

Review of Mental Health and Leadership Disability, Alcohol and Substance Misuse Response

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Institute of Public Health

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland was established in 1998. It is supported by the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland and the Department of Health & Children in the Republic of Ireland. The Institute is playing a strategic role in supporting and strengthening work for public health. It is influencing the direction and content of public policies in favour of health. To ensure that it makes maximum impact the Institute's multidisciplinary staff are committed to working with others particularly those whose work concentrates on the important themes of addressing health inequalities and influencing policy for public health.

The Institute recognises the significant harm that arises from the misuse of legal and illegal drugs and acknowledges that reducing the harm caused to the individual, their family and the community by drug and alcohol misuse is a big challenge to public health.

The Institute welcomes the review of mental health and learning disability's third draft report on alcohol and substance misuse. The Institute appreciates that the vision has been greatly informed by core values derived from consultations. The Institute places a premium on partnership working and broad participation in public health. It welcomes the commitment to these principles in this review. The only area where this principle of consultation might be a cause for concern is in Chapter 8, which deals with children and young people. Further support for this concern is that young people are not referred to amongst the sought views in Chapter 1.12. The question is were there other opportunities for young people to comment? For this reason recommendation 9 in Chapter 8, advocating participation of young people in hearing their views about plans and strategies is particularly important and welcome.

This report is clearly laid out and the inclusion of recommendations with respect to relevant settings or population groups is welcome. However at present there are no time lines attached to many of these recommendations nor are there specified agencies, departments or organisations tasked with responsibility for actioning these recommendations.

The Institute recommends that to ensure adherence to implementing recommendations, time lines and responsibilities for particular actions are indicated in future drafts or in an action plan which would accompany the report.

In Chapter 1 "Vision, Principles, Process and Challenges" the Institute finds it strange that there is absolutely no reference to either exchange of experience, or learning from best practice, on an all-island basis. Given the cooperation that exists in both areas for certain services, the ease of geographical access from one jurisdiction to another, similar prevalence rates for use of many substances North and South, and the ease with which alcohol, tobacco

and substances can be transferred from one jurisdiction to another it would seem appropriate to reference the importance of cross border cooperation and work in Chapter 1.

In relation to Chapter 2 “Current Position” which contains prevalence and other important data the Institute urges a standardisation of data collection procedures North and South for ease of comparability between jurisdictions and over time.

The Institute, given its all-island brief and the work that it is undertaking with regard to developing a population health observatory, is amenable to playing a role that would support North/South working and the exchange of best practice.

Chapter 15 “Smoking”

Acknowledging that the review is in the area of Mental Health and Learning Disability and acknowledging that the prevalence of smoking is far greater in those with mental health problems it is still disappointing that in this Chapter there is no recommendation to address the issue of tobacco use in the general population. Obviously measures taken at population level can provide a supportive climate to tackle tobacco use in many settings and the Institute recommends a call for a ban on smoking in the workplace as one of the recommendations in this Chapter. Such a ban has been successfully introduced in several other countries and Northern Ireland should take steps to follow suit immediately.

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