

# Northern Ireland's New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs – Phase 2

## Focus on Health Inequalities

### WHAT IS IT?

The New Strategic Direction for Alcohol and Drugs Phase 2 is Northern Ireland's strategy to reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drug use.

### INSIGHTS

The review looked at data on health inequalities alongside insights shared by people involved in implementing the strategy.

As part of the review, the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) captured the views of people working in government departments, health and social care services, research, community and voluntary groups and service user representative groups.

Some of the perspectives are overleaf.

### REVIEW

A review of the strategy looked at progress in addressing drug and alcohol harms, and reducing health inequalities.

Some of the key health inequalities around alcohol and drug-related harm include:

- Some people are far more likely to suffer harms from alcohol and drug use than others.
- Socially disadvantaged communities carry some of the heaviest burden of alcohol and drug related harms.
- Harms, and the best way to respond to them, differ.

For example, harms differ for men and women and for younger and older people. Some people at the highest risk of alcohol and drug-related harms, like people in the criminal justice system and people with mental health difficulties need special attention in the implementation of strategies.

# Insights from Stakeholder Engagement

## Young and older people

- Young people benefitted from the strategy, especially in terms of reductions in harmful alcohol use.
- The number of older people living with alcohol and drug-related harms is rising. Substance misuse services are trying to respond to additional challenges including loneliness, mental and physical ill-health and disability.

## Engagement and Cooperation

- Cross-government and cross-sectoral working was critical to addressing inequalities.
- Regional Drug and Alcohol Co-ordination Teams were powerful in addressing inequalities.

## Geographic

- Geographic inequalities in access to substance misuse services are a challenge for providers and those using the service.

## Alcohol policy

- Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP) of alcohol could be very helpful to addressing inequalities. The availability of very cheap alcohol was a source of frustration for those working to address alcohol-related harm.

## Most vulnerable

- Harm reduction approaches, including the needle exchange and naloxone initiatives, are protecting some of the most vulnerable people.
- There should be a strong focus on people engaged with the criminal justice system. While new services are evolving, this group remains highly vulnerable.

## Changing service needs

- Services for those who are alcohol dependent were successfully developed, but further improvements are needed.
- Services need to develop to respond better to co-existing substance misuse and mental ill-health, and to support people on a sustained recovery journey.

