



Crainn's Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use

— Education | Harm-Reduction | Community —

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Introduction

Ireland, over the past half-century, has been grappling with an increase in drug-related harms. Political apathy toward people who use drugs and a society-wide stigma against those who use drugs has further stunted any meaningful efforts to curb the harms of drug use.

The Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use is a once-in-a-generation opportunity for Ireland to honestly examine our approach to drugs thus far, identify its shortfalls and come back with meaningful recommendations that will shape our policy for decades to come.

Crainn is a community-led, grassroots organisation with over 38,000 members. Our advocacy aims to represent the large proportion of Irish society that uses drugs, specifically cannabis, who run into significant harms due primarily to policy failures. We are a totally voluntary organisation, with our committee consisting of students, nurses, employers and workers.

We have engaged with the Department of Health on the issues outlined in this document, as well as with other corners of government and the political system at large. We also engage regularly with medical professionals, advocacy groups, Student Unions and civil society from Ireland and beyond. In 2022, we took part in a broad-ranging examination of Ireland's drug policy, providing evidence to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice¹.

¹https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_justice/reports/2022/2022-12-14_report-on-an-examination-of-the-present-approach-to-sanctions-for-possession-of-certain-amounts-of-drugs-for-personal-use_en.pdf

This submission will consider Ireland's current situation, with a specific focus on how current policy negatively affects 'hard to reach'² drug users or 'recreational' drug users. We will provide a broad overview of the issues most pressing to our organisation, making use of recent data from Ireland and Europe. Following our overview of some of the main trends and causes for concern, we will outline a number of potential solutions and recommendations for consideration.

It is clear that Ireland's present approach to drug use has failed. In fact, current policy is exacerbating drug-related harms. There are concrete steps that can and must be taken to minimise these harms, promote safety and improve outcomes for the largest number of people, which we hope to outline in our submission.

Drug policy should be built on a harm-reduction, compassionate basis that is founded in evidence, best practice and human rights. Without a model rooted in these pillars, drug harms will continue to increase, and those who use drugs will be poorly served.

We watch the rest of your deliberations with intent, and wish you the best of luck with this important process.

Crainn

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²Difficult to reach drug users refers to a large cohort of people who use drugs that do not appear in treatment centres, or run into any significant dependency problems that require intervention. However, they come into unique harms as outlined in this report from the HSE:
https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/34852/1/Report_of_the_Emerging_Drug_Trends_and_Drug_Checking_Working_Group_2021_%28Web%29.pdf

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Ireland's Approach to Drugs and Current Model

Criminal Justice-led or Health-led?

The debate around which model Ireland currently adopts in respect to drugs use, at present, is around whether we employ a criminal justice-led model or a health-led model. It is recognised by the Dept. of Health that a health-led strategy for drug use is the most effective when dealing with drugs in Ireland, as outlined in their National Drugs Strategy, *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery. A Health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025*:

“Treating substance abuse and drug addiction as a public health issue, rather than as a criminal justice issue, helps individuals, helps families, and helps communities.³”

Despite this emphasis from the Department of Health, a clear mismatch between well-intentioned policy and results on the ground is present. A number of high-profile court cases and arrests appear regularly in national media, with individuals being prosecuted for €2 worth of cannabis for their own use, or being jailed for personal possession of heroin. Furthermore, recent figures show that 75% of court cases relating to drugs are for personal possession⁴, bringing drug users through a process wholly led by the Justice system.

While certain elements of the State work toward a health-led model, it is evident that a whole-of-Government approach is lacking, with minimal evidence of a meaningful improvement in drug-related outcomes, nor a significant decrease in criminalisation for the personal possession of drugs. The approach remains firmly Justice-led.

³ Department of Health, *Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery. A Health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017-2025*, p.3

⁴ <https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/11328/malta-cdr-2019.pdf>

Adult-Caution Scheme.

In 2020, it was announced that personal amounts of cannabis would be included under the adult caution scheme⁵, which aims to divert individuals found in possession of cannabis away from the criminal-justice system. This system of cautioning has a number of rules ascribed to it, namely:

- 1) The adult caution scheme can only be applied to those without a previous conviction.
- 2) The adult caution scheme does not define a 'personal amount' of cannabis.
- 3) The adult caution scheme can be applied at the Gardaí's discretion.
- 4) The adult caution scheme has a 'three-strike' system.

