



Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy 2019–2029

Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Programme



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Foreword



I am delighted to present the Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy 2019–2029, which will guide the non-clinical training activity of the Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) over the next ten years.

This strategy builds on the current good practice of statutory and NGO partners in relation to training and will maximise the effectiveness of resources to address the sexual health education and information needs of the population as set out in the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020.

As Ireland moves towards a national and open conversation about sexuality and sexual health, the development of this training strategy is particularly timely. It supports the upskilling of a diverse range of professionals, which in turn will help promote the development and expression of healthy sexuality throughout the life course, in line with the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020 and the Healthy Ireland framework.

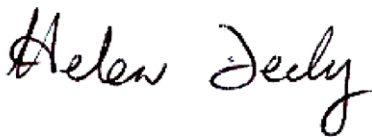
The challenge of the undertaking covered by this strategy is not to be underestimated. Matters to do with sex and sexuality were historically viewed as private or taboo in Ireland, so it is not surprising that personal discomfort plays a significant role in inhibiting the ability of professionals to raise and discuss sexual health with their service users. The training supported through this strategy will prioritise the development of participants' comfort and confidence in addressing sexual health matters.

Recognising that training alone is insufficient to bring about the required impact, the strategy will also support measures to integrate sexual health promotion into the core business of the relevant disciplines and organisations so that the learning of individuals who participate in training can be translated into their practice.

I would like to thank Alpha Healthcare for their assistance in the development of the strategy and all those who so generously contributed to the consultation process.

I would also like to thank the SHCPP staff who ably managed and inputted into all stages of the process: Moira Germaine, Education and Training Manager and Project Lead; Maeve O'Brien, Research Manager; and Anita Ghafoor-Butt, Communications Manager.

The SHCPP looks forward to working with all its partners during the implementation phase of the strategy.



Helen Deely

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1. Introduction

1.1 National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020

The Sexual Health & Crisis Pregnancy Programme (SHCPP) is a Policy Priority Programme within the Health Service Executive (HSE). It leads on the implementation of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020.

The SHCPP has developed this Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy in line with recommendations 3.20 and 3.21 of the National Sexual Health Strategy.

National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020:

- 3.20** Develop programmes for those working with vulnerable and at-risk groups to train them to recognise and respond appropriately to the sexual health needs of their clients, recognising and addressing the barriers to accessing services faced by many at-risk groups.
- 3.21** Incorporate training on sexual health for professionals who deliver sexual health education and prevention activities or who can incorporate sexual health into their core work and as part of continuing professional development.

These recommendations pertain to those professionals who work with the general population and those who have a specific focus on at-risk and vulnerable groups. The particular at-risk and vulnerable groups identified are: young people, including young people in care or after care; people with disabilities; sex workers; Travellers; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people; men who have sex with men; people who inject drugs; prisoners; migrants.

The SHCPP recognises that this list is not definitive and that not all individuals within these groups are at risk of negative sexual health outcomes or in need of additional supports.

1.2 National Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy 2019–2029

The SHCPP's Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy addresses the training of professionals to enable them to respond to the sexual health education and information needs of their service users. This comprehensive strategy will direct the activities and funding of the SHCPP over the next ten years.

The strategy will enable the integration of sexual health promotion into core support services within health, social care, education, community and youth work so that service users may be supported to make good sexual health choices.

The strategy will also ensure that sexual health promotion interventions are provided within a broader understanding of the specific circumstances and needs of the individual and of the population group.

See the Appendix for information on the context and development process for this strategy.

1.3 Scope of the training covered by this strategy

The training covered by this strategy will focus on increasing the willingness and developing the ability of professionals to broach sexual health topics with their service users and to provide sexual health education and information in a group or one-to-one context. In particular, it will be concerned with further developing professionals' comfort and confidence levels when raising the subject of sexual health and with providing a safe space for them to explore how their values and attitudes in relation to sex and sexuality affect their work.

