



**Pavee Point Travellers Centre, the  
Irish Traveller Movement and the  
National Traveller Women's Forum  
Submission on the development of the  
National Drug Strategy 2009-16  
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## ***Introduction***

Pavee Point Travellers Centre, the Irish Traveller Movement and the National Traveller Women's Forum welcome the opportunity to submit our views to the development of the next National Drug Strategy 2009-2016. We believe that the development of this strategy comes at an important juncture in the development of responses to drug issues in Ireland in general, but also particularly in the Traveller community. We hope through this submission to highlight the current needs and gaps identified by Travellers and Traveller organisations and to present a practical policy framework through which these issues can be progressed.

This submission is structured in the following manner:

- An introduction to the current Traveller context in relation to Traveller issues
- An input on community development approaches in the development of culturally appropriate responses;
- Background information on the current issues, gaps and needs relating to drug issues in the Traveller community are contained in this submission for information and current contextual situation regarding drugs;
- A new direction: Proposed actions on Equality and Intercultural issues relating to drugs in the next NDS the final section of the submission;
- Concluding Comments

## ***Traveller Context: Tackling Racism, Social Exclusion and Problematic Drug Use***

The current and historical experience of Travellers in Ireland is one of racism and discrimination which in turn has led to social exclusion across a range of areas. As a result Travellers experience many of the risk factors that are well documented as contributing to problematic drug use in many other disadvantaged communities experiencing drug problems, including indigenous communities such as aboriginal and first nations along with Black and minority ethnic communities internationally.

The correlation between problem drug use and social exclusion and the multiplicity of issues that face Travellers in their day to day lives in Ireland could best be described as a 'web of causation' in terms of the cause and effect of drug misuse within the Traveller community. Travellers could be considered an "at risk group" for problematic drug use given the levels of social exclusion and disadvantage they experience which are comparable to other disadvantaged communities in Ireland which have traditionally experienced drug problems.

The issue of drug use and problem drug use is recent in the Traveller community (relatively speaking), however drug use and problem drug use is growing over the past eight years. In some cases stigma and denial continues to be attached to drug use and misuse within the Traveller community, although this is changing. Drug use is becoming increasingly normalised due to its prevalence and availability in local Traveller communities. This is coupled with the fact that there are an increasing number of

Travellers that are problematic drug users, not accessing any services or supports. Traveller organisations and indeed drug service providers would assert that Travellers are underrepresented within drug treatment services, however with no statistical data available on their access, participation or outcome from services, there is an information deficit in this regard. Currently, new and innovative approaches are needed to engage this group, particularly in the case of Travellers who are drug users and their families.

For Travellers who are drug users there may dual issues in terms of social exclusion, discrimination and drug use. As a result of being a Traveller who is also a drug user they may experience discrimination from other drug users and wider society as a result of their drug use. Some Travellers who are drug users are no longer living within the community due to stigma and shame; this is particularly the case for Travellers who are heroin users.

The risk factors that contribute to the development of problematic drug use are well documented in drugs research. The presence of many risk factors for the development of problematic drug use as cited in research are interrelated problems in the following areas: education, health, employment, accommodation, previous and current drug use, involvement in the criminal justice system, family, social networks and the environment including social deprivation, community disorganization and neighbourhood disorganisation. The evidence presented in the NACD report<sup>1</sup> on Travellers shows that disadvantage in the nine areas named above characterize social exclusion and the risk factors for problematic drug use within the lives of individuals, communities and families. Indeed many of the risk factors named above are day to day issues in the lives of many Travellers in Ireland today. In order to address problematic drug use within communities, reducing the risk factors associated with social exclusion and promoting the protective factors such the positive role of the family plus strengthening and supporting communities is vital to the development of a holistic and meaningful response.

Drug strategies developed without recourse to other social inclusion strategies will not address underlying causes of problematic drug problems within socially excluded communities such as Travellers. This therefore places an impetus on policy makers to respond proactively. The NACD report clearly highlights the need for collaboration between and across government departments that have sectoral responsibility for policy relating to Travellers and broader social policy contexts. This brings particular challenges in relation to the current lack of implementation of Traveller specific policies, however the strength of the current national drug strategy has been the fact that it is a cross pillar strategy underpinned by and linked into broader social inclusion measures. It is this strength that should be harnessed in the next national drug strategy. If the growing problem of drugs within the Traveller community is not addressed in urgent and coherent manner over the next number of years, the Traveller community may face similar issues to other communities who have been devastated by drug problems within inner city areas.

