



30th April 2019

Deputy Gerry Adams, TD
Dáil Eireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2.

Re PQ: 17387/19

To ask the Minister for Health if there is a model of care for substance misuse services including alcohol at primary care level

Dear Deputy Adams,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to your above Parliamentary Question which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position:

The current approach to the misuse of substances in Ireland is set out in the National Strategy 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery. A health led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 – 2025'. The aim of the strategy is to promote rehabilitation and recovery by supporting the development of a range of treatment, rehabilitation and recovery services using the four-tier model of care. This is the first time that alcohol has been combined with drugs in a strategy and the strategy recognises the fact that alcohol, while legal, is also a drug and prioritises a public health approach to alcohol and drug use. The strategy contains measures aimed at reducing alcohol related harm and delaying early alcohol use among young people. The strategy also aims to reduce waiting times and provide equity of access to services nationally.

The management of all drug and alcohol treatment services falls under the remit of the HSE Primary Care Division, which oversees a number of national care groups. Drug and alcohol treatment is provided through a network of HSE services, but also non-statutory/voluntary agencies, many of which are funded by the HSE. Some private organisations also provide treatment.

At primary care level the community GP is often the first health care professional that an individual who has developed a problem with alcohol will encounter. Community General Practice would be considered a Tier 2 level of intervention in the four tier model of care supported by the strategy. The Irish College of General Practitioners (ICGP) has produced a guide entitled 'Helping Patients with Alcohol Problems – A Guide for Primary Care Staff' that supports GPs in identifying, screening, treating and referring individuals with harmful, hazardous or dependent use of alcohol. The ICGP has also a Substance Misuse Webinar series on 'Tips and Tools for Managing Addiction in Primary Care' aimed at GPs and Primary Care staff. The first webinar in this series is entitled 'Managing Alcohol problems in



Primary Care' and provides evidence based advice to GPs in relation to identification and treatment of alcohol problems. At this community based service medication assisted treatment can be initiated by the GP if necessary and referral to more specialised services can be considered.

The Health Research Board recently released the 2017 figures for Alcohol Treatment in Ireland. These indicated that in 2017, 7,350 cases of Problem Alcohol Use were treated. Of these cases, 48% were new cases and 72% of cases involved individuals who were alcohol dependent. Polydrug use where individuals were identified as mixing other drugs with alcohol occurred in 20% of cases.

Further information in relation to alcohol including a service finder link is available from the HSE website <https://www.askaboutalcohol.ie/>. In addition the HSE Drug and Alcohol Helpline is available Monday- Fri day 9.30 am – 5.30 pm with email support available at helpline@hse.ie.

I trust this information is of assistance to you but should you have any further queries please contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Eamon Keenan
National Clinical Lead – Addiction Services