

## Press release

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# Government marks Pride Week

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**Government marks Pride Week by confirming historic convictions for consensual sexual activity between men will be disregarded, and package of LGBTQI+ measures**

- new law to criminalise ‘conversion therapy’
- online PrEP app under development
- €30,000 for HIV Ireland
- drafting underway on refreshed National Sexual Health Strategy

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Tánaiste Micheál Martin, and Minister for Justice Helen McEntee have today confirmed that Government will legislate to disregard historic convictions for consensual sexual activity between men.

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Roderic O’Gorman has further confirmed that conversion therapy will be criminalised.

Marking Pride Week, the Taoiseach and Ministers also confirmed a comprehensive range of measures including the development of an app for people to manage their own medical pathway with PrEP, drafting of a refreshed National Sexual Health Strategy, and one-off funding for HIV Ireland.

The new measures were announced at a meeting with LGBTQI+ groups chaired by the Taoiseach in Government Buildings today.

The Taoiseach and Minister McEntee confirmed that Government has received the final report of the Working Group set up to examine the disregard of historic convictions for consensual sexual activity between men.

The report contains 95 recommendations regarding the introduction of a statutory scheme to enable the disregard of relevant criminal records, including recommendations on eligibility standards, the application process and the offences to be included in the scheme.

Minister McEntee will publish the report of the Working Group in the coming days to mark Pride Week, and will consider the recommendations of the Group in legislating for a statutory scheme to disregard relevant convictions.

Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said:

“Ireland has become a proud, progressive, and modern State. We have made great strides to promote equality and respond to the changing needs of a diverse population. However, we are not naive to think that LGBTQI+ people don’t continue to face significant barriers to full participation in public life. The Irish Government is committed to the promotion and protection of LGBTQI+ rights and we will work to better the lives of all in the community. I am particularly pleased that we are now moving to disregard historic convictions for consensual sexual activity between men. This was a commitment I made previously and I’m really pleased this is taking a step further during Pride Week.”

Other measures include the following.

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## Criminalisation of conversion therapy

Minister O’Gorman will bring draft laws to Government this year to criminalise the practice of conversion therapy. The definition of conversion therapy is likely to encompass practices targeted at a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity, and which aims to ‘convert’ someone from homosexual to heterosexual preferences.

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## New online PrEP app under development

Government has also confirmed €233,000 in funding to develop a new app and online platform to help people along a digital health pathway for PrEP treatment. This is based on a successful model used in Brighton in the UK, and will ensure that users will have access to their results and other information, and allow clinics to manage their capacity for treatment.

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## €30,000 for HIV Ireland

A new garden space will be developed at the Dublin offices of HIV Ireland as part of their treatment of people with HIV. The garden will provide a space for onsite counselling and consultation. Healthy Ireland is allocating €30,000 in capital funding to HIV Ireland to landscape and refurbish facilities.

# Drafting underway on refreshed National Sexual Health Strategy

The National Sexual Health Strategy will be refreshed to take account of significant changes since the last policy was launched in 2015. Since then, Ireland has brought in marriage equality, provided access to terminations, launched a free prescription service for young women and the National Condom Distribution Service, brought in several PrEP measures, and launched a national free home STI testing service. The new strategy will take account of these changes.

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## Hate Crime

The new Hate Crime Bill will help to provide a safe, fair and inclusive country for all, reflecting modern Ireland. It has completed all stages in the Dáil and has now started in the Seanad. We hope to have it enacted this Autumn.

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## Increased resources planned for PrEP programme

Ireland has a successful HIV PrEP programme with 13 public clinics around the country, and 17 private providers. Last year some 4,314 people were approved for PrEP. Further resources will now be sought for the programme in order to keep pace with demand.

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# Quotes

Tánaiste Micheál Martin said:

“Ireland has come a long way as a country in our journey to achieve full inclusivity and equality. As we celebrate Pride, this government is committed to continuing our work to improve the lives of LGBTQI+ people who still face discrimination and challenges in their everyday lives. There is still more work to do to foster a society that supports and cherishes all people equally.

“The measures announced today, including a new law to criminalise conversion therapy, and increased resources as well as a new National Sexual Health Strategy will play an important part in our vision for a safe, supportive and more inclusive Ireland.”

Regarding the disregard, Minister McEntee said:

“Nearly 30 years on from decriminalisation, Ireland has become a much more tolerant society. But there are many people who still feel the hurt and stigma created by the laws that criminalised consensual sexual activity between men.

“Today marks an important moment in our efforts to exonerate those impacted by these outdated laws and address some of the lingering harms of the past. While we cannot undo the hurt inflicted on people who were discriminated against for simply being themselves, I do hope that today’s report brings us closer to something that can address the harm done to generations of gay and bisexual men.”

Regarding conversion therapy, Minister O’Gorman said:

"Conversion practices are cruel processes, rooted in shame and stigma. The clinical opinion, the evidence and the lived experience of those who have faced conversion practices are clear – such practices are ineffective, unscientific, and most importantly, profoundly harmful. The government is committed to banning this outdated practice, and I look forward to bringing legislation through the Oireachtas shortly."

Minister for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy Hildegarde Naughton said:

"I am very pleased to announce funding of €233,000 for a new pilot online platform for people receiving PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, medication to reduce exposure to HIV. The PrEP programme has been hugely successful since its launch almost four years ago, and this pilot project will allow for its expansion. Based on a model successfully used in Brighton, it will provide service users with their results and other important data online, reducing their need to attend clinics and freeing up capacity for services to take on new clients."

"I'm also pleased to confirm capital funding of €30,000 for HIV Ireland for a dedicated counselling space and community garden at its premises in Dublin. This will help support HIV Ireland's holistic approach to providing services for an often-stigmatised group of people living with HIV and AIDS."

Minister McEntee added:

"I want to thank the Working Group for carrying out the detailed and thorough work necessary to complete this report. I also want to thank all those who contributed to the public consultation, I know that the input provided through the consultation was invaluable in shaping the final recommendations for a number of key issues in this report."

“Both the Programme for Government and my department’s Justice Plan commit to putting a disregard scheme in place. I now look forward to considering the report’s recommendations with a view to progressing the introduction of a statutory scheme.”

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## Notes

Final Report and recommendations of the Working Group.

(<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/50699-final-report-of-the-working-group-to-examine-the-disregard-of-convictions-related-to-consensual-sexual-activity-between-men/>).

Summary Report on the Public Consultation. (<https://www.gov.ie/pdf/261370/?page=null>).

The criminalisation of consensual sexual acts between men in Ireland came into effect prior to the foundation of the State and remained in place until its eventual decriminalisation in 1993. This criminalisation is now widely recognised as an affront to human dignity and a significant historic injustice.

In 2018, the government announced plans to bring forward proposals for a scheme to enable the expungement (or disregard) of criminal records for qualifying offences, where the sexual acts involved would now be lawful. A Working Group was established consisting of representatives from the Department of Justice, An Garda Síochána, the Office of the Attorney General, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) and individuals from the LGBTQI+ community with expertise in this area to examine how this could be progressed.

In May 2022, the Department of Justice published the Working Group Progress Report, which contained a number of recommendations.

From 3 November to 9 December 2022, the Department of Justice held a public consultation on a number of the key issues related to the development of a disregard scheme.

This consultation received 148 submissions from individuals, LGBTQI+ representative organisations, other non-governmental organisations, trade unions and political parties and representatives. In between these activities the Working Group met eleven times with follow up and wider outreach activities between each meeting. This final report of the Working Group represents the culmination of all outreach and deliberation by the Working Group.

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