



Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery
*A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in
Ireland 2017-2025.*

Strategic Implementation Group 5: Alternatives to Coercive Sanctions

Tony Duffin

Chair of Strategic Implementation Group 5

Citizens Assembly on Drugs Use

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Session 4 – Pathways and Options

What are the Strategic Implementation Groups?

National Drug Strategy

Drawn up in consultation with all stakeholders and launched in 2017.




National Oversight Committee

Chaired by Minister of State with responsibility for the National Drug Strategy.



Subgroups

Six Strategic Implementation subgroups; an Early Warning & Emerging Trends subgroup; and a Research subgroup.



Actions under Strategic Implementation Group 5: Alternatives to Coercive Sanctions

5.1 Oversee and support the implementation of the Health Diversion Programme.

5.2 Map alcohol/drug treatment service provision nationally, incorporating service availability and referral options for those going through the CJS who use drugs/alcohol problematically.

5.3 Evaluate the Dublin Drug Treatment Court and recommend the future direction of Drug Treatment Courts nationwide.

5.4 Strengthen policy and practice with regard to alternatives to coercive sanctions and share learning with EU member states.

How will Ireland's planned Health Diversion Programme work?

- Drugs will remain illegal.
- Gardai will divert a person found in possession of drugs for personal use to the HSE for a health screening and brief intervention.
- There will be two stages in the health-led approach whereby a person in possession of drugs, determined by Gardai to be for personal use:
 - On the first occasion a person would be referred by Gardai to the HSE for a health screening and brief intervention where their needs will be assessed and they can be referred to drug treatment services, if this is required.
 - On a second occasion, Gardai would have discretion to issue an adult caution. A referral to the HSE for a further health screening and brief intervention can also take place.
- On any subsequent arrests for possession of drugs for personal use, a person would not be included in the Programme and would be dealt with through the criminal justice system.

What is the difference between Ireland's Health Diversion Programme and Portugal's Dissuasion Committees?

- At the previous Citizens Assembly meeting Nuno Capaz attended and explained the work of the Portuguese Dissuasion Committees. So you are all aware of their process of administrative sanctions, fines, etc.
- In Ireland drugs will remain illegal and a system of depenalisation coupled with a health diversion will be put in place.
- In Ireland all people found in possession of drugs for personal use will be guaranteed one health screening and brief intervention. Whilst in Portugal, people are assessed every time they are found in possession of drugs for personal use.

Implementing the Health Diversion Programme

1. In October 2019 an interdepartmental group was established to implement the health diversion programme. The group is tasked with examining the need for legislative change, the phasing of the implementation, and to look in more detail at the costs involved.
2. As part of the work of the Implementation Group, it was identified that legislation will be required to enable the health diversion programme.
3. An operational sub-group has been established to advise on the operation of for the health screening and brief interventions. This includes development of operational procedures; supporting the recruitment of the SAOR practitioners; training requirements; liaising with the HRB on data collection; and development of an IT system to record and report on the intervention.
4. To support the establishment of the health diversion programme €0.7m was provided to the HSE to establish a national network of health screening and brief intervention services for participants of the health diversion programme. Recruitment of the SAOR practitioners is at various stages in each of the CHOs and it is expected that the practitioners will be in place in all nine areas by quarter 4 this year.