



Inner City Organisations Network (ICON)

Submission to the Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use June 2023



Buckingham Street, Dublin 1: Christmas Tree Memorial in memory of all those who have died have drug related causes.

For more information contact:

Siân Muldowney

ICON

22 Lower Buckingham Street

Dublin D01 N6VO

sian@iconnetwork.ie

087 9179756

Inner City Organisations Network (ICON)

ICON has its roots in over thirty years of community organisation in the north east inner city. It was formed to bring together all the local projects to fight against increasing local disadvantage and long-term unemployment and to make sure that local voices were heard. ICON has played a key role in the development of initiatives in an effort to combat poverty and disadvantage. Some of key achievements include:

1. Establishment of the first Local Drugs Task Force in response to the epidemic of drug misuse, this went on to become the model for the wider country.
2. Establishment of the first Community Policing Forum as a community response to prevalent drug dealing and antisocial behaviour.
3. Establishment of the Young People at Risk Initiative, an interagency partnership working to address the needs of young people and their families.
4. One of 7 pilot projects for a Community Development Programme under the Department of Rural and Community Development.
5. ICON works with residents and residents' groups to act on a collective basis and facilitate meetings with relevant state agencies to improve living conditions and address issues of anti-social behaviour and drug related intimidation.
6. Founding member of the North Inner City Community Coalition which was formed in response to the criminality and violence in the north east inner city.
7. Developed peer led research in a number of areas including on maintenance and conditions in local authority flat complexes; a community needs analysis into health care need in the NEIC and currently doing research into the experiences of service users in opioid treatment services in the NEIC.
8. Play a key role in regeneration projects within the NEIC including St Marys' Mansions, Croke Villas and Matt Talbot Court.
9. Carried out community consultations on relevant issues to ensure that the voice of the community is heard e.g. re-development of the Magdalene Laundry on Sean McDermott Street.
10. The establishment of the Christmas Hardship Fund which distributes 10,000 euros to families at Christmas.

Key Recommendations

1. Addressing the root causes of poverty and disadvantage

The relationship between poverty and drug-related harms is well-established. There is a need to re-establish the Combat Poverty Agency, independent of government and empowered to hold them to account. Develop a national anti-poverty campaign that will engage with communities and work to eliminate poverty in all its forms.

'Drug abuse plays a role in many major social problems, such as cuckooing, drugged driving, violence, stress, child trafficking and child abuse. Drug abuse can lead to homelessness, crime, and missed work or problems with keeping a job. It destroys families.'

'Addressing root causes of why people use drugs- poverty, discrimination of the NEIC community, criminality in wider community and witnessing trauma, intergenerational issues -parents mental health, lack opportunity etc.'

'Drug users under the influence everywhere, the community is unsafe for everyone. Dealers regularly dealing outside the health centre, when I walk into work in the morning, I see at least two drug deals. Throughout the day there are young boys selling drugs, placing them under cars and buyers coming to pick them up. Regular arguments on the streets, people in the community don't feel safe to attend health centre & not safe for children. Regular drug waste on the ground in the community and arguments between dealers.'

2. End criminalisation of people who use drugs

As long as we criminalise people who use drugs, we are causing them additional harm and reducing the effectiveness of any initiatives or services we put in place. We cannot respond effectively to other issues while we continue to do this.

'We have to end the criminalisation of children who are now caught up in selling drugs. Addiction and all the trauma that comes with this for all families.'

'By criminalizing those who are coming from marginalised and poorer backgrounds we are creating cycles of addiction and crime and creating much worse outcomes compared to those in affluent areas.'

'Criminalizing drug addicts especially women as effects can be detrimental for children in their care.'

3. Expand the Pilot Community Development Programme¹ to support and underpin a central role for community voices in decision-making structures.

The expansion of the programme will enable projects and services to further develop community development responses to a range of social, economic and environmental concerns that impact on addiction. It will place community voices at the core of the response to drugs and facilitate an empowering collaborative approach to building relationships and undertaking cooperative initiatives between marginalised groups, mainstream services and decision-making bodies.