Clinical training is not addressed within this strategy. However, the strategy does cover training for clinical personnel in relation to sexual health promotion activities.

1.4 Wider organisational supports

The SHCPP realises that the training of individual professionals cannot, in itself, change systems and that the transfer of learning into practice must be scaffolded by organisational supports. The strategy includes activities to encourage and assist relevant organisations to acknowledge sexual health promotion as part of their core work and to develop and implement relevant policies and practices to support service users and staff.

2 Vision, Mission and Values

2.1 Vision

The vision of the Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy is:

A population enabled to make good sexual health choices

2.2 Mission

The mission of the Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy is:

Through training and support, to empower professionals and their organisations to integrate sexual health education and information into their work with service users

2.3 Values

The values that underpin the work of the SHCPP in delivering the Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy are:

Promotion of positive and holistic sexual health

Mitigation of health inequalities

Promotion of respect for the individual and their circumstances

Partnership and collaborative practice

Evidence-informed practice

In addition, all decisions with regards to the funding, development and delivery of sexual health promotion training will be underpinned by a consideration of sustainability and cost-effectiveness.

3 Strategic Objectives

The Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy has five key strategic objectives. Each objective has a number of key actions through which the strategy will be delivered.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1	
Develop and promote partnerships and collaborative practice to advance sexual health promotion training for professionals	
Key actions	Enhance existing partnerships with sexual health promotion training providers
	Develop new partnerships with organisations that have the potential to support the sexual health promotion training of professionals
	Encourage and facilitate collaborative practice between provider organisations involved in sexual health promotion training of professionals
	Establish an appropriate networking forum for sexual health promotion training providers

There is a history of strong and productive relationships between the SHCPP, organisations involved in the promotion of sexual health and organisations engaged in the support of at-risk and vulnerable groups. The SHCPP will build on these relationships to strengthen existing partnerships and to forge new alliances in order to enhance sexual health promotion training for professionals. This objective will maximise the use of available resources by eliminating unnecessary duplication of effort and cost.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2

Build organisations' capacity to integrate sexual health promotion into their core work

Key actions	Work with higher and further education institutions to integrate sexual health promotion training into their mainstream, core curricula for relevant professionals
	Support the development of in-house training for health, social care, education, community and youth work professionals
	Encourage and assist organisations to integrate sexual health promotion into their core work through the development of policies and other supports for staff and service users

The SHCPP seeks to work in partnership with higher and further education institutions to integrate sexual health promotion training into relevant undergraduate education courses. The objective is to equip students with a basic level of knowledge and skills and to confirm sexual health promotion as a legitimate part of their future core work.

The SHCPP will also support organisations to develop their own, in-house, sexual health promotion training capacity, which will result in a sustainable training model tailored to the work of the specific organisation. This model will raise the status of sexual health promotion within the organisation and facilitate a unified approach to issues of sexual health.

In recognition that training is only one aspect of sexual health promotion capacity-building, the SHCPP will also encourage organisations to develop appropriate policies and supports to enable their employees to address the sexual health issues of their service users in a safe manner for all concerned. Such supports will allow the individual learning achieved within professional training to transfer more easily into client-centred practice.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3

Develop a quality standards framework for sexual health promotion training for professionals

Key actions	Work collaboratively with statutory and voluntary sexual health training providers to develop and roll out a user-friendly, evidence-informed quality standards framework
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Combining international good practice and the collective experience of statutory and voluntary sexual health promotion training providers to develop an evidence-informed quality standards framework for the Irish context will ensure a level of standardisation with regard to the quality and integrity of sexual health promotion training offered nationally.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4

Develop and deliver a standard suite of core and specific population group sexual health promotion training programmes for professionals

Key actions	Continue to adapt, develop and deliver the Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion as a core training provision on a nationwide basis, according to need, demand and available resources
	Complete an analysis of current training being provided for professionals on the sexual health needs of at-risk and vulnerable groups
	Work with statutory organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to develop and deliver sexual health promotion training programmes specific to particular at-risk and vulnerable groups
	Develop training on the needs of specific groups, based on consultation with those groups
	Address the comfort, confidence, attitudes, values, knowledge and skills of professionals within all areas of sexual health promotion training

This strategic objective focuses on the training programmes to be made available to professionals. It seeks to build on the success of the Foundation Programme in Sexual Health Promotion, and of the many training programmes offered regionally by NGOs, to develop a core suite of training programmes that can be offered to professionals on a national basis.

