses, with varying views on how these should be addressed.

Acknowledgements




This report was prepared by the drugs policy unit, with input and analysis from the strategic research and evaluation unit. AI was used to assist in the analysis of this report, within the guidelines for use of that technology in the Civil and Public Service. Results have been subjected to human check in the final instance.

Appendix A: Respondent Information





Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

		Answers	Ratio
Individual(ID90)		204	63.55 %
Organisation(ID91)		117	36.45 %
No Answer		0	0 %

Are you ordinarily resident in the Republic of Ireland?

		Answers	Ratio
Yes(ID113)		201	62.62 %
No(ID114)		3	0.93 %
No Answer		117	36.45 %

Gender

		Answers	Ratio
Male(ID112)		94	29.28 %
Female(ID126)		102	31.78 %
Prefer not to say(ID127)		5	1.56 %
Other(ID128)		0	0 %
No Answer		120	37.38 %

Age

		Answers	Ratio
15-24 years of age(ID99)		11	3.43 %
25-34 years of age(ID100)		37	11.53 %
35-44 years of age(ID101)		62	19.31 %
45-54 years of age(ID102)		53	16.51 %
55-64 years of age(ID107)		26	8.1 %
65+ years of age(ID109)		12	3.74 %
No Answer		120	37.38 %

Are you a person who has been affected directly or indirectly by drugs?

		Answers	Ratio
Yes(ID89)		152	47.35 %
No(ID94)		49	15.26 %
No Answer		120	37.38 %