



**8<sup>th</sup> November 2017**

**Press statement**

**College of Psychiatrists highlights alcohol's role in completed and attempted suicides and mental health difficulties as it calls for full support of the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill for discussion in the Senate today.**

Alcohol is at the heart of a great deal of mental health problems in Ireland. Psychiatrists and mental health professionals witness at first hand its damaging effects on patients' lives. This bill is an important first step to safer alcohol consumption in our society.

The harms caused by alcohol to mental health manifest themselves in many different ways and occur across the lifespan points out the College.

- We see **children experiencing severe emotional problems** against a background of abuse and neglect caused by parental heavy drinking.
- **Teenagers are drinking two years earlier** than a generation ago and this is **linked** to an **array of mood and psychological problems**.
- **Suicidal behaviour** can emerge in the teenage years with **one third of episodes alcohol related**.
- We know that **alcohol use in adolescents is associated with damage to the parts of the brain essential for memory**.
- **Half of all suicides are alcohol related**. Many of our adult patients with depression have their problems greatly exacerbated by their own, or by their partner's, drinking.
- Among **older patients, alcohol is increasingly a contributor towards dementia**.

*"The College supports the bill in its entirety, not a diluted version, to protect the mental health of our society and reduce the tragedy and devastation it causes through death by suicide, self-harm, addiction and negatively impacting the emotional development of our future generation"* explained, Dr John Hillery, President. *"What to drink is a personal choice but it should be informed."*

Dr Hillery continued,

*"This bill is not about ending alcohol consumption but sets out measures to lessen the harmful effects of alcohol advertising and consumption to aid those who are vulnerable and fight every day to resist its charms. We strongly urge that the Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is enacted in full and is not allowed to be neutered by the efforts of those who profit so much from the manufacture and sale of alcohol"*

Our politicians in the 1990s made a tragic error by deciding to treat alcohol as a grocery product. The resultant increase in availability and reduced cost then predictably contributed to substantial increases in use across the population.

Commenting on the impact to services **Dr Bobby Smyth**, Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist points out

***“While our patients pay an enormous price for this policy mistake, our mental health service finds itself struggling to meet the ongoing needs of our patients. It is very concerning to see that alcohol consumption is increasing once again as we exit the recession, rising by 5% in 2016 alone.***

***Politicians rarely have such a direct opportunity to have a positive impact of the mental health of the nation”***

Dr Smyth continued

***“We are convinced that this bill will contribute to reductions in suicide and reduce demand on our beleaguered mental health services. Resources currently used in addressing the entirely preventable devastation caused by alcohol can then be reallocated to other areas of important need within the services we provide”.***

The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill is a vital step in Ireland’s attempts to curb the carnage in our nation. It provides our current politicians with an opportunity to undo the damage inflicted on our society by their predecessors 25 years ago.

The Public Health (Alcohol) Bill aims to be effective in the following areas: minimum unit pricing, strict separation of alcohol products in outlets, compulsory health-labelling on alcohol containers, restrictions on advertising and promotions and its modest goal is to reduce average annual consumption in Ireland from 11 to 9.1 litres per person by 2020.

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland has supported previous initiatives to lessen the burden of alcohol-related harm.

**Ends**

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**Notes for the Editor:** The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland was formed in 2009. It is the professional body for psychiatrists in the Republic of Ireland. The Mission of the College of Psychiatrists of Ireland is to promote excellence in the practice of psychiatry.

The College of Psychiatrists of Ireland is the sole body recognised by the Medical Council and the HSE for the training of doctors to become specialists in psychiatry and for the continuing assurance of the career long competence of specialists in psychiatry. The College supports the delivery of mental health services in line with the recovery model and supports the delivery of the 2006 national policy on mental health services *A Vision for Change* in line with recommendations for adjustment 11 years on.