By design, the idea of a cautioning scheme for personal possession of cannabis acts as patchwork for a much wider problem of criminalisation.

The scheme itself is shown to work against the interests of those it is supposed to protect (namely, those suffering with significant problems relating to substance use). The use of adult-caution in the policing of drugs further exacerbates the social inequalities connected with drug enforcement across Ireland, leaving those vulnerable already far less likely to benefit from the scheme.

⁵ <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/33543/>

The scheme exclusively applying to those who have no previous convictions has substantial implications on the basis of class. We know that the number of drug convictions are disproportionately given out on the basis of socio-economic status⁶, meaning individuals from this background have a lesser chance of receiving a diversionary caution.

Furthermore, the lack of clear guidelines around what constitutes a personal amount of cannabis leaves the door open for disproportionate enforcement of the Misuse of Drugs Act, especially considered in light of the scheme depending on individual discretion on behalf of the Gardaí.

Stop and Search.

One of the primary functions used in enforcement of the current legislation surrounding drug use is the power of stop and search.

In the second set of meetings the Assembly held, the Gardaí stressed the importance of this power in their operations. We aim in this section to look at some of the limited data in Ireland on stop and search, its role in Gardaí operations and its relationship to drugs. There is very sparse research and published data on stop and search in Ireland, but there are two extremely relevant documents:

- *Report of the Garda Síochána Inspectorate 2014*⁷.
- *Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Garda Síochána (Powers) Bill 2022, 2022*⁸.

⁶ <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/11249/>

⁷ https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/22967/1/GSI_Crime_Investigation_Full.pdf0.pdf

⁸ https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_justice/reports/2022/2022-06-01_report-on-pre-legislative-scrutiny-of-the-general-scheme-of-the-garda-siochana-powers-bill_en.pdf

2014 Report.

This report carried out by the Garda Síochána Inspectorate on the force's operations included some analysis of the use of stop and search (pp.187-189) and state that they rely on 'stop and searches being conducted under the Misuse of Drugs Act legislation'. This is done regardless of the suspected crime, as noted by the Inspectorate.

Furthermore, the Inspectorate 'received negative feedback from within the Garda Síochána at all ranks about the use of stop and search' due to the fact that virtually all searches are currently carried out under the Drugs Act.

According to this report most searches, regardless of the basis of the search, are recorded on the PULSE system as searches under the Drugs Act. This led the Inspectorate to state that this leads to individuals being 'stigmatised or further disadvantaged'.

In a single year period (2013-2014), the report states that there were 145,776 of these searches conducted⁹.

We are unable to find figures for later years, despite the Garda inspectorate seeking out this data and stating that there was to be a further review carried out.

For comparison, the London metropolitan police, a police force serving a population of 9 million carried out ~116,000 Drugs stop and searches in 2022¹⁰

⁹ p.188 https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/22967/1/GSI_Crime_Investigation_Full.pdf0.pdf
¹⁰ <https://www.met.police.uk/sd/stats-and-data/met/stop-and-search-dashboard/>

2022 Report.

In 2022, the Oireachtas Committee on Justice analysed the Garda Powers Bill 2022 (Amendment). Their review included an analysis of stop and search powers. Below is a list of bullet points of some of the most salient points:

- Members of the Committee as well as members of the Policing Authority concluded that 'there is little evidence to suggest that stop and search practices are an effective policing method.' (p.13)
- Ethnicity, race and gender are significant drivers in the reasoning behind stop and search. Efforts should be made to rectify this and gather data on demographics of those stopped. (Recommendation 2 and p.13)
- Evidence was presented that found that the majority of stop and searches have not led to any arrests, while the powers negatively affect police and community relations. (p.23)
- Committee Witness Dr. Conway recommended that stop and search powers be seriously reformed or scrapped, and that only serious crimes should constitute a stop and search such as possession of a weapon. (p.23)
- Unanimous agreement that all stop and search data should be published and made transparent to the public and policy makers. (p.25)
- There are clear ongoing concerns about the use of stop and search. The use of these powers is primarily granted by the Misuse of Drugs Act, despite many, perhaps even the majority of searches being carried out not being related to drug possession.

Cannabis in Ireland

Usage Rates, Demographics & Scale

Cannabis is Ireland's most popular illicit drug, with the most recent report from the EMCDDA showing that 24.4% of all Irish people have used cannabis¹¹. Younger demographics (15-24) present the highest rates of cannabis usage in the country, coming in at 27.3%¹².

