



Community Consultation Process: Consultation Report, August 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report was written and compiled by Sarah Murphy (independent consultant) for the Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Drug and Alcohol Task Force (DLRDATAF), as part of its process to develop a new Strategic Plan for the period 2022-25. The report is based on a consultation process which consisted of a series of online, interactive meetings and written submissions between April and June 2021. A copy of the full report is available on the DATAF's website www.dlrdataf.ie and will be used by the DATAF in the next phases of preparing its Strategic Plan, 2022-2025.



Information flyer used in this consultation process

I. CONSULTATION OUTLINE

- a) A series of five online consultation meetings took place in April and May 2021, as per five themes and a related follow-up consultation with young people. The consultation meetings, used a World Cafe method, modified to suit an online platform. The basic structure, throughout was to engage participants—through breakout groups/online rooms—in deep conversations about the issues and priorities of most concern to them, relating to each of the five respective themes: adults, young people, prevention, child and family services, and wider community issues.
- b) Breakout discussions were facilitated by personnel from partner services in DLR. Google Jam boards were developed from each meeting to highlight the main points raised.
- c) The attendance at meetings ranged from 20 to 41 participants with an average attendance for each of the five meetings of 27. A total of 77 people took part, representing a wide variety of residents, parents, young people, and personnel from various youth, social, health, family and addiction services.
- d) An online survey was designed to facilitate the receipt of written submissions from stakeholders, and involved responses to 31 questions designed to delve further into some issues raised as part of consultation meetings. There were 138 responses to the online survey. The average number of responses to each question was 80.
- e) A multi-agency planning group was established to oversee the consultation, and in all it had seven planning and review meetings.

2. SUMMARY OF THE MAIN ISSUES THAT AROSE

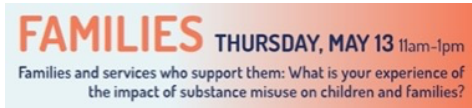
I. NORMALISATION:

There is a need to acknowledge and respond to the normalisation of drug use, in particular young people's use of cannabis and cocaine, and early alcohol misuse. These arose as primary issues of concern, and as potentially having far-reaching consequences in terms of the design and implementation of ALL prevention, harm reduction and treatment interventions into the future.



2. PREVENTION:

There is a need to address an appropriate mix of universal and targeted prevention measures, involving schools, youth and community bodies, to reduce the onset of drug and alcohol use by young people.



3. FAMILIES:

The consultation highlighted the negative impact of drug and alcohol misuse on families, including drug debt and related intimidation and the inability at times to seek help arising from stigma and fears of the criminal justice system, and the need for sensitive and proactive approaches to tackle hidden harms to children arising from parental substance misuse, and to support families in community settings.



4. COMMUNITIES:

The need for the DLR-DATF to address, through local collaborative structures, issues of exclusion in community settings, where there is a need to bring about the collective mobilisation of key stakeholder groups and agencies, including Gardaí, community organisations and family support services, as well as addiction services and other localised health and social services as appropriate.

I. ACCESS TO TREATMENT:

There is a need to connect drug services into community settings and family support networks, to address the provision of an effective network of community-based access routes into harm-reduction, help and treatment and for these to be comprehensively integrated with family support, community services and other systems of care.



2. INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION:

There is a need to recommence efforts to achieve enhanced integration, alignment and communication across addiction services, mental health services, housing and welfare services, in order to achieve better outcomes and social integration, particularly for those who are long-term attenders at addiction services.

3. CONSULTATION

In general the consultation exercise was considered successful. It had particular importance in keeping people informed, and to get their feedback on emerging issues and developments. It will also potentially help in recruiting new members, volunteers and service users thereby strengthening local structures—DATF, service management groups—and keeping people and local bodies updated. The process needs to be continued and extended.

