National Drugs Forum 2026

Creating inclusive digital health services



#nationaldrugsforum

Croke Park,
Cusack Suite, Dublin
18 November 2026

An Roinn Sláinte
Department of Health

HRB An Bord Taighde Sláinte
Health Research Board

This year's forum will consider how developments in telemedicine, personal health, health information systems and artificial intelligence will affect responses, monitoring and policy development over the next few years.

Developing Ireland's digital health architecture will be a significant challenge, but the quality of our information systems, the expert knowledge available and the commitment of successive governments will contribute to major transformation of health service planning and delivery over the next few years.

The drugs phenomenon and the responses to it are part of a multi-faceted and complex system. The services that respond to the drug situation, the research community that analyses it, and the policy system implementing change will face very particular difficulties in adapting to a rapidly altering health landscape. Engaging with service users and implementing the principes of coproduction in the development of digital services will be priorities in these initiatives.

National Drugs Forum 2026 programme

09:30 – 09:45	**Opening of National Drugs Forum**
09:45 – 11:00	**Building an inclusive ehealth system**
	Derek Tierney, Secretary General, Department of Health *Digital health policy in Ireland and social inclusion.*
	Aisling Sheehan, National Lead HSE Alcohol and Mental Health and Wellbeing Programmes *Adapting prevention practice for a digital environment: developing and evaluating an online intervention tool.*
	Tejaswy Swathi Kovuri, Peer Support Evaluation Lead, Better Together *A co-production model for web-based recovery services.*
	Address by Ms Murnane O'Connor TD, Minister of State with special responsibility for Public Health, Well Being and the National Drugs Strategy.
11:00 – 11:30	**Coffee**
11:30 – 13:00	**Supporting participation in digital health services**
	Felicien Izaturwanaho, Department of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin *What is the international evidence on the use of mobile health record apps in supporting vulnerable people?*
	Ruth Melia, University of Limerick *Engaging with service users in digital mental health interventions.*
	Wadih Maalouf, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime *Strategies for establishing effective prevention interventions on social media.*
13:00 – 14:00	**Lunch**

14:00 – 15:30	**Market place presentations**
	Prevention
	Ross Macmillan, University of Limerick, author of RePS study. **Aoife O'Connell,** Public Health, National Health Improvement, Health Service Executive
	Drugswatch early warning platform
	Deirdre Mongan, Research Officer, Health Research Board **Nicki Killeen,** Coordinator on Emerging Trends and the Early Warning System, Health Service Executive
	Addiction Research Network Ireland
	Autumn Brown, Coordinator, Addiction Research Ireland **Seán Millar,** UCC and Irish National Focal Point to European Drugs Agency (EUDA)
	The regional organisation of drug and alcohol services in Europe
	Jonathan Pratschke, Author of review **Brian Galvin,** Programme Manager, Health Research Board
	Putting services on the Map: supporting access, planning and regional development
	Anne Marie Carew, Senior Researcher, Health Research Board **Richie Stafford,** Assistant Principal, Department of Health and Children
15:30	**Close of forum**

Speakers



Mr Derek Tierney

Derek Tierney is Secretary General of the Department of Health, responsible for leading the Department as its administrative head and Accounting Officer, advising the Minister and Government, and stewarding the delivery of Ireland's health and social care policy and reform agenda. Prior to this role, Derek served as Assistant Secretary General at the Department of Health leading out on Health Infrastructure, advancing Digital Health and the coordination of the Sláintecare Reform agenda. Before that, Derek served as Programme Director in the Government's Covid-19 Vaccination Taskforce. He has held senior roles across the Justice and Transport sectors and central Government with responsibility for large scale programmes, reform delivery, system governance and whole of Government responses. Before moving into the Civil Service, he has also held senior roles in a commercial transport semi state and the private sector working in pharmaceutical, computer and telecoms industries.