### ***A Community Development Approach***

Traveller organisations promote Travellers human rights and self determination. We are community development organisations that work on a range of issues affecting the lives of Travellers including the issue of drugs. Traveller participation and leadership is central

to all their work including drugs. In carrying out our work we are striving to develop a community response to drugs within the Traveller community. The purpose of developing a community response is to:

- Provide information and raise awareness within the community about drug related issues and to challenge attitudes and myths about drugs that may exist;
- Promote protective factors and reduce the risk factors which give rise to problem drug use by exploring and addressing the root causes of drug misuse which community development work promotes;
- Build awareness of local supports and services, reduce stigma and promote equality of access, participation and outcomes from drug services<sup>ii</sup>;
- Promote a Traveller analysis and voice to drug issues within the community which can be articulated to drug policy makers, drug task forces and service providers;
- Foster Traveller leadership and the development of culturally appropriate community development response to drug issues that reflects the needs of the Traveller community;
- Recognition that the experience and knowledge of Travellers must inform the development of any response to drug issues within the Traveller community.
- Promote Traveller participation in the planning, development and implementation of strategies that address drug issues and services within their community
- Ensure Visibility of Travellers as advocates and peer workers for their community within the area of drugs
- Initiate collective action within the Traveller community in the development of a Community response to the issue of drugs
- Empower the Traveller community to address the issue of drugs in a positive and meaningful way.

Traveller organisations deliver targeted initiatives to the Traveller community and compliment and support but do not take the place or do not seek to take on the role of mainstream services. The types of initiatives Traveller organisations have been funded under the national drug strategy to carry out have enhanced access and participation within mainstream services. Examples of the types of activities local Traveller organisations are involved in include drug education and awareness work with a range of target groups within the Traveller community including Traveller parents and young Travellers; outreach projects with drug users and their families to support access to mainstream services, community youth work with young Traveller men at risk from problem drug use, developmental and support work with current and ex drug users in conjunction with probation and rehabilitation services. At a national level, Traveller organisations apply a community development approach which underpins the work on drugs by actively promoting the role of the Traveller community in addressing the issue of drugs in a Traveller context. We recognize the importance of community development processes in mobilizing and facilitating the Traveller community to address drug issues.

## ***Current Drug Related Issues, Patterns and Trends within the Traveller Community***

In the course of the work of Traveller organisations the issue of drugs within the Traveller community is changing and worsening all the time. Traveller groups on the ground are seeing a growing drugs issue in both urban and rural areas within and outside Dublin, similar to the general population trends. Through our direct work with Traveller organisations and during the course of regional workshops on drug issues the following issues were identified during 2006-7.<sup>iii</sup>

### ***Drug Trends and Patterns***

- An increase in recreational use of cocaine within the Traveller community, particularly among Traveller men which in some cases is becoming problematic and will have future ramifications for current recreational users who are beginning to show signs of problematic use;
- The rapidly changing drug trends e.g. the age profile of Travellers using drugs becoming younger a worrying trend given the fact that the recent census shows that the Traveller population is a very young population with 35% of the total population of Travellers male and female between the ages of 15-34. International and Irish research has shown that the highest lifetime prevalence of drug use occurs between the ages of 15-34 year olds;
- Increased misuse of prescription drugs by Travellers;
- Increasing numbers of Traveller women and under 18 presenting to drug services as evidenced by drug services themselves;
- The fact that many Travellers are still not accessing mainstream drug services and not being targeted by mainstream drug services;
- Shifting trends regarding Travellers who are smokers with some becoming injecting heroin users;
- ‘Normalisation’ of the use of certain types of drugs within the Traveller community and its impact on younger Travellers e.g. cannabis and cocaine;
- Increased availability of drugs as a result of inter and intra community drug dealing results in increased access to drugs within the community;
- Recent research has found the level of drug awareness within the Traveller community to be quite low and this is noted section 3 of the NACD report is the ‘*overall lack of awareness by Travellers of drugs and drug use....*’ (Fountain, p96).