3. THE MAIN ISSUES

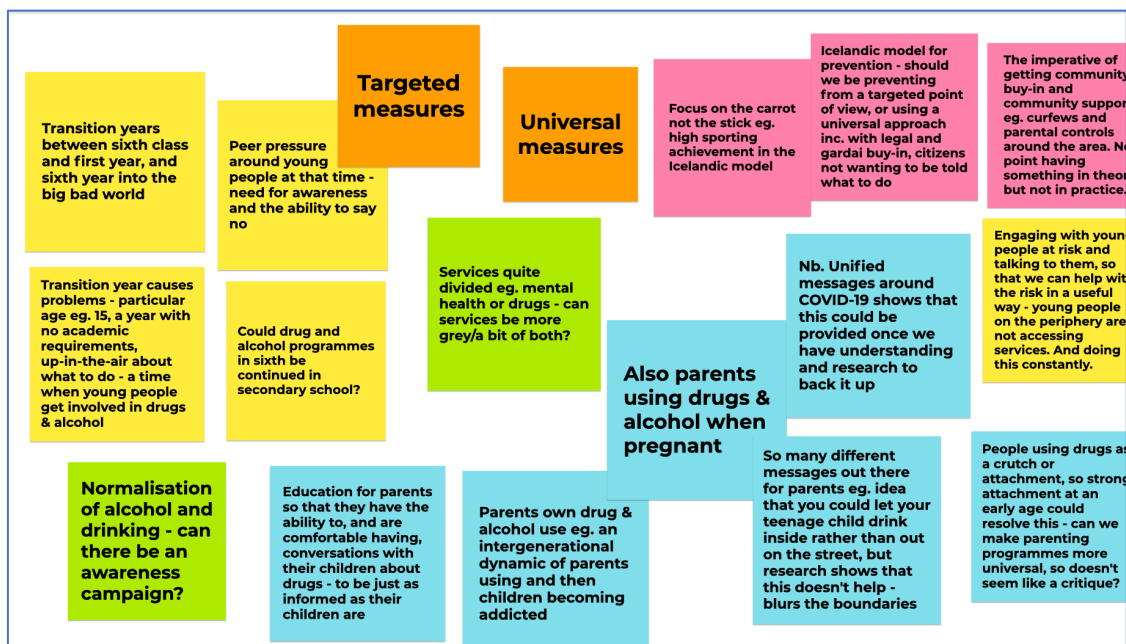
1. NORMALISATION:

- a) The normalisation of drug use, in particular cannabis and cocaine use, arose as a primary issue of concern, with particular challenges around an apparent gap between adult and young people's perceptions, and differentiating what was perceived by some as recreational drug use, from what others considered as problem drug taking.
- b) Cannabis use was also seen as being now more accessible to children and it was reported that some 5th and 6th pupils are using this drug.
- c) Social media were regarded as having a key influence in the process of normalisation, through a glamourisation of drug use, and in providing platforms to arrange drug

deals: advertising, payments and exchanges.

- d) The cultural acceptance of heavy drinking in both community and many family settings, was seen as problematic, and as having influenced young people's general willingness to use both alcohol and drugs; some concerns were expressed that alcohol was a more serious problem than drugs.
- e) The promotion of body images associated more with drugs/ spirits as compared to beers/ wine also reinforced the everyday influence of drugs.
- f) It was clear that the perceived normalisation of cannabis and cocaine use would potentially have far-reaching consequences for the design and implementation of prevention, harm reduction and treatment interventions that are required into the future, and that this aspect would need to be addressed in relation to all proposals for programme development under the DATF's next Strategic Plan.