The most recent Drug Use in Higher Education¹³ found that third-level students were the largest drug using cohort, with 55.3% of students having used drugs. Of those students who have used drugs, 98.1% of those have used cannabis.

These high levels of engagement in the use of cannabis pose a significant number of challenges toward the public under the current illicit model. We recognise some of the main points of concern as:

- Large proportion of young people at risk of criminalisation.
- Uncontrolled potency and strength.
- Contaminated supply due to zero regulatory safeguards.
- Disproportionate amount of cannabis arrests taking place in marginalised communities.
- Due to the large consumer base, a massive amount of wealth is being amassed by cartels, posing significant risks to communities and individuals.
- Ease of purchase for under 18s¹⁴.

¹¹ <https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/stats2022#displayTable:GPS-1>

¹² <https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/data/stats2022#displayTable:GPS-2>

¹³ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/b06ba-the-drug-use-in-higher-education-in-ireland-duhei-survey-2021/>

¹⁴ Based on most recent data from HSE, 22% of cannabis is purchased via social media. <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/36571/1/FINAL%20European%20Web%20Survey%20Drugs%202021%20WEB.pdf>

Quality of Supply

One urgent area of concern around cannabis in Ireland is the quality of our cannabis supply. In recent years, Ireland's cannabis market has become increasingly contaminated with a class of substances known as SCRA's. The below table from the HSE shows a number of the chemicals identified in 2021¹⁵:

- **MDMB-4en-PINACA** (29 cases), this substance has been found in plant material, liquid and vape products.
- **ADB-BUTINACA** (10 cases), this substance has been found in sweets, plant material and liquids.
- **5F-EDMB-PICA** (15 cases), this substance has been found in plant material and some sweets.
- **4F-MDMB-BUTINACA** (16 cases), this substance has mainly been found in plant material and in some liquid.

The above mentioned chemicals are increasingly prevalent in Ireland. Inserted into products marketed as cannabis, SCRA's are unsuspectedly ingested due to a distinct lack of awareness and regulation. These products have an extremely unpredictable and high risk profile, posing acute health risks to consumers that would not be brought on by regular cannabis use.

Here are some concerning findings from the HSE in 2021:

- "A total of 12 deaths with a confirmed link to the same substance MDMB-4en-PINACA were reported by Hungary (8), the United Kingdom (3) and Sweden (1) between January 2019 and August 2020."
- "Identified samples did not differ in appearance to uncontaminated hash or weed products highlighting that there is no way a person could recognise the difference."
- "A warning was issued by the Public Health Agency in Northern Ireland in 2020 and again in April 2021 following the hospitalisation of young people after using cannabis vape products which were described as containing 'Spice'."

¹⁵ https://www.drugs.ie/news/article/synthetic_cannabinoids_in_ireland_hse_update_october_2021

More recently, Ireland has seen another surge in accidental SCRA consumption, leading to the hospitalisation of a number of young people, which prompted an emergency alert by the HSE in early 2023:

“Today 6th January 2023, the HSE National Social Inclusion Office has issued a risk communication on the emergence of synthetic cannabinoids appearing in cannabis and THC products. A small number of hospitalisations have occurred following the consumption of edible products (Jolly Rancher jellies) during the period of December 2022 in the Tipperary Region. Upon analysis from Forensic Science Ireland, these edible products have been found to contain new and risky substances known as synthetic cannabinoids¹⁶.”

These products pose a significant threat to novice or younger consumers, being sold primarily as novel cannabis products such as chocolates, gummies or vapes. These products are particularly appealing to younger people due to their more discreet nature and ease of use. Below is an image from *Forensics Science Ireland* as an example of the packaging these products are typically found in:



Forensics Science Ireland 2023

¹⁶https://www.drugs.ie/news/article/hse_drug_trend_risk_communication_on_cannabis_jellies_adulterated_with_synt

We recognise this growing issue that poses risk of death to a large cohort of young cannabis users (27.7% of 15-24 year olds and 55.3% of students) as one that needs to be dealt with the utmost urgency. If we look to jurisdictions that are successfully combating the issue of SCRA poisoning, we can see that this issue thrives in areas without any regulatory model when it comes to cannabis.

Germany, a nation currently developing a legalised cannabis system produced a Government report on cannabis which examined the SCRA issue and found that there was a 37% reduction in emergency poisoning calls relating to cannabis consumption in legalised American States as compared to neighbouring States that still operated under a criminal-justice model¹⁷.