Dr Aisling Sheehan

Dr Aisling Sheehan is the National Lead for the HSE Alcohol Programme and Mental Health & Wellbeing Programme. With a background in psychology and health services research, she leads the strategic development of national health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiatives across alcohol harm reduction and mental health promotion. Her work spans public awareness campaigns, workforce development, research, service innovation and cross-sector collaboration. She leads several national programmes and initiatives aimed at improving population health and wellbeing and translating evidence into practical action across communities.



Tejaswy Swathi Kovuri

Tejaswy Swathi Kovuri is a Peer Support Evaluation Lead at Better Together, bringing expertise in global health, pharmacy, research and participatory evaluation, with a focus on ensuring lived experience informs learning and peer-led recovery.



Ms Jennifer Murnane O'Connor

Ms Jennifer Murnane O'Connor TD is Minister of State at the Department of Health with special responsibility for public health, wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy. She was appointed to this role on 29 January 2025.



Mr Felicien Izaturwanaho

Felicien Izaturwanaho is a 4th year PhD Candidate at the Centre for Innovative Human Systems, School of Psychology, Trinity College Dublin (TCD). The PhD research seeks to develop a set of user requirements for a mobile health record app to enhance inclusion health services for trauma-informed and integrated care in Dublin, Ireland. It is funded by the Taighde Éireann-Research Ireland, Centre for Research Training in Advanced Networks for Sustainable Societies (ADVANCECRT) and St James's Hospital (SJH). The PhD research work capitalises on his experience in human factors, trauma-informed care, and digital health, which he acquired during his work in Rwanda.



Dr Ruth Melia

Ruth is an Associate Professor in Clinical Psychology at the University of Limerick, and a researcher in the areas of suicide prevention and digital mental health. She is a Clinical Psychologist by background and training having worked across primary care psychology, disability and secondary level mental health services in Ireland. Ruth is a member of the Board of Directors of Jigsaw – The National Centre for Youth Mental Health and a member of the Sharing the Vision Digital Mental Health Specialist Group. As a 2022 / 2023 Fulbright HRB Scholar Ruth was based at the Joiner Lab, Florida State University where she researched the application of AI to ecological momentary assessment data in suicide research. Previously, as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar 2016 / 2017 Ruth collaborated with researchers at the Suicide Prevention Research Lab, Stanford University exploring short-term evidence-based interventions for those experiencing suicidal thoughts and behaviours.



Dr Wadih Maalouf

Wadih is team lead for the prevention programme in the UNODC Prevention Treatment and Rehabilitation Section, orienting the drug prevention response globally for UNODC. He has been working in the field of health response to drug for over 25 years (19 of which with UNODC). Wadih holds a PhD in Mental Health and Drug Addiction Epidemiology from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

Marketplace presenters

Prevention



Dr Ross Macmillan

Professor Ross Macmillan is the Professor of Sociology at the University of Limerick, Ireland. A sociologist, demographer, and epidemiologist, his research has focused on crime and victimization, child development, family relationships, and the dynamics of health and well-being over the life course. Alone and in collaboration, his work has been funded by the Health Research Board of Ireland, the European Union, the European Research Council, the National Science Foundation (USA), the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (USA), and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.



Dr Aoife O'Connell

Dr Aoife O'Connell is a Consultant in Public Health Medicine with National Public Health Improvement, Health Service Executive. She holds postgraduate qualifications in Child Health, Women's Health, Community Health, Medical Education, Healthcare Leadership and a Fellowship in Healthcare Management Consulting. She is currently leading work on drug and alcohol prevention, specifically the implementation of the HSE's National Drugs and Alcohol Prevention Health Needs Assessment. Her work focuses on prevention, health equity, inclusion health, and reducing population harm through evidence-informed policy and system-wide approaches. Dr O'Connell has extensive experience across public health, primary care and health service improvement.

Drugswatch early warning platform



Dr Deirdre Mongan

Dr Deirdre Mongan is a research officer in the Health Research Board, with responsibility for the Irish national drug and alcohol strategies. In this role, she undertakes research on drug prevalence and patterns of drug use in Ireland and has managed the National Drug and Alcohol Survey and the Irish section of the European Web Survey on Drugs. She also has a keen interest in early warning and is the Irish early warning correspondent to the European Union Drugs Agency. She is currently working on the development of Drugswatch, a web-based platform that will help identify, respond to, and mitigate drug-related public health threats.