Jam Board: Consultation Meeting - Substance misuse prevention and education

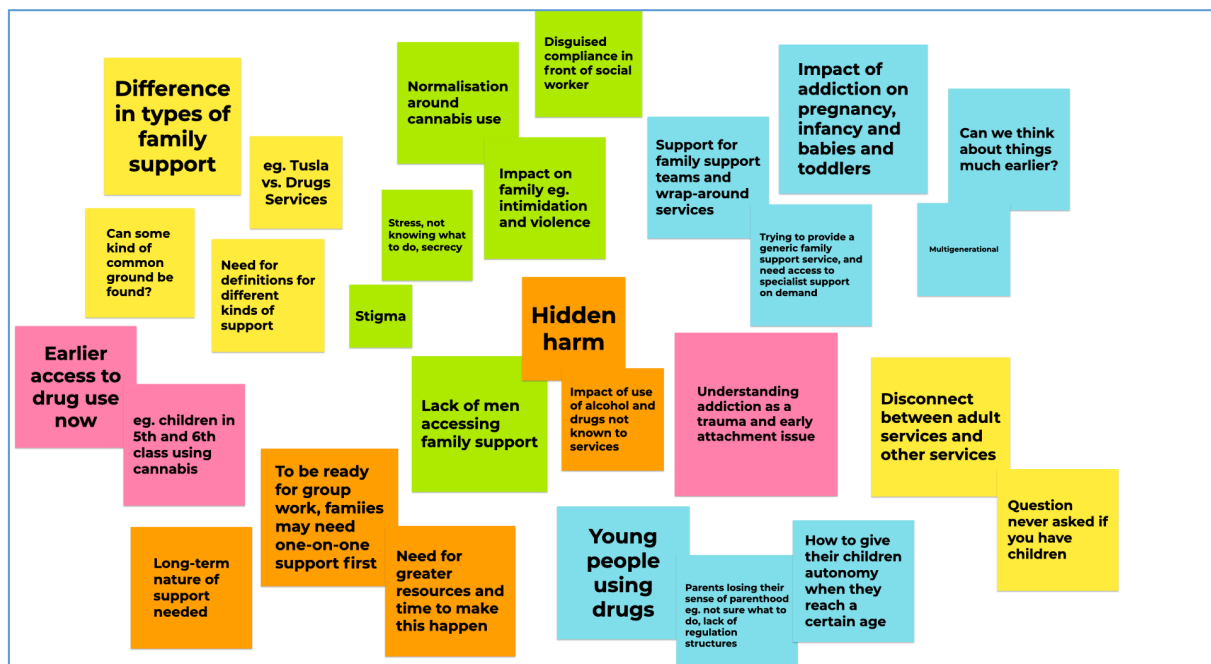


2. PREVENTION

- a) The issue of preventing drug and alcohol problems was seen as very challenging, particularly arising from COVID 19, and a perceived reduction in services and facilities for young people and things for them to do.
- b) An increase in gang violence in some parts of the county, and the involvement of young adults in drug dealing, were also stated as raising complex challenges from a prevention perspective.
- c) Children and young people were seen to be particularly vulnerable around experimenting with drugs and alcohol at the transition from 6th class primary into 1st year second level. It was suggested that this transition provided opportunities for a universal approach to prevention from within a school

environment and reference was made to the Icelandic Model (Planet Youth) as offering a model for developing a localised intervention.

- d) It was acknowledged, that targeted measures are also valuable, especially in terms of reaching out to young people at particular risk.
- e) Transition year (post junior cert) was also mentioned as a time when there are less academic requirements, and that good prevention programmes could be developed at this stage also.
- f) It was noted that the Covid 19 pandemic and the national response to it had set a positive precedent in terms of coherent public messaging, and there was a lot to learn in terms of using the same approach to messages about alcohol and drugs.



Jam Board: Consultation Meeting Services for children, young people and families

3. FAMILIES

- a) The impact of drug use on families including intimidation and violence, which in turn produced stress among family members, was mentioned. Participants spoke of associated stigma, resulting in families not feeling able to speak about addiction, drug debt or related intimidation openly and that

there was instead an unhelpful silence around these issues.

- b) Hidden harm experienced by children due to drug and alcohol misuse, including during pregnancy, was also mentioned, as well as the fact that many services are not always aware that this was happening at home.

- c) The need for intensive supports for parents to assist them in providing young people with discipline, structure and guidance, as well as giving young people appropriate autonomy was discussed.
- d) Addiction was referenced as linked to childhood trauma and early attachment issues, and there was a need for different types of family support, tailored to families' needs, with some families needing long-term support.

Concern was also expressed in relation to the gendering of family support. It was noted that there was currently a lack of men accessing family support. Men's Sheds was mentioned as an example of successful engagement of men, and that such initiatives needed to be developed further.

- e) Participants noted a disconnect between adult services (addiction) and other services and called for services to be more linked up and coordinated.



Jam Board: Consultation Meeting - Substance misuse and wider social and community issues

4. COMMUNITIES

- a) It was discussed that alcohol and drug use, including during the Covid 19 pandemic, had created fractures in communities in DLR and that there was a need for this to be addressed and for a sense of social cohesion to be re-created within local communities.
- b) The financial gains enjoyed by drug dealers was visible in some communities and the lack of apparent repercussions for this meant that young people were increasingly seeing drug dealing as a viable career choice, and getting involved at younger ages.
- c) Drug debt and related intimidation was causing families to leave areas in

DLR and there was a call for housing policy reforms and improvements in confidential Garda scheme for receiving information on drug-related intimidation.

- d) Anti-social behaviour linked to drugs and alcohol use in community spaces and neighbourhoods was mentioned as an issue, while participants also cautioned against being unfairly critical or villainising young people which would further exacerbate fractures in communities.