The actual prevalence in Ireland remains unclear, due to the lack of widespread monitoring of the illicit cannabis market. However, it is clear to us based on feedback and testimonies from our members (39,000 members on Reddit), that these products are highly prevalent, particularly in schools and college campuses. Furthermore, data from the HSE and EMCDDA validates the feedback we receive on the prevalence of such chemicals.

Whilst awareness campaigns are helpful, they serve as a short-term solution to a widespread problem. We have continued to promote awareness around SCRA's on our platforms, but realise that policy intervention is desperately needed in this case.

These policy interventions would include robust regulation of cannabis that ensure a safe supply of cannabis products in Ireland. This is explored more in the section Regulatory Models for Cannabis.

¹⁷https://www.bundesgesundheitsministerium.de/fileadmin/Dateien/5_Publikationen/Drogen_und_Sucht/Abschlussbericht/ECaLe_Technical_Report.pdf p.32

Solutions and Way Forward

Strategy and Legislation in Ireland.

The current model for dealing with drug use in Ireland is at best outdated and not fit for purpose but is more accurately becoming an increasing danger to the public with implications on the human rights of marginalised communities.

In this section we will examine Ireland's current legislative landscape, a number of already effective alternative models internationally and make recommendations in terms of what Ireland should consider.

As mentioned above, Ireland's approach to drug use still remains firmly 'Justice-led', with large numbers of drug users being criminalised under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, a piece of legislation not able to deal with the drug landscape in Ireland.

When considering drugs in State policy, the issue should be approached from a health-led perspective. In our 2022 submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, we stressed the need for policy to be adaptive to the needs of those most affected by harmful drugs use and/or addiction problems, including the provision of:

- Safe Consumption Rooms [Also known as Injecting Centers or Overdose Prevention Centers.]
- Rapid deployment of mobile consumption rooms or vans, as seen in Portugal¹⁸. This allows life-saving services to operate in high-impact areas that do not have access to adequate infrastructure.
- Removal of all criminal and administrative sanctions for personal possession of drugs or personal, private consumption of drugs.

¹⁸https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/11331/portugal-cdr-2019_0.pdf

- Implementation of Heroin Assisted Therapy or Opiate Assisted Therapy (HAT/OAT) based on positive results from Swiss programmes¹⁹.
- Automatic expungement of criminal records for drug use in recognition of the impact a criminal record has on an individual's opportunities, relationships and mental health.
- Recognition that many currently illicit substances have relatively low risk profiles²⁰.

An approach that is led primarily by health needs to be adaptive, imaginative and a radical alteration to Ireland's current approach. Some of the primary challenges in implementing a policy that is led by harm-reduction includes legislative roadblocks coming from existing legislation that prohibits drug use.

In order to facilitate a new approach to how drugs are consumed, bought and sold, Ireland will require change to current legislation. This section will cover proposed legislative changes to Irish law around drugs, and examine approaches made by other jurisdictions. Simple legislative change, however, is distinct from models of regulation, which robustly govern how sale and supply of newly legalised or decriminalised drugs are covered.

Reforming the legal status of drugs would be reasonably straightforward, as the prohibitions around them come from the Misuse of Drugs Acts.

In terms of Ireland's legislative framework for dealing with drug prohibition, specifically of cannabis, a change from a prohibitive to permitted framework would be rather simple. The current ban on cannabis is covered under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977.

¹⁹<https://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2019/01/21/switzerland-couldnt-stop-drug-users-so-it-started-supporting-them/>

²⁰<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25922421/>

In the Oireachtas, some attempts have been made over the past number of years by members to make changes in regard to Ireland's approach to cannabis. Here are two significant attempts at legislative reform:

- Cannabis Regulation Bill (2013) Initiated by Luke Flanagan²¹.
- Misuse of Drugs (Cannabis Regulation) Bill (2022) Initiated by Gino Kenny²².

Both bills fundamentally sought to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, with 2013's bill also giving provisions to establish a regulatory framework, which included details on who could sell cannabis, age limits, taxes and so on. The bill itself failed to pass and become law.

The 2022 bill is still before the Dáil, in its second stage. This bill would be considered a 'decriminalisation' approach, seeking to make a small amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 which would legalise possession of cannabis up to seven grams for personal use.

