

High Level Taskforce on mental health and addiction

Addressing the mental health challenges of those interacting with the criminal justice system is a major challenge and while there are no easy fixes, this Government is determined to make sure that the right help and support is available for those that need it.

Considerable progress has been made on the Programme for Government commitment to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those imprisoned, and primary care support on release.

In April 2021, the Minister for Justice along with the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, and Ministers of State Frank Feighan and Mary Butler established the High Level Task Force (HLTF).

The work of the High Level Taskforce is continuing apace with an aim to finalise a report, including a high level implementation plan assigning responsibility and timelines for its recommendations shortly. It will then be submitted to Government with the high level implementation plan as soon as possible.

Minister McEntee met with Minister Donnelly as well as other relevant Ministers and the Chair of the Taskforce on 21 July and officials from both Departments have been engaging in further discussions in order to progress this matter with some degree of urgency.

Establishment of crisis intervention units as referenced in the HLTF recommendations

The establishment of crisis intervention units were recommended by the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland in their Report published in 2018. Crisis Intervention Teams are a priority project under A Policing Service for our Future, the Government's implementation plan for the Commission's recommendations. These will be specialist uniformed units who will work jointly with health professionals to provide a rapid and integrated 24/7 response to people with mental health issues.

Crisis Intervention Teams have become a globally recognised model within contemporary policing for safely and effectively assisting people who experience mental health crises or related problems within the community. The Crisis Intervention Team model promotes strong community partnerships among law enforcement, health professionals and appropriate follow-on support agencies.

Members of An Garda Síochána in the Limerick Division are leading on the implementation of a pilot project that examines, designs and resources a 24/7 multi-agency approach to responding to mental health related incidents.

The Assistant Commissioner with responsibility for Roads Policing & Community Engagement is sponsoring this important project within An Garda Síochána, while local Garda management in Limerick are engaged in the design, planning and eventual rollout of the project. The Limerick Crisis Intervention Team Project is currently in the consultation phase and is scheduled for implementation in Q3/Q4 2022.

The intention is that the pilot project will involve a co-located response unit comprising of a Community Psychiatric Nurse working alongside frontline members of An Garda Síochána to respond to calls from anyone in crisis.

The project team have engaged with an academic research partner from the University of Limerick who will assist in evaluating the project over a 2-3 year period. They will also assist the team with policy terminology and language in respect of vulnerability and eligibility criteria. A training programme is also currently being drafted.

The learning from the pilot initiative in Limerick will be of enormous value in shaping a model for Crisis Intervention Teams to be rolled out across the country and ensure that all people with mental health needs receive the support they deserve, and are diverted from the criminal justice system whenever possible.

2022 progress

- March 2022 Joint Steering Group (AGS Limerick & HSE Mid-West) submitted a 72 page Joint proposal document outlining the model and pilot design.
- March – July 2022 Joint proposal document shared between senior management of AGS & HSE with clarifications returning to steering committee
- August 2022 Joint steering group requested to complete a Project Initiation Document focusing on Strategic Alignment, Scope, Benefits, Deliverables, Milestones, Dependencies, Project Assurance, Project Risks, Project Issues, Project Costs, Project Structure, Stakeholder & Communication Plan, Project team description and key recruitment positions and Project Approval
- October 2022 submission of Project Initiation Document – request for approval
- Subject to approval – advertising and appointment of key new posts and the identification of dates for pre pilot implementation and Communication Plan implementation.

The joint steering group meet regularly at the HSE Buildings at St Joseph's hospital, Mulgrave Street (adjacent to Limerick Prison)

Ongoing consultations are taking place in relation to the research and evaluation of the pilot project with the University of Limerick.