5. ACCESS TO TREATMENT

- a) Reference was made to new trends in substance misuse, that the types and

varieties of drugs being used required services to adapt, and to develop a broader understanding of the meaning of harm reduction, with service users in the driving seat of determining a plan, particularly one that dealt with other presenting issues, such as housing, income, social well-being and health.

- b) There was also a view that some services were framed around particular drugs and that persons with other drug problems could feel excluded, or get referred to the wrong treatment.
- c) There was concern that alcohol was causing greater problems than officially recognised, especially during the pandemic and that services needed to be able to deal with alcohol referrals.

- d) A lot of concern was expressed that several new forms of cannabis and cocaine were having a negative impact on young people's mental health, suggesting the need to link in with mental health services and assessments at an early stage.
- e) Reference was made to the need for a single, generic model to facilitate access into services and there was also a need for more coordination between drug services and between addiction services and other services. There was a particular challenge around how to locate services, particularly in community settings, such that there was improved access, especially for families, but in such manner that this did not contribute to stigma.

Jam Board: Consultation Meeting - Adult substance misuse



6. INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

- a) The need for enhanced interagency coordination among services, in particular mental services and addiction services, was identified to create clear and accessible pathways for service users, particularly around managing dual diagnosis at the point of referral, and formalised ways for

addiction and mental health services to work together.

- b) Reference was made to the need for specialised therapies, and to have a clearer role for mental health professionals to be actively involved with care plans.
- c) It was highlighted that the matter is not just a resource issue but one that

requires a greater commitment towards getting the appropriate addiction and mental health services—and other associated services, probation, housing and welfare—to work more closely together, in a formalised manner.

- d) Staff from addiction services expressed frustration with the absence of effective collaboration. They felt that

there was a parity of esteem issue at times where their experience was often not valued and that they were supporting service users with more than just addiction, helping them with social skills and integration into society, as well as proactive work connecting with other services, and that this work needed to be more recognised



Jam Board: Consultation Meeting Alcohol and drugs; young people's voices

4. OVERVIEW AND CONCLUSION

- The normalisation of drug use, and the influence of social media in glamourising drug and alcohol use, and in enhancing access to supply chains, were clear findings in this consultation process. The COVID 19 pandemic has also resulted in more visible drinking by people of all ages in DLR.
- Participants articulated that Irish policy, and some services, are behind the curve of changing trends, and that policy and services need to become more aligned with service users' needs and that the DLR-DATF potentially has a role in generating debate and discussion on these matters.
- Cannabis use was perceived as having a potential negative impact on young people's mental health and other issues, with clear implications for service design and the development of treatments and interventions for those young people, as they get older.
- Strategies around early intervention and prevention referred to universal measures, with support towards developing a prevention initiative for schoolchildren during the 6th class to 1st year school transition phase.
- Targeted measures were also discussed, including tailored family support responses to work with families known to have experienced

intergenerational trauma, addiction or poverty and working with parents during pregnancy and infancy stages to promote healthy attachment and bonding. The importance of outreach work with young people who do not attend youth services was emphasised.

- f) There was considerable concern about the negative impact of drug use on communities, particularly drug-related debt and intimidation, anti-social behaviour relating to drug and alcohol use and drinking, and the impact of gang violence and drug feuding on families and communities.
- g) Participants identified the need for a stronger neighbourhood approach to community-based programmes and service developments, thereby creating harm reduction strategies and pathways for drug and alcohol users of all ages into evidence-based treatments and also improved opportunities for social integration (recovery) and strategies to address stigma on persons who have long-term drug problems.
- h) The neighbourhood approach also potentially offered opportunities for:
 - protecting families from the effects of members' drug use.
 - protecting children from hidden harms arising from family substance misuse
 - protecting young people from involvement in drug use, including via outreach

- addressing issues of supply, access, and distribution, including via social media.

- i) Issues were also raised around dual diagnosis, social integration of persons on long-term methadone treatment, the impact of stigma and the lack of visibility of primary care in service provision, and also for ensuring there is in place a workable integration plan for individuals who have addiction and other problems arising from drugs.
- j) The consultation process has been a successful and rich exercise that has produced valuable findings and considerable food for thought for future debate and exploration. The extent of participation with the process contributed significantly to its success and to the breadth of its findings.
- k) The consultation poses significant challenges ahead, particularly in terms of the growing normalisation of drug use, developing a mix of universal and targeted preventive measures, addressing the negative impact of drug issues on families and communities, and in achieving a closer integration between harm reduction and treatment services *and* neighbourhood needs and improving service collaboration to ensure social integration of persons who use drugs.

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