'The responses need to be local; they need to be community based, they need to involve the people most affected by the problem in finding solutions that work for their communities, and they need to be adequately resourced.'

'Vital that locals are listened to and forums for feedback to locals are safely provided. Too often we ask for input but never follow up with the community as to where their views / concerns went and who dealt with them.'

'By meeting people where they are at, people in addictions (drug use) family members, local community groups/ reps that are impacted by such issues as well service users. Need meet people where they are at and let them share their experience.'

4. Open up a discussion about the impacts on our communities of the current legal framework under which drugs are controlled and whether it is fit for purpose.

It cannot be ignored that issues like drug related intimidation, open drug dealing and associated anti-social behavior impacts marginalised and poor communities the most. The fear of reporting drug related crime leaves communities isolated and outside of the normal criminal justice process. Mechanisms need to be put in place to further support communities who are experiencing violence and intimidation on a daily basis.

'The impact is grooming young children to selling the drugs for the big known gangs and feuds. As youth worker a lot of young people grow up under care of grandparents or with one less parent in home due to ongoing drug use, serving time in prison or death from drug overdose/ related illness.'

'Drug paraphernalia been left around the area. Young people been groomed to sell drugs by older drug dealers. Drug addicts committing crime to supply their habit (bike theft, robberies, muggings) drug addicts sleeping in doorways making people feel uncomfortable to walk the streets late at night. Gangs of young people hanging around corners selling drugs.'

¹ In 2021, the Minister for Rural and Community Development, Joe O'Brien, announced a new pilot Community Development Programme in fulfilment of the commitment in the Programme for Government. The aim of the programme is to use community development as an approach to address poverty, social exclusion and inequality, and promote human rights.

5. Add the 10th: Recognise socio-economic status as the tenth ground of discrimination in Irish equality legislation.

There are currently nine grounds of discrimination set out in equality legislation. The exclusion of socio-economic status represents a significant gap for those with an experience of poverty as they currently have no way of seeking any form of legal redress and have no protection in the law. Socio-economic discrimination can occur in many forms and can be experienced both individually and collectively. It is often felt within public services, such as in healthcare, housing and accommodation, when seeking employment, education, social welfare, or with the police, all areas where those living in poverty and addiction have to engage. There are number of harms associated with drug and alcohol misuse, both on a personal and social level and a multiplicity of issues which can affect recovery capital – housing and homelessness; mental health and dual diagnosis, education, spent convictions – all of which require engagement with public services.

Those with a lived experience also report everyday incidences of discrimination as a result of their accent, clothing, haircut, address, employment status, etc. People report not being able to get a taxi to their home, being followed around in stores or being refused service in a restaurant. The stigma and shame that results from discrimination has huge effects on mental health and wellbeing. In addition, it can also enormously restrict a person's life and opportunities. The exclusion of socio-economic status represents a significant gap, and those with an experience of poverty "constantly fall through the cracks" of equality legislation. ²

6. Training and Information Campaign on impact of drug related stigma

Stigmatisation drives people into isolation, danger and back into addiction. It labels families and neighbourhoods. It destroys people's prospects and their chances to contribute to society. Resource and roll out the stopthestigma.ie campaign across all addiction services.

Stigma attached to service users, poverty, the availability of programs, the high availability of drugs, not following through with the safe injecting facility.

7. Place Trauma Informed Care at the Heart of the Response to Addiction

Addiction, trauma and crime come from poverty and oppression and addiction is an effective way of responding to trauma. Trauma Informed Practice is an approach that explicitly recognises and acknowledges the effects of people's lived experience of trauma and the role trauma plays in people's lives.³

Drug abuse plays a role in many major social problems, such as cuckooing, drugged driving, violence, stress, child trafficking and child abuse. Drug abuse can lead to homelessness, crime, and missed work or problems with keeping a job. It destroys families.