In addition to the generic Foundation Programme, the SHCPP will establish and meet the need for group-specific training programmes to develop professionals' understanding of the health, cultural, socioeconomic and legislative influences that impact on the sexual health of a particular population group. The training developed will be based on consultation with the relevant population group.

Along with the development of knowledge and skills, all training will address the comfort and confidence of professionals as enablers to the practice of sexual health promotion. Training will also include a consideration of personal and organisational values and attitudes and their impact on sexual health interventions with service users. The aim is to develop professionals' competence and willingness to meet the sexual health education and information needs of their service users in a manner that is unbiased, non-judgemental and appropriate to the individual or group in question.

All training will be in keeping with the quality standards framework (see objective 3) and will be appropriately evidence-informed, cost-effective and measurable.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 5

Develop an infrastructure to support the implementation of the strategy

Key actions

Establish a strategy implementation group of statutory and voluntary partners

Establish project working groups as required

The strategy implementation group will determine, establish and oversee any additional necessary infrastructure to realise the strategic objectives. It will be the responsibility of the implementation group to develop and deliver on agreed business actions, aligned with the overall strategic plan, including risk management, communication and reporting.

4 Interim Action Plan 2019

The Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy's interim action plan for 2019 is set out below. Detailed action plans for 2019, 2020 and beyond will be developed in partnership with the implementation group.

Action	Strategic Objective(s)	Commencement	Completion
Launch strategy	1	Q1 2019	Q1 2019
Establish implementation group	1, 5	Q1 2019	Q2 2019
Agree 2019 action plan with the implementation group, incorporating actions already under way	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Q2 2019	Q2 2019
Engage with key survey respondents to decide and progress ways in which to engage with the wider higher and further education sector	1, 2	Q2 2019	Q3 2019
Support the development of the sexual health element of Tusla's online resource to help staff to meet the needs of children in care and after care	1, 2, 3, 4	Q3 2018	Q3 2019
Fund and support the development of online training by LGBT Ireland	4	Q3 2018	Q3 2019
Fund and support the redevelopment of the Sense and Sexuality manual to support the development of sexual health policy post-training – particularly in the youth work sector	1, 2	Q1 2019	Q2 2019
Develop the 2020 action plan	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	Q3 2019	Q4 2019

Appendix: Context and Development Process

Sexual health promotion and vulnerable groups

Two of the most significant developments over the last decade have been the acknowledgement of the social, economic and political forces that influence people's vulnerability to sexual ill-health; and the recognition that sexual health is intrinsic to an individual's health and wellbeing. Sexual health experiences and outcomes are influenced by many factors, including sociocultural norms, legislation, religious beliefs and practices, education, changes in family structure and the media.¹

The SHCPP leads on the implementation of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020, which focuses on improving the sexual health of the population, with a particular focus on those at greater risk of poor sexual health outcomes. The strategy identifies the following at-risk and vulnerable groups:

- Young people, including young people in care or after care
- People with disabilities
- Sex workers
- Travellers
- LGBT people
- Men who have sex with men
- People who inject drugs
- Prisoners
- Migrants.

It is very important to note that this list is not definitive and that not all individuals within these groups are at risk of negative sexual health outcomes or in need of additional supports.

¹ World Health Organization, *Developing Sexual Health Programmes – A Framework for Action*, WHO/RHR/HRP/10.22, page 3.

