

# Irish Drugs Policy and the Citizen's Assembly



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SDF #StopTheDeaths Conference  
Glasgow - 27<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup> August 2025

# Citizens' Assemblies to date

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
<b>01  </b> <b>Convention on the Constitution</b>												Voting Age, Presidential Term, Role of Women and Women in Politics, Same Sex Marriage, Electoral Reform, Blasphemy, Right to vote for citizens abroad, Dáil Reform, Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
<b>02  </b> <b>Citizens' Assembly</b>												Abortion, Ageing population, Climate change, The manner in which referenda are held, Fixed Term Parliaments
<b>03  </b> <b>Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality</b>												Gender discrimination, economic and structural pay inequalities, participation and equal opportunities, early years parental care and work-life balance, the social responsibility of care
<b>04  </b> <b>Dublin Citizens' Assembly</b>												Directly elected mayor and local government structures for Dublin
<b>05  </b> <b>Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss</b>												How the State can improve its response to biodiversity loss
<b>06  </b> <b>Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use</b>												Legislative, policy and operational changes to significantly reduce the harmful impacts of illicit drugs on individuals, families, communities and wider society

# Citizens' Assemblies – Cost and International Context

## Cost in Ireland

- Funded by the Department of the Taoiseach
- Gender Equality Assembly (2021): Approx. €700,000  
(Excludes staff wages)
- Drugs Use assembly: Likely more costly, exact figures undisclosed

## International Context

- [OECD](#) Database:
  - 89 Citizens' Assemblies
  - 231 Citizens' Juries/Panels
- Organisational approaches vary across jurisdictions

# Three phases of a Citizens' Assembly

## Phase 01

### Establishment

- Government initiates the Citizens' Assembly
- Initial proposal typically set out in the Programme for Government
- Followed by a Government Decision
- Oireachtas formally establishes the Assembly and sets Terms of Reference

## Phase 02

### Operation

- Chairperson appointed
- Members recruited
- Meetings held
- Recommendations agreed
- Report drafted



## Phase 03

### Reporting

- Report submitted to Oireachtas
- Oireachtas Committee responds to recommendations
- Government then responds in detail to the recommendations



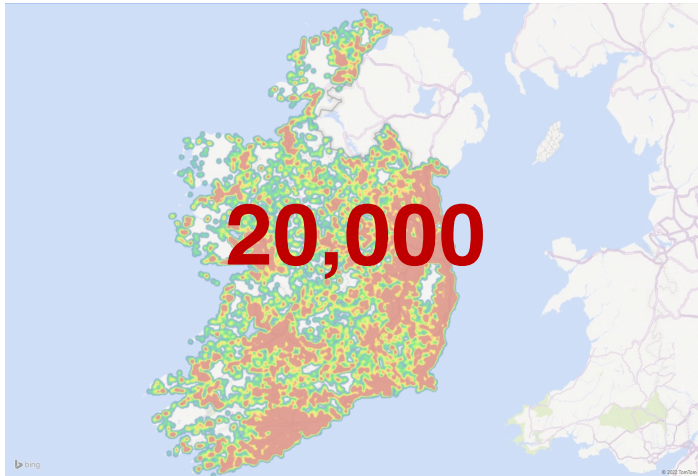
# Membership

<b>01</b> 100 Members	99 members	An independent Chairperson
<b>02</b> General Eligibility	All adults normally resident in the state	
<b>03</b> Ineligible Groups	 Politicians	 Lobbyists
<b>04</b> Residency	Includes non-citizen residents	

# Member Recruitment

**RANDOMLY  
-SELECTED HOUSEHOLDS**

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**APPLICANTS**

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**RANDOMLY  
-SELECTED MEMBERS**

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# Demographically representative

Category	Group	Target	Total	Result	Total
AGE GROUP	≥ 65 years	20	99	20	99
	45 – 64 years	32		32	
	25 - 44 years	36		36	
	18 - 24 years	11		11	
GENDER	Male	49	99	48	99
	Female	50		50	
	Non-binary	-		1	
LOCATION	Dublin	28	99	28	99
	Rest of Leinster	27		27	
	Munster	27		27	
	Connacht & Ulster	17		17	

## ***DIVERSE & INCLUSIVE***

**Four people** with disabilities, people from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, and **15 non-nationals** including **11 whose first language was not English.**

Other languages spoken included Latvian, Romanian, Polish, Mandarin, Arabic, and French.



