



# Youth Work Ireland

**Department of Health Strategy Statement  
July 2011**



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Youth Work Ireland is a federation of local youth services throughout the country who work in the interest of young people through the provision of a range of services and who share a common ethos and approach.

## Our Vision

Youth Work Ireland has a clear and unambiguous view of the kind of society we want to contribute to developing.

Our vision states this clearly as:

*'A more equal and sustainable world where all young people are valued and involved.'*

## Our Mission

Our mission is:

*'to contribute to changing society for the benefit of young people.'*

We will achieve this by deploying the resources of the Federation, both nationally and at a regional level through the engagement of Boards, staff and countless volunteers in order to:

- Promote quality youth work
- Build our capacity
- Work to realise the rights of young people
- Influence decision making and policy

## Our Beliefs

We have a positive view of young people, their dignity and worth

All young people have rights and should be supported to realise these

Young People have the potential to effect change



## Department of Health Statement of Strategy

In 2004 Youth Work Ireland carried out a national youth poll of over 1,000 16-18 year olds on issues that mattered to young people. Health was one of the leading issues and it is interesting to note that these young people reflected very much the priorities of the country in general.

We have sought to input on some of the critical areas of policy that impact on the young people we work with and which fall under the remit of the Department.

### Mental Health

The National Children's Strategy commits to ensuring "Children will be supported to enjoy the optimum...mental and emotional wellbeing" A vision for change sets out the headline objective of policy in this area and those relevant to young people need to remain a priority. The document recommends 99 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Teams. There has been progress towards this but more needs to be done and CMAHs need to be fully and properly staffed.

Children under the age of 18 continue to be admitted to adult units and this is a key failing of our current system. The ending of this practice must be a high level goal for the Department and the HSE.

### Alcohol

Some time ago the Government produced the Strategic Task Force on Alcohol. The document set out a very clear road map on dealing with Ireland's alcohol problems. Young people are impacted disproportionately by these problems and rates of consumption and binge drinking are some of the highest in the world in Ireland. The hugely negative impact of such a situation for our country has been well documented and there is an increasing understanding in the current climate of the huge economic impact of alcohol issues.

Alcohol is not an ordinary product and normal regulatory rules are not sufficient. The WHO has identified key areas that countries need to address when confronted with well above average consumption rates. Ireland's policy in this area is opaque at best. While there have been high level policy statements such as the Strategic Task Force Report and nominal commitments to the interests of children and young people, the impact of the drinks industry on regulatory issues looms very large.

There are three key areas of evidence based concerted action that should feature in the Departments work, and the Department needs to be a thought

leader across Government in relation to these if it does not have the actual responsibility.

Price: Allowing for changes in the CPI over the last 10 years there has been a real decrease in the price of alcohol. There have been no significant increases in excise duty despite the massive collapse in the public finances. This is a win-win situation for Government, a public health impact which raises much needed income for the exchequer

Promotion: The impact of alcohol advertising on children and young people has been well established. However voluntary codes still allow alcohol ads to be shown when hundreds of thousands of young people are watching. The link between alcohol and sport is particularly insidious and promised moves to address this appear to be tortuously slow. The voluntary approach in this area needs to be addressed and stated commitments in relation to sport realised

Availability: This is the one area where there has been reasonable progress but there is a lot of work to be done on remote and online access as media reports have illustrated

## **Counselling**

Local youth services often provide professional counselling targeted at young people. These services make use of the need for professional practice and development in the area of counselling. We would hope some greater level of support could be offered here as the youth service is a trusted source of support

## **Drugs**

While the official responsibility for this area may lie elsewhere the HSE is an important delivery mechanism. Youth services are important actors in local areas particularly in relation to prevention and early intervention. Their role and reach in this regard needs to be valued and recognised by local units in the HSE. The relative rapid response by Government to the issue of head shops was most welcome but concerns still remain about online access

## **General Health Promotion**

Youth Services play an important role in this area. The non formal nature of the educational and developmental work they do means issues can often be addressed in a more effective way than in the classroom setting.

## **Universal Health Insurance**

Moves towards such a system are to be welcomed but must ensure the role of dependents is clear and the situation of young people in transition particularly between 18 and 25 when they may be students, unemployed, moving regularly or just beginning work at lower levels of their careers.

## **Particular Conditions**

Young people generally are less dependent on acute health services. However there are particular conditions that do require prolonged interaction with these services. The most common is Cystic Fibrosis. Indeed the condition has been highlighted by some very prominent young advocates. The major commitments in this area need to be honoured in terms of self contained units in major hospitals and progress on a proper system of organ transplantation. Youth services may also be a fruitful area for Donor Card drives

## **Obesity**

This area has rightly been highlighted by the new Minister for Children. Better information and advice for parents along with good quality education in schools can help here and youth services are willing to play their part. The advertising and promotion of junk food to children particularly during programmes before the 9pm watershed should also be addressed.

Exercise and the habit of regular exercise is crucial to ensuring young people grow up in a healthy way. Local voluntary youth services participate in national sports events organised by Youth Work Ireland. The Department and the HSE along with Sports Councils should examine extending their reach to these community based services to further a healthy disposition amongst young people.