Any change of a drug's legal status would need a simple amendment to the Misuse of Drugs Act, either removing a certain drug from the provisions or providing a set limit on how much an individual can possess. This action effectively decriminalises the substance.

We would recommend that the Drugs Act is either scrapped and a new bill is introduced, or safe drugs are individually removed and accounted for with new bills.

This approach of reforming the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977 would have to be a vital part to any legislative change. However, to regulate the supply would require additional legislation, which is covered in the section Regulatory Models.

²¹ <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2013/116/eng/initiated/b11613d.pdf>

²² <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2022/111/eng/initiated/b11122d.pdf>

Regulatory Models for Cannabis

How should Ireland Approach Regulation?

This section will explore a number of different approaches to regulation, however any form of regulation should have clear aims and objectives which include:

- Displacement of the illicit market, which will drastically restrict the power held by criminal gangs under the current criminal model.
- Checks and balances that ensure safe quality products in circulation.
- Control and transparency around THC strength and content of products to promote mindful consumption.
- Reduction of underage cannabis use.
- Removal of criminal gangs from the drug supply chain.
- A portion of tax revenue generated from cannabis to be secured for public spending on initiatives such as drug treatment, education and awareness.
- More open and accessible research on drugs by academics, drug agencies and public bodies.

In order to successfully meet these objectives and aims, particular attention must be given to the process of regulation, which will require changes to existing legislation as well as the introduction of new legislation catered to the controlled sale, supply and consumption of cannabis in Ireland.

Cannabis Regulation Bill (2013)²³.

2013's attempt to regulate and legalise cannabis included with it a number of new pieces of legislation that attempted to regulate the sale and supply of cannabis, as well as amendments to existing drug control legislation. While it would be unwise to recommend the Government enact the 2013 bill in its entirety, some fundamental principles can be identified within it that would suit a regulatory model going forward.

Some of the primary aspects of the regulatory attempt were:

- The establishment of the 'Cannabis Regulation Authority' with the function of overseeing licensing of cannabis and upholding product standards²⁴.
- Facilitation of commercially sold cannabis (similar to alcohol, tobacco or other goods) as well as provision for 'social clubs,' which are social establishments for cannabis users resident in Ireland to become members of and socialise.
- Establishment of the 'Cannabis Research Institute' with the function of overseeing cannabis related research for the purposes of public education and fostering of scientific knowledge.
- Legal framework of cannabis cultivation (growing) for personal, commercial and wholesale use through licence granted by the Cannabis Regulation Authority.
- Legal framework for businesses to obtain a licence to sell cannabis that is legal, safe and taxable.

²³ <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2013/116/eng/initiated/b11613d.pdf>

²⁴ Cannabis Regulation Bill 2013, Section 6., part (2) (a) - (f).

Our Regulatory Recommendations

Regulation Authority

At the core of 2013's Cannabis Regulation Bill was the establishment of a Cannabis Regulation Authority which would have oversight of the licensing around the sale and supply of cannabis in Ireland, upholding quality standards. Similar bodies have been established in other jurisdictions that are beginning to reform their approach to cannabis, and similar authorities exist already in Ireland for alcohol, tobacco and food products.

In order to move away from the illicit market, Ireland would need a robust regulatory body to oversee a legal cannabis market. As mentioned previously, a major risk facing users of cannabis is the low quality, dangerous supply chain the illicit market provides.

Social Clubs

Along with the establishment of commercial sales, similar to that of tobacco or alcohol, we recommend the establishment of social clubs for Irish residents who have a keen interest in the social aspect of cannabis, as well as engage in the hobby of home-cultivation. While alcohol remains a social experience for many in Ireland, the consumption of cannabis has shown to be a solitary experience for many primarily due to the harshness of Irish law.

The establishment of non profit social clubs (alongside commercial sales,) gives those who enjoy cannabis a safe place to enjoy their product with friends. Social use of substances also promotes harm reduction, for example drinking in a bar with friends is widely considered a safer, more healthy form of recreation in comparison with consuming alcohol alone at home.

Spain, for instance, operates on a wholly social club model and there are a number of issues associated with this, primarily the inability to outcompete the illicit market. To improve public safety we need to rapidly shrink the illicit market through displacement.

A social club system operating alongside regulated adult sale of cannabis in licensed commercial establishments would be the most effective way to shrink the illicit market.

Some criticisms of the American model thus far have been the lack of social venues for cannabis consumers to partake, resulting in a lot of social consumption taking place in shared public spaces, or in some cases social isolation.