# And a wide range of perspectives





# Inputs to proceedings

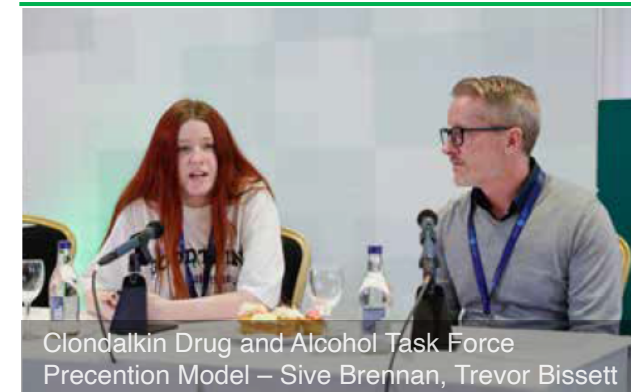
## Site Visits



## International case studies



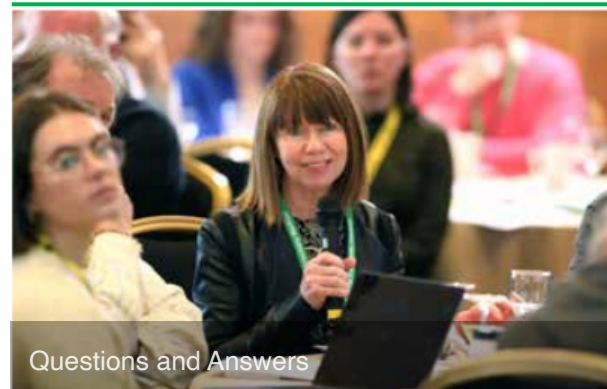
## Good practice examples



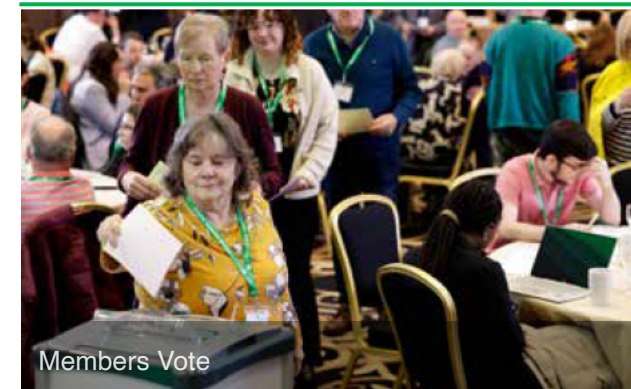
## Roundtable discussions



## Q&A



## Democratic decision-making



# Inputs to proceedings

## Expert inputs



Session -Prof. Mary Cannon, Joe O'Neill, Judge Ann Ryan, Paul Griffiths, Prof. Jo – Hanna Ivers

## Submissions to public consultation

CADU007	Cristian	Roman	No legalisation.	<a href="#">View</a>
CADU008		Name with Secretariat	Pro legalisation	<a href="#">View</a>
CADU009	Barry	Smith	Ireland needs to change their approach to dealing with drug use as the approaches in the past have not had any positive impact. Wake up Irelands, illicit drugs are present and will continue to be unless Ireland takes a more Liberal and supportive approach.	<a href="#">View</a>
CADU010	Colin	McGee	Drugs should be legalised and heavily regulated and taxed	<a href="#">View</a>

## Roundtable discussions

## Lived experience inputs



Contributuon from Karl Ducque

## Advocates and campaigners



Session 5- Graham Temple, Prof. Bobby Smyth, Prof. Anne Doherty, Eddie D'Arcy

## Service Providers



Session 2- Joe Kirby, Tommy Gilson, Dermot King, John Bennett, Brid Walsh, Prof. Eamon Keenan



# Coverage



**ALL PUBLIC  
PROCEEDINGS LIVESTREAMED**



**EXTENSIVE  
MEDIA COVERAGE**

# Recommendations on drugs use

## Oireachtas Committee

**59**

additional  
recommendations



## Citizens' Assembly

36 recommendations

Span the full spectrum of drug  
policy issues

Prevention, harm reduction,  
treatment and recovery

Examine implications of drug  
use on individuals, families,  
communities and wider  
society

## Government response

**2025**

Onwards



Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland



# The deliberative process



**01**

Clear governance, with rules, procedures and guiding principles to protect the integrity of the process

**02**

Strident efforts to ensure fairness and balance of proceedings, with high-quality deliberation, supported by professional facilitators, ensuring equality of voice and respect for all viewpoints

