



Summary

- **A healthcare model to support current drug users and their families.**
- **Improve funding for services and facilities for drug users including counselling, occupational therapy, social support and psychotherapy.**
- **Reverse the cuts to Community and Voluntary drug services. Restore Community Task Force teams on drug addiction.**
- **Education to replace criminalisation as a method of deterrence.**
- **Information on drug safety should be commonly available via our health service, our schools and universities, at music festivals and in commercial venues.**
- **Integrated substance abuse and mental health services.**
- **Safe injecting rooms and pill testing centres could be established such as those in the Netherlands.**
- **Establish a State body to work closely with the Health Products Regulatory Authority to scientifically examine drugs that people take socially.**
- **State run distribution services with high levels of regulation and supervision including proper funding for needle exchange.**
- **Oppose the commodification and promotion of addictive drugs such as that engaged in by tobacco and alcohol companies.**
- **Move towards the Portuguese Model to undermine criminal gangs. Immediately decriminalise possession for personal use and low level distribution.**
- **Controls on the Pharma Industry to reduce the abuse of prescription drugs.**
- **Tackle the inequality, deprivation and oppression that create the material conditions for problematic drug use.**
- **Legislate for the use of medicinal cannabis for pain management of chronic conditions.**

Introduction

Drug use is one of the most complex and troubling issues we face today. Drugs have ravaged some of Ireland's poorest communities and led to pain and suffering across society. Gang violence and deaths in urban areas are mostly as a direct consequence of drug deals. Far too many young people get caught up in drug related crime and risk beatings and/or prison or even death. For these reasons, amongst others, any change in drug policy must be sensitive to the effects on poorer communities - but the policy has to change.

Criminalising drug users is a failed approach. People Before Profit favours a healthcare approach to drug taking and education rather than criminalisation. That said, we do not



favour large corporations taking control of the newly legal drugs market in the way that tobacco and alcohol companies have done.

Our policy would involve careful regulation, banning promotion of drug use by commercial bodies and ensuring good quality information is available for users and good quality health services are available for those who have health problems related to drug use, including prescription drugs.

People take drugs for a variety of reasons: social and recreational, health, addiction, stimulation, sex, fitness and exercise and even for religious reasons e.g. wine at a Christian mass. It is a fact of life in Ireland that many adults consume, often in large amounts, tea, coffee, cigarettes, sugar, alcohol and painkillers during an average week for example. However, certain drugs – particularly crack cocaine and heroin – are strongly correlated with poverty and social disadvantage. Any effective drugs policy needs to tackle the material causes of these forms of drug taking instead of targeting vulnerable drug users with criminalisation.

A Public Health Approach

For years, the state's approach to drugs has been to tax the profitable ones and criminalise the black-market ones. International drug companies' benefit hugely from substantial tax breaks, whilst alcohol companies still dominate advertising at sports and other events. The Irish criminal justice system punishes those who happen to get caught, but rarely addresses the root causes of drug use and abuse.

Instead the state often uses its drugs enforcement policies to monitor and supervise poorer communities. This law and order approach is further reinforced by the education system. Children and young people are taught about drugs in the classroom. However, in most school programmes, children are given only a brief overview of what drugs are, before being warned they are illegal and told not take them. Children are not informed about the effects of different drugs or about what drugs contain. Heroin and cannabis are often lumped into the same category and the 'gateway theory' is commonly taught. Students are told that if they smoke a joint they might end up addicted to heroin one day, because taking one leads to the other. Offering misleading information like this undermines other useful advice about moderation and safety. Instead of criminalisation and misinformation, People Before Profit favour a public health approach that stresses,

- **Proper Resources.** PBP would improve the funding for services and facilities for drug users and their families, including counselling, occupational therapy, social support and psychotherapy to reduce the reliance on multiple drug prescriptions and illegal drugs.



- **Public Health Campaigns.** Increase funding for a public health educational campaign on drugs and restore the funding for Community Task Force teams on Drug addiction.
- **Minimize Harm.** Drug users should have access to good information; moderate use in a clean environment; drugs free from contaminants and early recourse to health advice. The state should also establish a clean needle exchange service and safe injection rooms in urban areas including the option of access to medical preparations to replace street drugs.
- **Extra Supports.** Drug users who decide to stop active drug use should have a range of choices available to them e.g. detox, maintenance or reductions programmes to suit their needs.
- **Integrated Services.** Integrated substance abuse and mental health services should offer a united ethos of minimising drug use and promoting alternative coping and occupational strategies including individual counselling, support groups and practical social support with income, childcare, jobs and housing.
- **Proper Information.** Information on drug safety and potential dangers of new pills should be commonly available via our health service, our schools and universities, at music festivals and in commercial venues. The 'Think Contraception' campaign would be a good model to follow in this regard.
- **Proper education.** People Before Profit would introduce scientific education programmes about drugs in primary and secondary schools. Children and young people need to be accurately informed about the effects of drug compounds and the potential for harm.
- **Proper administration.** Safe injecting rooms and pill testing centres could be established such as those in the Netherlands. From there we could move towards a more effective national drug strategy that puts harm reduction, medical care and education at its core.
- **Proper regulation.** A new state body that would work closely with the Health Products Regulatory Authority should be established with the view to scientifically examine drugs that people take socially. This body would also be responsible for the dissemination of information via an official website.
- **Ban the corporate sector.** We are against the commodification of drug use. It would become a battle to get genuine information about the safety of various drugs out to the public such as happened with the Tobacco industry in relation to the causative relationship between tobacco and cancer, respiratory, circulatory and other diseases.
- **Move towards the Portuguese approach.** To cut out criminal gangs completely it is necessary to have drug supply under the control of state institutions and to coordinate drug testing, education in schools, the dissemination of information to the public and the sale and distribution of drugs.
- **Controls on the Pharma Industry.** Misuse of prescription drugs is a massive issue, particularly benzodiazepines. Big Pharma has a huge influence on the way their tablets are given to people. They encourage doctors to over prescribe these drugs and turn a blind eye to the way their products are smuggled into the



country. There needs to be far tighter controls on the activities of the pharmaceutical industry.

- **Reduce inequality and material deprivation.** More equal societies have less problems in terms of mental and physical health, lower stress levels, more happiness, less crime and lower levels of drug abuse. Drugs can be a great escape for some people. To combat this necessitates a major shift in economic and political resources away from the rich towards the rest of society. Better life chances will go a long way to reducing drug use in society.
- **Medicinal Cannabis.** Medical Marijuana should be researched and made available as an evidence-based option for health care providers and patients. The non-commercialised legalisation of cannabis to be regulated by a new state body and dispensed via designated stores.