### ***Fall Out Issues***

- Travellers with co-existing mental health and drug issues including in some cases Travellers in prison and other institutions<sup>iv</sup>;
- Reports of self harm and suicide by Travellers who are drug users,
- Anti social behaviour, drug dealing and drug related crime within the Traveller community;
- A perception that homelessness is increasing due to drug misuse, including an increase in the number of Travellers who are rough sleepers, in 2007/8 a number of Traveller families are facing eviction due to their drug misuse, in particular heroin and alcohol misuse;

- The impact that the use, availability and misuse of drugs is having on Travellers who are drug users, Traveller families and the wider Traveller community including young people and the damage to Travellers sense of pride and community self esteem means that this is an issue which affects the whole community directly and indirectly.

### ***Traveller Inclusion within the current National Drug Strategy***

Emerging drug related issues within the Traveller community bring other dimensions and interfaces to the work of Traveller organisations and drug service providers as named above. These intersecting and cross cutting dimensions bring additional challenges to Traveller organisations and drug service providers and convey the need for a national drug strategy which is flexible and co-ordinated with other relevant strategies enabling appropriate responses. The many ‘fall out’ issues that occur within communities affected by drugs must be acknowledged and incorporated within the next national drug strategy and communities such as the Traveller community should be resourced and supported to develop culturally appropriate responses to these issues in conjunction with other key stakeholders.

The national organisations welcome the fact that drug related structures such as the Local and Regional Drug Task Forces are making concerted efforts to support Traveller inclusion within their structures and drug policy arenas. However, as shown by the publication of the recent NACD research report much of the work to date has been ‘ad hoc’ and not applied across the board in a uniform and strategic manner. At a national level, drug policy has begun to consider the specific needs of Travellers, particularly over the last three years; however the only official government policy recognition of Travellers within current national drug policy is **Action 98** of the National Drug Strategy to carry out the NACD research.

Through collaborative working between the National Drug Strategy Team and national Traveller organizations some policy changes have taken place e.g. the inclusion of Travellers as a community of interest within the guidelines for the establishment and development of the RDTFs; the completion of the NACD report and the development of an implementation plan for the report; the ‘prioritization’ of Travellers within the work of the LDTFs and finally the commitment of the NDST itself to pursuing Traveller inclusion within national drug policy. However, Traveller organizations would assert that a more formal approach to policy development is required as it has taken the advocacy work of Traveller organisations plus the good will of the NDST to progress on only a small range of issues over an eight year period leading to the frustration of Traveller organisations. This also negates against the development of coherent and timely responses, good governance and a whole system approach to national drug policy development.

### ***Evidence Based Approach to addressing drug issues in the Traveller Community: NACD report***

The national Traveller organisations have played a central role in ensuring that the NACD research took place, was disseminated and finally has pursued the development of

an implementation plan for the report's recommendations, which we fully endorse. We also recognise the implementation of the plan will require a more concerted commitment to collaborative working by all the key stakeholders involved, including Traveller organisations.

In summary some of the concerns identified by Travellers themselves in the report's findings about the impact of drugs on the community are central to the development of the next national drug strategy in terms of the individual, family and the community itself. One of the main issues Travellers who are drug users named was exclusion from family and community along with health related issues similar to those for other drug users. The impact on the family and the effect of drug use by a family member on family relationships, in terms of stress on families and the influence of drug users on other family members were also named. In relation to the community Travellers felt that drug use in the community results in the '**stigmatization**' of Travellers which is a concern particularly in relation to how the general population views Travellers. Travellers feel that drug use (separate to problematic drug use) has become '**normalised**' in the community, as in it was normal to see drugs being taken. Fears were expressed in relation to young Travellers growing up in the Traveller community and being exposed to drug use. Other related topics which Travellers discussed were the perceived increase in drug related crime and the challenge that drugs bring to Traveller culture and the Traveller community itself in light of the destruction drugs have caused in other communities.

Access to drug services arose as a theme with increasing regularity throughout the research process as an area that needs more attention. In the report barriers to drug service access by Travellers identified included five main issues named here in no particular order, these were:

- 1) The lack of awareness of the existence and nature of drug services among Travellers;
- 2) The lack of formal education e.g. literacy skills in terms of drug education programmes or filling in forms in drug services;
- 3) Stigma and embarrassment about drug use amongst Travellers which can result in drug users not telling their family about their drug use, the family knowing but hiding it from other Travellers and finally drug users and their family not wanting to access services;
- 4) Drug services not being culturally appropriate for Travellers and finally;
- 5) Racism, discrimination and stereotyping on the part of drug services in relation to Travellers.

