



Ministerial meeting of the Misuse of Substances work sector

11 March 2021

COMMUNIQUÉ

The importance of Health and Social initiatives to address problematic alcohol and drug use was one of the key messages from the British-Irish Council¹ 'Misuse of Substances' work sector Ministerial meeting held today via a virtual format and hosted by the Government of Ireland.

The Government of Ireland chairs this work sector and Ministers were welcomed to the meeting by Frank Feighan, T.D. Minister of State for Public Health, Well Being and the National Drugs Strategy.

The BIC Ministers were informed about the work across all Member Administrations taking forward 'Financial mechanisms to reduce the consumption of alcohol'. Ministers noted the efforts of Member Administrations to decrease alcohol consumption and agreed that there was value in comparing approaches and sharing learnings from the emerging evidence base.

Ministers were also apprised on the work to 'Measure the effectiveness of addiction services and harm reduction strategies' in Member Administrations. In this regard

¹ The BIC, established under the Agreement reached in the Multi-Party Negotiation in Belfast on Good Friday 1998 is a forum for its eight Member Administrations to exchange information, discuss, consult, and use best endeavours to reach agreement on co-operation on policy areas of mutual interest.

Ministers recognised the importance of effective monitoring and evaluation to ensure policy and practice is developed, based on sound evidence and that sharing this diversity of knowledge, understanding, experiences and learning across Member Administrations affords a unique resource for enhancing monitoring and evaluation.

Ministers acknowledged and reaffirmed the significant benefit gained by Members Administrations from collective participation in the BIC Misuse of Substances work sector.

Looking forward, in discussing and approving the Forward Work Plan of the work sector, Ministers acknowledged the challenges for the sector in the coming years and agreed that focus should be on the following five themes:

- Consider the lessons of Covid-19 and the delivery of drug and alcohol services;
- Reduce the risk of drug related deaths;
- Reduce alcohol related harms through the use of financial mechanisms;
- Consider joined up approaches to meeting the health and social needs of people who are homeless and use drugs and alcohol (in conjunction with the BIC Housing work sector); and
- Engage with the voluntary and community sectors to consider their role in the provision of drug and alcohol services, and in the development and monitoring of policy.

Ministers also had the opportunity to listen to a Presentation by Professor Dame Carol Black² on prevention, treatment and recovery which they considered very informative and timely. Concluding the meeting Ministers thanked officials in each of the

² Professor Dame Carol Black has been undertaking a Review of Drugs in England for the UK Government Department of Health & Social Care. The Presentation focused upon Part 2 of her Review and provided insight into lessons learned from the review study. The overarching aim of the review is to ensure that vulnerable people with substance use need get the support to recover and turn their lives around in the community and in prison.

Administrations for their active engagement in the Work Sector and looked forward to regular updates on the progress on the Work Plan over the coming years.

The meeting was chaired by Frank Feighan, T.D. Minister of State for Public Health, Well Being and National Drugs Strategy, Government of Ireland. The Government of Guernsey was represented by Deputy Al Brouard, President: Committee for Health & Social Care. The Isle of Man Government was represented by Hon Ray Harmer MHK, Minister for Policy and Reform. The Government of Jersey was represented by Deputy Trevor Pointon, Assistant Minister for Health and Social Services. The Northern Ireland Executive was represented by Robin Swann, MLA, Minister of Health and Deirdre Hargey, MLA, Minister for Communities. The Scottish Government was represented by Mairi Gougeon, MSP, Minister for Public Health, Sport & Wellbeing and Angela Constance, MSP, Minister for Drugs Policy. The UK Government was represented by Jo Churchill, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Prevention, Public Health and Primary Care. The Welsh Government was represented by Eluned Morgan, MS, Minister for Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language.

British-Irish Council Secretariat

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