

IMO / BMA Northern Ireland Joint Statement

Throughout the island of Ireland, mental health disorders and addiction remain significant medical and public policy challenges. Recession has had a major impact on mental health and addiction in Ireland and Northern Ireland with unemployment and loss of earnings contributing to increased levels of stress and anxiety in individuals which may contribute to a greater dependency on alcohol on drugs.

In addition, the onset of the recent global economic recession has had a particularly pronounced effect on the public finances and fiscal policies, diminishing the resources that governments have allocated to tackling issues of mental ill health and addiction.

North and South, the inhabitants of this island are, per capita, high consumers of alcohol and illegal narcotics. Consequently, they suffer from substantial rates of addiction and dependency on a variety of substances that pose dangers to individuals' health and well-being, and impact on family relationships and society in a number of ways.

Research has shown that the risk factors for mental health problems, such as personal financial instability, societal economic inequality, and unemployment increase in times of economic recession and can increase the prevalence of mental health illnesses among the general population, including increased levels of anxiety and stress and higher use and dependency on alcohol and drugs.

Over the last few decades, Mental Health Services in Ireland and Northern Ireland have undergone significant reform, moving from an out-dated institutional model of care to a model of community-based care, which is associated with better outcomes and improved quality of life for patients. Movement of mental health care into the community has been slow and chronically under-resourced. Recent public expenditure cuts in Ireland and Northern Ireland have had a further detrimental impact on the provision of community-based mental health services.

Doctors can play an essential role in refocusing the debate and influencing cross border and global alcohol, drug and mental health policy. This ensures that it is based on public health principles and results in better health outcomes for the individual, families and communities.

Mental Health

IMO and BMA Northern Ireland call for resources to ensure parity of outcomes for both physical and mental health and steps to address the unmet needs in people who have mental health conditions.

To realise this goal, and make 'parity of outcomes' a reality, action is needed to promote prevention and early intervention strategies; enhance training and workforce planning to

improve the quality of care these groups receive; deliver more joined-up care, particularly through improving commissioning and delivery processes; and encourage a greater research focus on mental-physical multi-morbidity.

IMO and BMA Northern Ireland call for resources to ensure that people who have dual psychiatric diagnoses, including alcohol or drug dependency, receive a high standard of care and that doctors have access to the appropriate training to care for patients with dual mental health conditions.

IMO and BMA Northern Ireland recognise the potential impact that economic austerity has on mental health and call on the two Governments to make the appropriate investment in services for people affected by mental health and addiction, including support for their families.

Addiction issues

Drugs

The BMA and IMO believe that doctors should inform drugs policy as they see first-hand the devastating effects of drug addiction on their patients and their families.

For policy to be effective, it must take account of the complex biological, psychological and social factors involved in drug use.

As doctors, we know that drug addiction cannot be seen in isolation, therefore a holistic approach to treatment is important.

We are calling on Governments in both jurisdictions to develop public policy initiatives concerned with drug misuse that focuses on health and wellbeing, with all drug users able to access the help and support they need.

Alcohol

Comprehensive policy measures are required in both Northern Ireland and Ireland to tackle the level of alcohol related harm, including ways to reduce its accessibility. Price is a key determinant of access to alcohol.

IMO and BMA Northern Ireland believe that action is required to:

- rationalise the structure of alcohol taxation systems to ensure that excise duty for all alcoholic drinks is proportional to alcoholic content
- ensure that excise duty on alcohol is increased above the rate of inflation

- set a minimum unit price for the sale of alcohol that is no less than 50p or 65 cents per unit

IMO and BMA Northern Ireland call for both Governments to bring in a range of measures to reduce the affordability and accessibility of alcohol, including stricter licensing laws, further restrictions on advertising, effective education and prevention measures and minimum unit pricing on a cross border basis.

Gambling

The IMO and the BMA call for increased resources to fund research and the development of treatments and services for gambling addiction.

In conclusion

The IMO and the BMA in Northern Ireland are calling on their respective Governments to ensure that mental health is put on a parity with physical health and that funding is appropriate to ensure the development of mental health and addiction services North and South of the Border

We ask that our Governments work cooperatively to reduce harm from addictions including, drugs alcohol and gambling misuse, on a cross-border basis where possible, for example in tackling drug trafficking.

We intend to work to ensure that doctors are appropriately trained in treatment of addiction and dual diagnosis both as part of the core curriculum and continuing professional development