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Deputy Carol Nolan  
Dail Eireann  
Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2

16<sup>th</sup> July 2020

**PQ ref: 14241/20**

**Question:** To ask the Minister for Health the measures and supports in place to reduce the number of abortions from the recorded 6,666 abortions that took place in 2019; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Nolan,

Thank you for your question to the Minister for Health, which was forwarded to my office to respond to you directly.

The HSE Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) is one of a number of national policy priority programme situated within Health and Wellbeing in the Health Service Executive. The SHCPP is tasked with implementing Ireland's first framework for sexual health and wellbeing, the National Sexual Health Strategy (NSHS) 2015 – 2020. <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/about/corporate-publications/national-sexual-health-strategy/national-sexual-health-strategy.pdf>. The SHCPP delivers a wide range of education and communications initiatives to promote sexual health and wellbeing and prevent crisis pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in line with the national strategic objectives; and funds crisis pregnancy counselling services to support women and their partners experiencing a crisis pregnancy. Further information on these initiatives are presented here.

### **1. Education and communications initiatives**

The SHCPP works closely with statutory and non-statutory partners to develop and promote resources to support young people U18 and young adults (18-30) to make healthy choices about relationships, sexual activity and safer sexual practices. The SHCPP focusses efforts on these target groups because younger adults are more likely to experience crisis pregnancies compared to older adults. The HSE SHCPP also supports the provision of training for professionals and information for the public more broadly.

- **For U 18s**, the SHCPP works with:
  - The Department of Education and Skills and its agencies, to develop resources to support the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in the school setting. Past examples include the 'Trust' resource (Senior Cycle), 'Growing up LGBT' (Junior and Senior Cycle), 'B4udecide' (Junior cycle). We are currently completing an update on the 'Busy Bodies' resource on puberty and adolescence (5<sup>th</sup> and 6th class) and are working with the NCCA to develop RSE activities for the new Junior Cycle SPHE short course.
  - Parent representative organisations and other statutory and NGO partners, to develop resources for parents to support them to talk with their children about all aspects of relationships, sexuality and growing up. We have worked with the 'HI at your library' initiative to make a range of commercial RSE books available to parents, and have developed a guide, 'Making the Big Talk Many Small talks', which lists the books and offers related information and guidance. We are also developing a suite of more detailed booklets for parents, the first of which 'Talking to your young child about relationships, sexuality and growing up' is complete. The second, focussing on parents of 8- 12 year olds, will be available in Autumn 2020. We also work with the National Parents' Council Primary and the Irish Family Planning Association to offer parents training in supporting their children to develop their relationships building skills; and an understanding of healthy sexuality and its expression.
  - Youth work organisations such as NYCI, Foroige, BeLonGTo to support the development and delivery of a range of RSE training programmes, these include B4udecide, Pornography and The Real U.
  - Tusla, to enable foster carers, social workers and social care workers support young people in care and after-care in relation to their relationship and sexuality education needs. As a response to the recommendations of the SHCPP-commissioned study, 'Sexual Health and Sexuality Education Needs Assessment of Young People in Care', we have developed a module of the same name for their online support tool. This is due for completion in 2020.
  - The youth organisation Spun-Out, to develop new web content for teenagers. This new content, which has been informed via consultation with teenagers. Videos will be developed to help promote the online content and to engage young people via social media platforms. It is anticipated that this will be complete by end 2020.
  
- **For young adults (18- 30):**
  - The development and promotion of communications campaigns promoting safer sexual practices.
    - The digital #respectprotect campaign which focuses on the importance of using condoms to protect against unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This campaign uses search, digital and outreach activations to reach young adults.
    - The 'Because...' campaign, which promotes consistent condom use as a protection against unplanned pregnancies and STIs and to normalise discussion around sexual health and wellbeing.

This campaign appears across multiple channels, including posters in colleges and social venues and digital posters were placed in high-footfall areas.

- Currently working with the Irish Pharmacy Union to develop an in-pharmacy campaign to encourage young adults to consider their sexual health and wellbeing during the coronavirus pandemic.
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- **For the public more broadly**, the HSE SHCPP supports the provision of training for professionals and health promotion information via the following initiatives:
    - Working with colleagues in HSE Health Promotion and Improvement, to develop and deliver the Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion (FPSHP). The course aims to build the capacity of health, social care, education, youth work and community professional to promote the sexual health and wellbeing of their service users. Evaluation of the FPSHP has demonstrated significant impact on participants' knowledge, skills and comfort levels in addressing the topic. <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/foundation-programme-final.pdf>
    - Maintaining, updating and promoting the national sexual health and wellbeing website; [www.sexualwellbeing.ie](http://www.sexualwellbeing.ie).
    - Managing and overseeing the National Condom Distribution Service (NCDS) which is a central point for distributing free condoms to services and organisations who work directly with people at an increased risk of negative sexual health outcomes. In 2018, 409,319 condoms were distributed via the NCDS to services and organisations who work directly with people at an increased risk of negative sexual health outcomes. <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-professionals/research/research-reports/ncds-2018-final.pdf>
    - The development and dissemination of the 'Your Contraceptive Choices' leaflet setting out all of the contraception options available. This is available in maternity hospitals, GP surgeries and community organisations. Click here to download a copy of this leaflet <https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/sexual-health/contraception/>
    - The translation of information for people whose first language is not English. This includes:
      - The translation of the 'Your Contraceptive factsheet' into six languages
      - Supporting the development of contraception information in five languages for the [www.Healthconnect.ie](http://www.Healthconnect.ie) app in partnership with Cairde.

## 2. Crisis pregnancy counselling support services

The SHCPP provides funding to 11 unplanned pregnancy counselling services at many locations across the country. In addition funding is provided for the delivery of the nationwide MyOptions telephone helpline service, which provides information, support and counselling to anyone with an unplanned/crisis pregnancy.

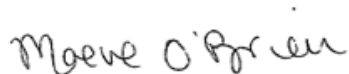
Those faced with an unplanned pregnancy can access free support and counselling provided by experienced accredited counsellors in a face to face setting or over the phone. All counselling is provided in a non-judgemental, non-directive manner, which allows the individual experiencing the crisis pregnancy (and their partner) the time and space to make the best decision for them. The individual is supported by the counsellor in whatever decision is made and counselling can continue throughout a pregnancy. Post abortion counselling is also available and provided by the same funded counselling services.

My Options can provide information and support in over 240 languages. When an interpretation service is required My Options can arrange for an interpreter to phone a caller back for a three way conversation between them, a counsellor and an interpreter, where the interpreter will help the client to speak to a counsellor in their own language. My Options also supports Irish Sign Language users with their call to My Options by providing a live video-link to an Irish Sign Language interpreter. Irish Sign Language users can book an appointment with IRIS online (<https://iris2.gettimely.com>). This service is free of charge.

For more information on MyOptions and face to face counselling services, please visit <https://www2.hse.ie/unplanned-pregnancy/>.

**Many of the resources and information leaflets mentioned above are available to download from [sexualwellbeing.ie](http://sexualwellbeing.ie); and available to download or order in hard copy, from [healthpromotion.ie](http://healthpromotion.ie).**

Yours Sincerely



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