² <https://www.atdireland.ie/wp/atd-irelands-work-on-socio-economic-discrimination>

³ www.saolproject.ie

The same drug dealers and families operate with impunity in the NEIC over decades. Not dealing with the underlying causes such as trauma and toxic stress, sexual abuse, intergenerational poverty, lack of progressive pathways out of inequity and inequality. lack of proper services to address the causes and consequences of addiction, creation of an economic subculture due to drug use and drug dealing.

Taking a 'fix the individual' approach rather than addressing the systemic failures of the criminal justice and health system. Need for more trauma informed and dual therapeutic approaches.

The area is traumatized with impacts on drug use, stemming from intergeneration trauma, crime violence, drug use, poverty and homelessness.

8. Place availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality at the heart of services and policies

The right to health imposes four essential standards on healthcare services: Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Quality. These standards have to be applied across all aspects of the health service to ensure service users can avail of health services in a way that meets their needs.

Lack of access to drug treatment centres for parents.

Existing drug prevention programmes are working but there is not enough of them to engage all young people for whom it should be essential either in school or in community based organisations.

Decriminalize, regulate, combat poverty, enable people's agency to make informed judgements and ensure access to health and healing support for people in addiction.

This submission was based on consultations and engagements with the participants and working groups in ICON. In addition, we conducted a short, online survey to incorporate further opinions. We highlighted some of the responses above and below are some of the (unedited) responses to that survey.

Question 1: What do you see as the harmful impacts of drug use in the NEIC community?

- Grooming of young people and children into dealing and eventually increasing the possibility of them using drugs.
- Drug users under the influence everywhere, the community is unsafe for everyone. Dealers regularly dealing outside the health centre, when I walk into work in the morning, I see at least two drug deals. Throughout the day there are young boys selling drugs, placing them under cars and buyers coming to pick them up. Regular arguments on the streets, people in the community don't feel safe to attend health centre & not safe for children. Regular drug waste on the ground in the community and arguments between dealers.
- Children growing up and seeing people taking and selling drugs on every corner. People afraid to walk the streets after dark.
- Drug paraphernalia been left around the area. Young people been groomed to sell drugs by older drug dealers. Drug addicts committing crime to supply their habit (bike theft, robberies, muggings) drug addicts sleeping in doorways making people feel uncomfortable to walk the streets late at night. Gangs of young people hanging around corners selling drugs.
- It's hurting a lot of people and their families.
- Kids standing at street corners/ intimidating
- The impact is grooming young children to selling the drugs for the big known gangs and feuds. As youth worker a lot of young people grow up under care of grandparents or with one less parent in home due to ongoing drug use, serving time in prison or death from drug overdose/ related illness.
- There is also open drug dealing and engagement of young people in drug selling, holding etc which young people report as distressing to see or get pressured into being involved in.
- Trauma due to feuds, deaths in community, growing up unstable environments.
- Drug abuse plays a role in many major social problems, such as cuckooing, drugged driving, violence, stress, child trafficking and child abuse. Drug abuse can lead to homelessness, crime, and missed work or problems with keeping a job. It destroys families.
- Too much pressure on young people to go into the drugs trade. Pressure then from all sides - dealers and police. Families plunged into debt. Young people forced into other crimes in order to pay debts ending up themselves as criminals. Mental health catastrophes ensue.
- Rising Crime. Poor parenting. lack of ambition.
- Drug depths / intimidating
- Homelessness

