

Members of the Oireachtas,

The scale of the ongoing public health crisis around drugs prompted the establishment of the Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use. Their conclusions have been explicitly endorsed by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Drug Use. The evidence laid out has made it clear we cannot continue with a status quo that alienates, stigmatizes, and punishes people who use drugs.

It is confounding that this government continues to do more of the same when we have all the evidence it's making things worse AND it's not what the public, experts or members of the dedicated Oireachtas Committee want. This comes after hundreds of hours spent considering expert testimony, including those who cautioned against decriminalisation, through the model of deliberative democracy Ireland has been praised for pioneering.

The government has repeatedly stated their drugs policy is guided by a "health-led" approach, yet they have rejected the key means of achieving this. The Citizens' Assembly, upon considering the international policy evidence, called for the decriminalisation of the person using drugs. The cross-party Oireachtas Committee has provided clear evidence-based guidance on how and why this can be achieved.

Yet senior figures in government and law enforcement are dismissing their findings offhand, in spite of the demonstrable harms of continuing to address this health crisis through policing rather than healthcare.

We know from speaking to individual representatives from all political parties, that there is broad support for modernising Ireland's drugs laws, reflecting popular support from the Irish people.

We call upon Oireachtas members to push for a proactive, principled, and evidence-based approach to decriminalising people who use drugs.

There are three reforms in particular that should be enacted as a matter of urgency;

- Repeal Section 3 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, so that a true public health approach can be substantively pursued without stigma and marginalisation, as recommended by the Citizens' Assembly and three Oireachtas committees this decade.
- Reform Section 23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1977, to restore institutional trust through safeguards and recourse mechanisms around Garda use of stop-and-search powers, as per the 2014 Garda Inspectorate report.
- Engage with health professionals and international partners on developing and introducing pilot programmes for regulated access to lower-risk scheduled substances, as recommended by two Oireachtas committees this decade.

Yours,

- Cormac O'Loughlin, Brendan Minish and Chloe Victory on behalf of Crainn
- Peter McCarthy on behalf of An Glaiseacht
- Martin Condon and Aimee Brown on behalf of Grassroots Social Club Cork
- UISCE team and peers