



24th July 2023

Deputy Dvaid Cullinane, TD
Dáil Eireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2.

PQ35162/23

To ask the Minister for Health the cost of a consistent standardised needle exchange programme rolled out across all taskforces

Dear Deputy Cullinane,

The Health Service Executive have 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 provision of Needle Exchange programmes is a core element of the Harm Reduction response to the problem of injecting drug use and has been in operation in Ireland for over 20 years. The Harm Reduction approach was introduced to address the problem of injecting drug use, in particular, the transmission of viral illnesses such as HIV and Hepatitis through the sharing of contaminated injecting equipment. In addition, contact made with people who are injecting drugs can be an opportunity to refer individuals to services and appropriate care such as Opioid Agonist Treatment.

Given the important role of needle exchange programmes as part of the Harm Reduction response, the HSE has invested significantly in the provision of this intervention. In the Dublin region, there is a network of needle exchange programmes operating currently. Outside the Dublin region, needle exchange is largely provided through the innovative Community Pharmacy Needle Exchange programme as well as a number of mobile needle exchange initiatives in areas of most need. The following table outlines the number of needle exchanges available per HSE CHO area

CHO Area	Pharmacy Needle Exchange	Other (fixed site and mobile)
1	9	
2	12	
3	12	2
4	16	1
5	14	8
6&7		16
8	28	1
9		9



Please note that Addiction Services in CHO 6 & 7 are provided together by a joined up HSE Addiction service for the two areas.

The further development of services if required could be either a static site or a mobile site depending on location and identification of need.

The cost of a small static site could be identified in the table below

Staffing (incl. non-pay)	2 x €47,000
Insurance (non HSE)	€10,000
Stock	€10,000
Total	€114,000

In relation to developing a mobile needle exchange if there was a need for one identified then the cost for such a service has been estimated as per the table below. Please note that any such service is developed if a need is identified and there has been consultation with relevant stakeholders. The cost includes the initial capital cost of purchasing a vehicle and any service will require two staff working together.

Staffing (incl. non-pay)	2 x €47,000
Cost of Van (built in compartments)	€30,000
Servicing/CVT	€1,200
Insurance/Tax	HSE/State Claims
Fuel	€4,500
Stock	€10,000
Total	€139,700

As evidence of the success of the Harm reduction approach, including needle exchange, the graph below is taken from a recently published academic paper and identifies the significant decrease in new diagnoses of HIV in Ireland over the last two decades.

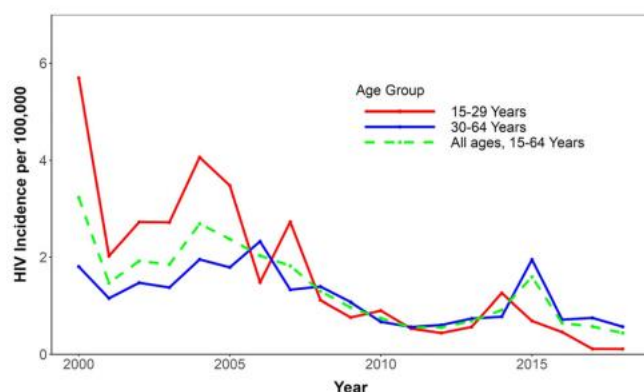


FIGURE 1 HIV Incidence among people who inject drugs (PWID) in Ireland by age group from 2000 to 2018.

This type of scientific information <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36710467/> coupled with the knowledge that injecting drug use is declining in most countries across Europe https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/selected-issues/injecting_en#downloads

brings into question the need to further expand needle exchange services when there already appears to be an adequate and effective response in this area already in place.

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

Yours sincerely,



Prof Eamon Keenan
National Clinical Lead-Addiction Services
HSE National Social Inclusion Office