- Young people starting earlier / harder drugs
- Grooming of YP
- I live in and the amount lads hanging around smoking weed its getting scary at night, there security at night in my building were lads are coming in out dealing so I am wanting to move its anti-social
- Homelessness too many rough sleepers and a wide range of dealing.
- Anti- social behaviour. People scared to leave their homes. Drug related intimidation.
- The potential harm and danger they put themselves and other people in.
- Community morale is low.
- Visible drug taking and dealing openly in the street. very depressing seeing so many people obviously in addiction.
- Children seeing this as the norm. Children being used to carry drugs. Trafficked. Parents capacity very limited by drugs so the children suffer from neglect.
- Sense in the local community that society has forgotten about them.
- Criminalisation of children who are now caught up in selling drugs. addiction and all the trauma that comes with this for all families.
- The same drug dealers and families operate with impunity in the NEIC over decades. Disempowerment of the community due to the open drug use, over medication by GPs. Not dealing with the underlying causes such as trauma and toxic stress, sexual abuse, intergenerational poverty, lack of progressive pathways out of inequity and inequality. lack of proper services to address the causes and consequences of addiction, creation of an economic subculture due to drug use and drug dealing.
- Children living in chaotic households with no consistency.
- Children going into care with foster families OR extended families.
- Children not getting the head start support they deserve in their young lives.
- Lack of access to drug treatment centres for parents.
- Families and children seeing it as the norm.
- Blatant open drug dealing in people's faces day in and day out.

Question 2: What do you think is currently working in addressing the issue of problematic drug use in the NEIC?

- Existing drug prevention programmes are working but there is not enough of them to engage all young people for whom it should be essential either in school or in community based organisations.
- I am not sure if the current services or efforts are working to address the issue of problematic drug use. There is not enough Gardai presence, drug dealers rule the streets, and you very much are at the mercy of dealers. I personally haven't been targeted as they know I work in the community, but I have seen other people be harassed and shouted at walking down the street.
- Creating awareness, groups, information meetings, CE schemes, programs aimed at harm reduction and recovery.
- Nothing there should be more places opened up to help them.
- Wider structures working together to support families and young people and those who are experiencing addiction.
- Cross sectoral engagement i.e. garda, community organisations, community members i.e. recent dual diagnosis pilot work through recovery college.
- There are many addiction / recovery programmes such as SAOL Project, Crinan and Soilse doing amazing work with people who use drugs.
- Dr. Daniel Shaw at the University of Pittsburgh is looking at whether teaching healthy caregiving strategies to parents can help promote self-regulation skills in children and prevent substance abuse later on. Starting when children are two years old, Shaw's study enrolls families at risk of substance use problems in a program called the Family Check-Up. It's one of several parenting programs that have been studied by NIH-funded researchers.
- JLO officers running restorative conferences acknowledging that children are involved in criminal networks and can't stop dealing drugs for many reasons. other trauma informed practices, the LEAR programme also.
- Clinics and addiction services are present. They probably need to be restructured and numbers increased.
- Taking a 'fix the individual' approach rather than addressing the systemic failures of the criminal justice and health system. Need for more trauma informed and dual therapeutic approaches.
- Awareness of drug intimidation as a problem in the community.

Question 3: What do you think is not working in addressing the issue of problematic drug use in the NEIC?

- Street dealing is allowed to continue unabated which normalises it for local young people.
- There is not enough recognition of the negative impact that street dealing has locally.
- AGS's (An Garda Siochana) frustration with local people not reporting crime when they are ignoring the serious implications of being seen as a 'rat' if they do report crime.
- There is a lack of prevention services, there is a lack of services for children between 8-13, the area need to work with the family effected by drug issues and trauma in a therapeutic way.
- Stigma attached to service users, poverty, the availability of programs, the high availability of drugs, not following through with the safe injecting facility.
- More availability for detox, rehabilitation beds for males but also females where can bring children.
- Criminalizing drug addicts especially women as effects can be detrimental for children in their care.
- More early intervention needed with young people and work done to identify young people at risk of getting involved in selling or holding drugs and responses.
- Properly funded family supports work with children therapies affected by trauma of parents in addiction.
- Issues between state bodies and community i.e. closing of drug task force for many months and sometimes lack of collaboration and communication by state.
- Addressing root causes of why people use drugs- poverty, discrimination of the NEIC community, criminality in wider community and witnessing trauma, intergenerational issues -parents mental health, lack opportunity etc
- Criminalisation of addicts keeping generations in cycles of poverty. Not legalising weed meaning it's not safe and the prohibitive cost driving young people to crime.
- Grooming of young people not being tackled.
- Offering methadone only there could be another alternative offered like subtext etc.
- Criminalisation of drug users. could be decriminalised and addressed as a health problem.
- Lack of community garda visibly present in NEIC thus drug dealing and supply happening in broad daylight.
- A lot of the dealing is being contained in the NEIC. It was moved from city centre and left here.

