

6th January 2026
Martin Daly, TD
Dáil Éireann
Kildare Street
Dublin 2.

PQ 73717/25

To ask the Minister for Health if the HSE has a policy on harm reduction in relation to drug taking; and if so, if a policy document is available; and if she will provide the same.

Dear Deputy Daly,

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.

The HSE does not have one specific policy on harm reduction as an approach to problematic drug use. The HSE has responsibility for public health actions mandated within National Drug Strategies, the Programme for Government and the HSE National Service Plan, all of which recognise a health-led response to substance use.

Harm reduction is recognised by agencies such as the UNODC and WHO as a response to drug use globally delivered alongside a spectrum of interventions such as drug prevention, treatment and recovery. Harm reduction describes a range of public health policies, interventions and programmes which focus on reducing the health and social harms associated with substance use to individuals, communities and to the wider society. Harm reduction interventions can include, but are not limited to condom distribution, opioid agonist treatment, the provision of sterile use equipment and naloxone (an antidote to reverse an opioid overdose), Medically Supervised Injection Centres, drug checking services, targeted engagement in communities, prisons or use settings such as festivals and the development of early warning structures to detect and respond to extra risky drug trends.

The current National Drugs strategy is 'Reducing Harm, Supporting Recovery: A health-led response to drug and alcohol use in Ireland 2017 – 2025' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/reducing-harm-supporting-recovery-a-health-led-approach-to-drug-and-alcohol-use-in-ire.pdf>. This was the first National Strategy to adopt a 'Health-Led' response to drug use. A Strategic Pillar was dedicated to the goal 'Minimise harm and support recovery' and made a series of recommendations for the development of several new harm reduction measures, which were led by the HSE. These Actions included the development of the Medically Supervised Injection Centre, the expansion of the Naloxone programme, developing responses to drug use in nightlife settings (including festivals) and the development of a HSE Public Health Alert system to identify and respond to extra risky drug trends. As a result, the HSE has worked closely with a range of stakeholders to deliver these national harm reduction initiatives throughout the lifecycle of the policy.

The current drug market is changing rapidly, and HSE research has identified that increases in use are occurring in Ireland at a time when there is an increased risk for those people who do use, such as higher potency and new drugs emerging. Significant concerns are the emergence of high-strength MDMA and the new synthetic opioids 'nitazenes'. As a result, the HSE recognises the need to expand

current services and pilot novel harm reduction approaches as part of the next National Drug Strategy.

Strategy Priority 7 of the recently published EU Drugs strategy identifies the need to 'Reduce individual drug-related harm' and aims to increase the availability and coverage of evidence-based harm and risk reduction interventions in Europe. The strategy recommends that Member States expand and adapt harm reduction interventions. As part of the EU Strategy, the European Union Drug Agency (EUDA) will review the effectiveness of new interventions and share best practices through a harm reduction database. These efforts will ensure information is widely available to support the development of quality standards on harm reduction. The information will be widely available to support the development of quality standards on harm reduction. Building on the success of the European Prevention Curriculum, the EUDA will develop a dedicated training programme to improve the implementation of evidence-based harm reduction measures. The European Harm Reduction Curriculum will help Member States build capacity for harm reduction across Europe.

Our own new National Drugs Strategy will be published in 2026 and will build on work from previous strategies to ensure that effective evidence-based interventions are provided to those most in need within our society. The work of the HSE Addiction Services, including any harm reduction initiatives, will be informed by the recommendations from the strategy.

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 for HSE Addiction Services