***In light of the NACD report's findings and recommendations, the national Traveller organisations recommend that the actions from the implementation plan be included within the next national drug strategy. This will ensure progress being made in addressing drug issues specifically within the Traveller community over the next eight years.***

**The six recommendations are:**

- *Develop Procedures on ethnic monitoring within drug treatment reporting systems and drug service planning systems. These should be in line with current work being*

*carried out under the National Traveller Health Strategy's ethnic identifier pilot project and with international best practice.*

- *Carry out Equality Proofing of drugs policy and of drug service planning and delivery.*
- *Increase awareness amongst Travellers of drugs, drugs related issues and drug services*
- *Adapt the organizational culture of drug services to consider the cultural diversity of Ireland by considering Travellers' drug service needs in terms of the importance of the family, outreach work, nomadism, specific and generic services, literacy skills, appointments, waiting lists, social exclusion and work force development*
- *Implement an effective Traveller community engagement programme through a collaborative model of the Drug Task Force process.*
- *Conduct further research on prevalence and patterns of drug use amongst Travellers.*

### ***Incorporating Equality and Intercultural policy issues in the NDS '09-16***

This section of the submission will focus on the recommendations of the three national organisations on the inclusion of a dedicated section within the next national drug strategy on Equality and Intercultural issues. Travellers, similar to many target groups who experience inequality require a diverse response to drug issue to ensure and support their full inclusion within national drug strategy frameworks. International research and experience has shown that universal availability of services and supports do not necessarily result in equality of access, participation and outcome from services. In Ireland current research on Travellers, ethnic minorities and women reflects the underrepresentation of these groups in drug treatment services and the lack of consideration of their needs in the course of service planning and delivery across a range of drug related initiatives<sup>v</sup>. The diversity of need for many communities and groups is not currently being planned for or met by national drug policy. The concept of Diversity is used here as a general term not one which specifically identifies *any individual approach but encompasses the range of approaches which share central concepts of anti racism and equality. (Pavee Point)*. The following recommended actions would supporting the mainstreaming of equality and intercultural issues within the next national drug strategy, including those relating to Travellers.

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#### **1) National Governance Framework**

The next national drug strategy should contain a section with a statement of intent as to how equality and intercultural considerations including dedicated actions on same will be rolled out locally, regionally and nationally for Travellers, ethnic minorities and other groups experiencing inequality.

##### **Action 1**

The development of a governance framework and the identification of key stakeholders who would be responsible for various actions<sup>vi</sup> necessary to develop the actions with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms built in to progress reporting in this regard.

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#### **2) Local and Regional Delivery of Drug Services and Supports**

The UK model in their current drug strategy<sup>vii</sup> provides for the equivalent of drug task forces the DAAT to develop action plans as to how they will ensure the needs of various

diverse communities will be met across all areas. A similar process should be considered in an Irish context.

### **Action 2**

All community participatory structures, area action plans, research, data collection systems, drug treatment service commissioning and service delivery, monitoring and evaluation tools would be inclusive of ethnic minorities and other diverse communities and groups demonstrated through action plans and service level agreements at a local and regional level and signed off by the funding body.

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### **3) Research Development**

There is a deficit of research on equality, diversity and intercultural approaches to drug issues in Ireland, which results in a lack of qualitative and quantitative information and direction on the experiences and needs of specific target groups in relation to drug services. An action on what supports the NACD could provide to address this deficit in information should be developed.

### **Action 3**

In order to support best practice, a review of current work in the Irish context in drug services and other areas of work by NGOs, current national and international research on Black and Minority communities and other diverse groups including models and approaches should be carried out by the NACD for consideration as to their application by the NDST. Consideration should be given to carrying out further research on foot of the above review.

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### **4) Policy Development**

Current drug policy development on the use of administrative tools to promote equality and inclusion within drug service development has not figured prominently to date within policy discussions. These tools are however being used in other policy arenas in Ireland. A policy review should be instigated and its purpose would be to focus on current best practice regarding *equality proofing and impact assessment, data collating and reporting on diversity issues, ethnic monitoring, and positive action initiatives* which can in turn become part of national drug policy.