Question 4: What are the current gaps in service delivery for people impacted by problematic drug use?

- There are not enough Community Gardai on the streets to act as a deterrent or to develop positive relationships with young people.
- There is a lack of therapeutic support for families in the area that have been impacted by drug use, trauma and intergenerational trauma. The area should have a Systemic Family therapy team to address these systemic issues in families to break the cycle.
- We need more counsellors, more wrap around services.
- Funding, not having enough programs for service users, long wait times for people to get into services.
- Access to treatment, stabilisation, recovery, wellness and counselling in an affordable and timely fashion.
- More support for people who return after seeking treatment i.e., wrap around supports
- Family support, therapy for families, support after returning from prison etc.
- Ongoing need for dual diagnosis support for people using drugs and who had or have developed mental health issues /diagnosis.
- A health related approach from all services will enable gaps to be identified and lessened.
- Recovery cafes, also recovery coaches in every methadone clinic; safe spaces where people in addiction can meet with their peers and chat; make recovery visible.
- Not enough rehab facilities in or around the area for habitual drug use.
- We need more community lead projects not statutory run agencies. People working on the ground delivering services.
- The whole family needs to be involved in the treatment plan run by an interagency approach.
- Addiction Service is primarily an opioid treatment service. it needs to expand both with premises, services and staff.
- Addressing trauma at an early age, and throughout life, offering progressive and rewarding pathways out of poverty and inequity. Decriminalization and legalization of non-class A drugs. Increasing access to multidiscipline supports for addiction and other trauma induced adverse behaviours.

Question 5: How do we ensure the voice of communities are included at every stage of developing and implementing responses to the impact of drug-related harms?

- There is a need for open community meetings to discuss this issue and for locals to feel they have somewhere to bring their issues.
- There is a need to build solidarity between local people so that individual people do not feel isolated and worry about being targeted if they raise an issue.
- Invite the community to meetings in local locations such as youth clubs, GAA clubs and community centres.
- Consultation, transparency, information meetings, more supports for service users and families affected by drugs, more resources to pay for things to keep people occupied, going around meeting with the community and listening to what the issues are and coming up with solutions to the issues, quicker wait times for services.
- Addressing the relevant authorities and trying to impact the needs for supports for addictions Engaging with people who are in recovery but also people who are still using drugs not excluding them.
- Identifying or asking several groups to nominate people to give opinion insight at every stage of policy process and to roll out some changes where possible.
- Work with organisations in community to ensure change is sustainable and engages with all.
- Identify smaller bits of work i.e., families or young people and work with organisations or some ppl from those groups as they can often be left behind when we talk about people who use drugs.
- Being conscious of all the influences and connections that people who use drugs have and seeing how to engage make change there.
- During the past 15 years, concerns about crime and violence have prompted increased law enforcement, prosecution, and punishment. But although the “get tough” approach may have contributed to recent reductions in crime, there are limits to its ability to enhance the public’s safety and general well-being in the long run. The reason is that it does little to address drug and alcohol abuse and addiction. Although these problems have had a fundamental impact on the criminal behaviour of 80 percent of inmates, only one in six of those who need substance abuse treatment receives it while in prison, and far fewer receive comprehensive intensive treatment with aftercare. As a result, our prison doors open to release tens of thousands of untreated or inadequately treated offenders back into the community every year. Most will return to a life of drug and alcohol use and crime.
- Ask them.
- Vital that locals are listened to and forums for feedback to locals are safely provided. Too often we ask for input but never follow up with the community as to where their views / concerns went and who dealt with them.

