

Five year plan to cut smoking rates

Smoking kills up to 6,500 people in Ireland every year and it is estimated that related healthcare costs account for up to 15% of all annual healthcare costs here. The HSE's new Tobacco Control Framework sets out a strategic plan to address tobacco issues over the next five years writes Martina Blake, Framework Project Manager.

The Tobacco Control Framework outlines our commitment to tackling the problem of tobacco related harm within the population as a whole and in particular within vulnerable groups such as children, adolescents and those at the margins of society. It provides a strategic plan to address tobacco over the coming five years and outlines national standards for service provision.

Why address tobacco use?

The social and economic cost of smoking is detrimental to society in terms of time lost from work due to tobacco related diseases, productivity losses, medical, disability and mortality costs. In high income countries like Ireland, smoking related health care costs account for between 6% and 15% of all annual healthcare costs, so controlling tobacco use in a comprehensive way is crucial to controlling costs within our health services.

The combined evidence of thousands of published scientific papers confirms that there is undisputable evidence that tobacco use has detrimental health effects for those who use tobacco and for those exposed to second-hand smoke (SHS). Second hand or passive smoke as it is otherwise known is defined as a class 'A' carcinogen by the US Surgeon General's Report.

Research tells us that half of all smokers are killed as a direct result of their smoking, and half of them die prematurely. Tobacco use is a significant cause of ill health (particularly chronic illnesses) and mortality in the population. As smoking is more common among lower socio economic groups, it exacerbates health inequalities.

There are still a significant number of smokers in Ireland. The decrease in smoking rates that was evident between 1998 and 2002 has now ceased with no reduction in smoking from 2002 to 2007. Overall rates for smoking were 33% in 1998, 27% in 2002 and 29% in 2007. It is estimated that there were 940,000 adult smokers in Ireland in 2007.

Tobacco Control Framework

The Framework considers the best available international evidence base in tobacco control and is modelled on the World Health Organisation (WHO) Report on the Global Tobacco Epidemic 2008.

The approach is called 'MPOWER' which stands for the six most important, effective and evidence based tobacco control policies:

- **M**onitoring of tobacco use and prevention policies,
- **P**rotecting people from second-hand smoke,
- **O**ffering help to people who want to quit,
- **W**arning of the dangers of tobacco,
- **E**nforcing bans on advertising, promotion and sponsorship, and
- **R**aising taxes on tobacco.

A Tobacco Free Policy for the HSE

The actions contained within the Framework which will be progressed over the next five years include the establishment of a tobacco free policy for the HSE, both indoors and on health service grounds. This will require extensive consultation, planning and communication both

from a management and staff point of view and will also amount to a huge cultural change for our service users and visitors.

The consumption of tobacco is a personal lifestyle choice for individuals (including staff). However as an organisation dedicated to “enabling people live healthier and more fulfilled lives” the consumption of tobacco within and on the grounds of our facilities is incompatible with the health promotion message and service we wish to portray. Health care services need to take a leading role in the prevention and reduction of smoking. Tobacco-free rules contribute to a reduction in smoking. They prevent ex-smokers from starting again. They prevent second-hand smoking risks. They are also a major element in fire safety.

Expansion of smoking cessation support services

Another action which helps us to achieve our corporate aim of achieving ‘*an integrated health and social care model*’ is the expansion of smoking cessation support services via GP’s, nurses in hospital and community settings, and other allied health professionals. Smoking cessation training standards to support this initiative are being prepared to quality assure our services in line with corporate policy.

Partnership

The HSE will implement the actions outlined in this Framework by seeking to address the determinants of tobacco use and reduce health inequalities. However, the health sector is not the only sector that will play a role in the prevention and treatment of tobacco use. Relevant government departments, including those responsible for taxation, together with social and community sectors, all have a role to play. The HSE will work and support these other relevant sectors to implement the actions that are outside the remit of the health sector.

The Tobacco Control Framework is an innovative evidenced based document which will support the HSE to set standards for service provision and it provides us with a strategic plan for tobacco control. We look forward to working with our partners to achieve our common goal.

* The Framework for Tobacco Control was developed by the HSE’s Tobacco Control Framework (TCF) project group, guided by a national steering group, in order to inform HSE policy and provide a coherent HSE response to tobacco use in Ireland over the coming years. A population health approach was considered as outlined in the HSE’s Population Health Strategy.