We should learn from this and provide an opportunity for cannabis consumers to engage socially in spaces dedicated to that experience in ways that minimise impact on non-consumers and minors.

Commercially Sold Cannabis

Through the granting of a licence by a regulatory authority, certain locations could be licenced for the sale of regulated cannabis products to adults, subject to age verification and other constraints, similar to how alcohol or tobacco is sold.

This would allow people who consume cannabis to leave the illicit market, have better access to educational campaigns, be more knowledgeable and informed on the products being consumed and contribute positively to the Irish economy through the taxation system.

Legal sales would also decrease underage consumption of cannabis, given that strict measures and penalties would be in place for selling the substance to children.

Research

Research on the impacts of cannabis in terms of health should be encouraged in a legal market. We should monitor how well the legal market is displacing the illicit market, with attention given to consumer trends. Research should be conducted into the medical effects of cannabis, its relationship to other drugs and general societal impacts or changes due to legalisation.

Cultivation

Cultivation for commercial or wholesale purposes should be facilitated through a licensing scheme overseen by a cannabis regulation authority.

Any licensing on personal cultivation would be extremely difficult to enforce, and creates barriers to exiting the illicit market.

A limit could be set on what constitutes a personal grow, with some countries implementing a limit on the number of plants (usually between 4-24) and others putting restrictions on how much space a grow can take up.

The decriminalisation of home cultivation should be a matter of priority, as it requires no regulatory implementation and is a simple legislative or policing policy change.

While it is clear a regulatory system will take some time to implement, the provision of home cultivation allows a number of people to use an illicit market alternative relatively quickly and easily, thus beginning the process of displacement.

Recommendations to the Assembly

Based on the content of our submission, we make the following key recommendations for the Assembly to consider:

- Commitment to a health-led approach to drug use demonstrated through a lesser emphasis on the Justice system and investment in much-needed resources for drug users.
- Considering that non-problematic drug users make up the majority of drug users, efforts on behalf of the Government should be made to include these groups in discussions and policy frameworks, such as the National Oversight Committee for the drug strategy.
- Creation of Government legislation that regulates the sale and supply of drugs with good safety profiles²⁵ with the aim of displacing illicit markets and reducing harms²⁶.
- Decriminalisation of personal drug use and possession.
- Immediate repeal of the use of stop and search under the Drugs Act.
- Recognition by the Gardaí of the arbitrary and discriminatory nature of stop and searches.
- Expungement of prior criminal records relating to drug use, recognising the harm of criminalisation on an individual's social and personal opportunities.
- Decriminalisation of home-cultivation of drugs to move current users away from the harmful illicit market.

²⁵ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25922421/>

²⁶ We have a more thorough set of recommendations on regulation in the section **Regulatory Recommendations**, p.18

Conclusion

Ireland's drug landscape is broad, and different types of drug use elicit different types of responses. The current Justice lead approach has proven to be profoundly ineffective and has been severely damaging to both society and individuals.

Drug harms have increased dramatically over the past 50 years, with high numbers of arrests and prosecutions for personal drug use.

The steps necessary to remodel Ireland's drug policy will require bravery on the Assembly's part, but this forum has been transformative in the realms of biodiversity, gender equality and women's rights.

The current model has proven to be discriminatory, harmful and counterproductive. Fairness and equality must be at the heart of our new approach to drugs. A recognition of the broad spectrum of drug use, including non-problematic use, should be central to the next phase in Irish drug policy.

Across the globe, nations are successfully implementing progressive regulatory systems for cannabis and some are now creating regulatory frameworks for other drugs. These reforms are improving outcomes and society.

Other stakeholders from the front lines of Ireland to the other side of the world will further inform the Assembly and we trust that your final report will be progressive, compassionate and comprehensive.

The recommendations outlined in this document are only part of the solution, but we believe if implemented will reduce the harms of drugs substantially.

We wish you the very best of luck with the rest of the proceedings.

Crainn

Main Sources Consulted:

- Oireachtas Archives
- Health Research Board's Drug Library
- Drugs.ie
- Gardaí Inspectorate
- European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA)
- Nutt, et al. *European Rating of Drug Harms*.
DOI: [10.1177/0269881115581980](https://doi.org/10.1177/0269881115581980)

All relevant information can be found within the footnotes above. Any queries regarding the citations please contact contact@crainn.com