- By meeting people where they are at, people in addictions (drug use) family members, local community groups/ reps that are impacted by such issues as well service users. Need meet people where they are at and let them share their experience.
- Keep doing the research keep highlighting the lack of services, detox and treatment choice.
- Meet with people and families with lived experiences. Listen to warnings from people on the ground.
- This community has been disempowered. I'm not sure if the voice of the community can be captured.
- By using the local networks, ICON, YPAR, Coalition.
- Focus Groups in safe environments where residents/community are.
- The responses need to be local; they need to be community based, they need to involve the people most affected by the problem in finding solutions that work for their communities, and they need to be adequately resourced.
- Increase local consultation on tackling drug dealing.
- Legalising small amounts of drugs (Portugal model), more policing, introducing safe injection facilities.
- Acknowledge people everywhere use drugs however by criminalizing those who are coming from marginalised and poorer backgrounds we are creating cycles of addiction and crime and creating much worse outcomes compared to those in affluent areas.
- I do think supply and demand is hard to deal with however more resources should be allocated to gardai and also early intervention to prevent young people getting involved in drug gangs and organised crimes. Work done to break intergenerational family crime networks.

Any further comments

- The area is traumatized with impacts on drug use, stemming from intergeneration trauma, crime violence, drug use, poverty and homelessness.
- Drugs has been a problem for a long time. More services are needed in the area. I'd say 90% of the population is taking cocaine. In the area poverty is on the rise and this has increased people's drug use. If you advocated for the legalisation or decriminalisation of small amounts of personal use drugs it would stop people getting silly charges which in turn effects job possibilities due to not been able to get Garda clearance (nearly every job requires this) and put drug dealers out of business. Young people need to be kept busy and off the street.
- Grooming is a big thing that you can see daily with young people going around on scooters selling the drugs.
- A lot more work needs to be done to support those using drugs families and young people to help create better life for those in the north east inner city and all over Ireland. Wishing the assembly best of luck in working to achieve this 😊

- Prescription drugs have now taken over from illegal drugs in terms of addiction. Glamourising and sensationalising criminals through the media is a game that distracts from the class issue at play. It's another way of demonising the working classes. We need to be a grown up society that recognises addicts as humans with trauma.
- Bring back our drugs task force to NEIC.
- Gone beyond urgent, children's lives are precious, and they deserve to live in a drug free zone.
- The operation of organised drug families and gangs must be severely challenged and dismantled to allow drug services to look after those who need treatment and support.
- Keep Civil Servants away from the process.
- Also need to take harm reduction approach and have more support for people who may not be ready to stop completely. Trauma and counselling to deal with underlying issues that bring people into chronic drug use.
- Legalise weed this disassociating it with other drugs and stopping it from being sprayed with chemicals. Alcohol is a much more poisonous drug that is let ruin our society because of the power of the Vintners Association.
- Conversations around legalisation, a young person can access drugs easier than smokes or alcohol.
- The government and policing policies have to be on the same page and make sure that there is a concerted effort to remove drug from the inner city once and for all too many half-hearted tried in the past.
- Groups and agencies working together. Listen to communities and engage with them.
- Go after the big pushers and stop using the kids to sell for them.
- Laws against grooming being enforced.
- Consistent Garda presence. arrests, moving people on and taking back owner ship of the area by the current initiative of pro-social events and festivals in the area.
- Joint approach from policing, health and other depts.
- When the legislation come in, groomers and traffickers of children need to be pursued with vigour and when convicted be put on child groomers register akin to a sex offenders register.
- Decriminalize, regulate, combat poverty, enable people's agency to make informed judgements and ensure access to health and healing support for people in addiction.
- The need for early intervention and more education and information on drugs within the school settings.
- More resources for treatment, prevention.