### **Action 4**

A review of the use of these tools in other areas should take place and adapted for use within a drug policy context. A plan of action on the development, roll out (including training), monitoring and review of same in a national, regional and local level should be carried out.

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### **5) Community Sector**

The section on Equality and Intercultural issues should include an action regarding the support mechanisms for representative structures to be put in place for Travellers, ethnic

minorities and other diverse communities by the strategy and sub structures i.e. the national drug strategy team, drug task forces. These structures would support the participation of these communities and their representatives.

**Action 5** Under the auspices of the next strategy, a national independent forum on equality and intercultural issues should be instigated which would meet quarterly to advise the minister and the NDST on issues pertaining to drugs and equality issues and to discuss the progress being made by the strategy in this regard. A representative from the forum should be nominated onto the NDST as a Community representative.

**Action 6** Under this action a clear statement should be made on the role of communities and community development organisations within the strategy plus practically how the strategy will support the participation of Travellers, ethnic minorities and other diverse groups.

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### **6) Training and Quality Assurance**

In order to achieve many of the above actions training for those working in drug services, drug task forces and other related disciplines will be required e.g. administration and use of ethnic monitoring, equality proofing, information on models of best practice in the delivery of services to underrepresented communities, anti racism training, guides and criteria for developing action plans inclusive of equality and intercultural perspectives etc

**Action 6** Training needs assessment audit developed and administered to the key stakeholders with an attendant training programme co-ordinated and delivered over the life time of the strategy providing supports and ensuring best practice and seamless delivery. NGOs working with Travellers and other diverse communities would have a key role to play in the delivery of a range of training in this regard.

### **Concluding Comments**

If real progress is to be made in tackling the growing drug problem in the Traveller community then the implementation of the recommendations of the NACD report is crucial. The inclusion of the implementation plan actions in the next national drug strategy coupled with a formal commitment to a whole system approach to equality and intercultural considerations would make huge incremental changes over the next eight years. Finally, as noted in the beginning of this submission, the context of drug issues within the Traveller community cannot be examined or addressed in isolation. The ongoing social exclusion that shapes the everyday lives of Travellers exacerbates the risk of problematic drug use within the Traveller community. This can only be addressed by Government strategies and policies regarding Travellers plus broader social inclusion policies working in conjunction with the national drug strategy. Traveller organisations also have their role to play and we will continue to do so over the life time of the next national drug strategy as we have done over the past eight years.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> An overview of the nature and extent of illicit drug use amongst the Traveller Community: an exploratory study by Professor Jane Fountain, National Advisory Committee on Drugs, government publication, October 2006

<sup>ii</sup> The term ‘drug services’ is used as encapsulating term throughout this submission is inclusive of the five pillars in many instances unless stated otherwise etc

<sup>iii</sup> Regional Workshops with Travellers, Traveller organisations, the NACD and Regional Drug Task Forces (reports on these workshops available from Pavee Point)

<sup>iv</sup> Psychiatric morbidity among male prisoners in the Irish Prison System (two publications) See recent publication by the Irish Psychiatric Journal 2006(23) 2 p54-62 by D. Duffy, S. Linehan and Harry G. Kennedy, also Psychiatric morbidity among women prisoners in the Irish Prison System See recent publication by the Irish Psychiatric Journal 2006(23) 2 p47-53 by B.Wright, D. Duffy, K. Curtin, S. Linehan, S. Monks and Harry G. Kennedy.

<sup>v</sup> See Drugs and Diversity: exploring drug issues within new communities and the Traveller community, seminar Report Merchants Quay Ireland and Pavee Point Travellers Centre, May 2007 available on [www.paveepoint.ie](http://www.paveepoint.ie) some of the issues identified in this seminar report were:

- That this issue is a complex issue but not rocket science
- A focus on models of good practice and what works elsewhere ( this can be found under section six of the report, Developing Intercultural Responses and Promoting Best Practice)
- Services should ensure cultural competence in service delivery
- The importance of Drug User and Ex-User Involvement
- The importance of outreach work and flexible approaches to work

<sup>vi</sup> This development would be in line with the National Action Plan against Racism, the HSE Intercultural Health Strategy, other related strategies plus current government legislation on equality

<sup>vii</sup> Drugs: Protecting Families and Communities 2008-2018 strategy, the Home Office, UK government publications