Ms Nicki Killeen

Nicki Killeen is the HSE Coordinator on Emerging Trends and the HSE Early Warning System. Nicki oversees a range of national initiatives focused on monitoring emerging drug trends, reducing drug-related harms and strengthening public health responses to substance use including the HSE Safer Nightlife Programme in festival settings and the newly established wastewater surveillance system. Her work involves coordinating the National Red Alert Group with health, justice, scientific and community partners to monitor and rapidly respond to drug threats and outbreaks in Ireland. Nicki represents this work on national structures and chairs the national Night-time Economy Task Force Safety Subgroup.

Nicki holds a Bachelor's Degree in Social Science, a Master's Degree in Addiction Studies, and has completed further professional studies in Project Management and Drug Policy Management.

Addiction Research Network Ireland



Dr Autumn Brown

Autumn Brown is an Assistant Professor in Public Health and Health Policy at Trinity College Dublin who studies how health is made collectively, through shared spaces, social ties and communal practice. She is the project manager of Addiction Research Network Ireland.



Dr Seán Millar

Since completing his PhD, Dr Millar has been working in the School of Public Health at University College Cork as a researcher for the Irish National Focal Point of the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA), formerly the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), which is headquartered at the HRB in Dublin. In this role he is responsible for reporting on drug use prevalence, health correlates and consequences of drug use, and substance abuse in Irish prisons. Seán is a regular contributor to Drugnet Ireland, the quarterly newsletter of the EUDA Irish National Focal Point, and is the Principal Investigator for repeated capture-recapture studies that estimate the prevalence of opioid use in Ireland. Findings from Dr Millar's research with the EUDA Irish Focal Point were recently used by the Department of Health in the drafting of Ireland's 2026–2030 National Drugs Strategy.

The regional organisation of drug and alcohol services in Europe



Dr Jonathan Pratschke

Over the last 30 years, Jonathan Pratschke has conducted numerous research projects on topics including the organisation and regionalisation of healthcare services, user participation in healthcare decision-making, migrant health, the assessment of health inequalities, and the monitoring of addiction services. His work has also covered subjects such as end-of-life care in hospitals, interregional patient mobility, work processes within the healthcare sector, and the development of composite indicators for monitoring the quality and effectiveness of services. He has taught on these topics and delivered advanced training courses for European institutions, doctoral and undergraduate programmes.



Mr Brian Galvin

Programme Manager for Drug and Alcohol Research in the Health Research Board's (HRB) Evidence Centre. Head of Ireland's National Focal Point to the European Union Drugs Agency since 2009 and oversees Ireland's annual national report on the drugs situation. Manages the research and monitoring pillar of Ireland's national drugs strategy and is a member of the steering group preparing Ireland's new strategy 2026-30. He is editor of Drugnet Ireland, the HRB's quarterly research and policy bulletin and manages the National Drugs Library.

Putting services on the Map: supporting access, planning and regional development



Dr Anne Marie Carew

Dr Anne Marie Carew is a Senior Researcher with the HRB, leading the National Drug-Related Deaths Index (NDRDI) and the National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS). She is Ireland's National Focal Point expert to the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) on drug-related deaths and treatment demand. Her research focuses on drug epidemiology, mortality, treatment demand and emerging drug trends, informing policy, services and public health responses.



Mr Richie Stafford

Richie has worked in the area of Social Inclusion & Addiction for the past 17 years. He is currently an Assistant Principal in the Drugs Policy, Refugee & Inclusion Health. He is currently chair of the Council of the European Union 'Horizontal Working Party on Drugs'. He is also responsible for national policy in relation to treatment services, workforce innovation, drug prevention policy and the licencing process for Ireland's first Medically Supervised Injecting Facility

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