**03**

Ongoing quality control, monitoring of deliberative conditions

**04**

Members' feedback systematically obtained

**05**

Lobbying not allowed, and external pressures mitigated against

# Quality Control and continuous improvement

**Members**  
detailed evaluation  
data provided  
following each  
meeting

**Facilitators**

**Steering  
Group**



**Advisory  
Support  
Group**

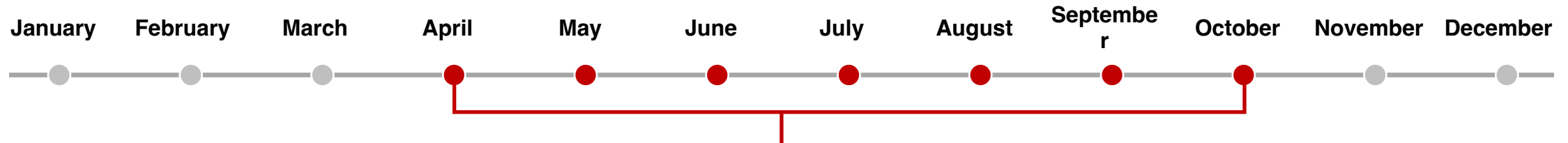
**Lived  
Experience  
Group**

**Deliberative  
Democracy  
expert**

**INFORMED BY REGULAR, SYSTEMATIC FEEDBACK**

# Citizens Assembly on Drugs Use

1 April to October 2023



## Purpose

- Examine drug policies
- Gather evidence
- Develop recommendations for reform

## Membership

- Reflective of the general population
- Selected to ensure diverse demographics

## Process

- Members learn from experts and people with lived experiences
- Then deliberate in small groups and larger sessions

A FINAL REPORT WITH RECOMMENDATION SENT TO POLICYMAKERS FOR CONSIDERATION

# Post–Citizens’ Assembly on Drugs Use

## Timeline & Next

### Steps

- **Oct 2023** – Citizens’ Assembly agrees 36 recommendations
- **Dec 2023** – Final report submitted to Government
- **June–July 2024** – First Oireachtas Committee holds hearings
- **22 Oct 2024** – Interim Committee report published
- **29 Nov 2024** – General Election held
- **18 Dec 2024** – 34th Dáil convened
- **23 Jan 2025** – New Government of Ireland formed
- **May 2025** – New Oireachtas Committee on Drugs Use established
- **Sept 2025** – Public hearings begin → final report due by **June 2026**

# 4 years 9 months gap?

## **Civil Service and Political Processes**

- Citizens' Assembly Report submitted: December 2023
- *New National Drugs Strategy (NDS): To be published before end of 2025*
- Oireachtas Committee Final Report due: May 2026
- Government Response to Committee: Q4 2026 (post-summer recess)
- NDS Mid-Term Review: circa Q3 2028

## **Time Gap**

- From: Citizens' Assembly Report (Dec 2023)
- To: Government response included in NDS Mid-Term Review (circa Q3 2028)
- Total Gap: 4 years and 9 months

## **Implication**

- Government response to Citizens' Assembly recommendations will be delayed
- Government response will not be reflected in the initial NDS
- First opportunity for integration: Mid-Term Review in 2028
- Highlights a mismatch between strategy development and political input

*Of course, there has been consultation for the new NDS, and the recently established NDS Drafting Committee is aware of the recommendations from the CA on Drugs Use.*

# Drug Policy in Ireland: Progress and Challenges

- **National Drug Strategy** under development.
- Critical Partners: **Civil Society** involvement in the field of Drug Policy (C-EHRN report 2024)
- **Decriminalisation**: Many Civil Society actors and Political advocates remain committed.
- New **Health Diversion** Scheme: initiative to be rolled out in Nov 2025 - as reported in the Irish Examiner.
- Pilot **Supervised Injecting** Facility: evaluation.
- Dublin **Drug Treatment Court**: evaluation.
- Back-of-house **Drug Checking** is available at two festivals this year.
- **Long-acting injectable buprenorphine** (Buvidal) is currently prescribed via HSE clinics.
- Whilst much work has been done to improve access, **Naloxone** remains a prescription-only medication in Ireland.

# Further information

## Links

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- [Home | Citizens' Assembly](#)
- [Citizens' Assembly on Drugs Use - Wrap Up Video](#)
- [Ministers for Health publish independent evaluation of the National Drugs Strategy](#)

# Thank you – any questions?