Current environment

The development of the Sexual Health Promotion Training Strategy 2019–2029 was influenced by, and took account of, a number of existing, relevant national frameworks and strategies. It also considered likely future social, economic and legislative changes.

National frameworks, strategies and reports

Healthy Ireland is the national framework for action to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Ireland. Its main focus is on prevention and keeping people healthier for longer. Healthy Ireland's goals are to:

- Increase the proportion of people who are healthy at all stages of life
- Reduce health inequalities
- Protect the public from threats to health and wellbeing
- Create an environment where every individual and sector of society can play a part in achieving a healthy Ireland.

The **National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020** is a framework for the sexual health and wellbeing of the Irish population. Its aims are to improve health and wellbeing and to reduce negative sexual health outcomes.

The **Sláintecare** report is an all-party Oireachtas committee vision for the future of health care in Ireland. The report makes recommendations on expanding health and wellbeing, primary care, social care, dental care and mental health care. One of its key recommendations is to expand capacity in primary care and social care, including investment in community diagnostics, primary care teams, mental health teams, services for people with disabilities, homecare services and free GP care.

The 2017 **Report of the Joint Committee on the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution** includes ancillary recommendations relating to improvements in sex education in schools and youth clubs and to the provision of contraception. The Minister for Health has established a group to formulate an effective and comprehensive response to the issues raised by the committee. Work is under way to consider the nature and scope of a free contraception service and what the introduction of such a service would involve.

In 2018 the **Oireachtas Education and Skills Committee** undertook a review of sexual health and relationship education and matters relating to the areas of contraception and consent in primary and post-primary schools, colleges, youth clubs and other organisations involved in education and interactions with young people. The committee's chairperson stated: 'It is clear that this element of the current curriculum is out of date and in many areas, no longer reflective of society today.'²

2 Joint Committee on Education and Skills' hearing on Relationships and Sexuality Education, 15 May 2018, Leinster House, Dublin.

The **National Council on Curriculum and Assessment** also commenced a major review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in schools in 2018. The review covers both the content of the RSE curriculum and support materials, and the delivery of the curriculum to students. The review is likely to recommend further training and supports for RSE teachers.

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (Department of Children and Youth Affairs) is the overarching national policy framework for children and young people for the period 2014–2020. It aims to improve outcomes for children in physical and mental wellbeing, and includes a commitment to improve sexual health outcomes.

The **National LGBTI+ Youth Strategy 2018–2020** (Department of Children and Youth Affairs) is the first such strategy in Ireland and includes recommendations with regard to the sexual health.

Connecting for Life is Ireland's national strategy to reduce suicide 2015–2020. Connecting for Life sets out a vision of an Ireland where fewer lives are lost through suicide, and where communities and individuals are empowered to improve their mental health and wellbeing.

The **Irish Prison Service Health Care Standards 2011** commits to providing prisoners with services that may prevent illness and promote health, and with the information and opportunity to enable them to make reasoned choices regarding the adoption of a healthy lifestyle. Amongst other issues, the plan specifically addresses HIV, hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections. In addition, the Irish Prison Service's **Strategic Plan 2016–2018** commits to further developing the relationship with the HSE, particularly in the areas of primary care, addiction and mental health services.

The **National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021** is a cross-departmental initiative to improve the lives of the Traveller and Roma communities in Ireland. Under the strategy, the HSE has committed to a range of actions to address the health-related issues of Traveller and Roma communities in an inclusive and culturally appropriate manner.

Legislative changes and legal reform

Anyone working with children and vulnerable people needs to be clear about the associated legislation and their legal responsibilities under same. It is incumbent on the SHCPP and organisations that provide services to these groups to keep abreast of the legal framework within which we operate. At the time of writing, the following legislation is particularly relevant for those working in the area of sexual health promotion (this list is not definitive and is subject to change):

- The Constitutional Referendum on the Rights of the Child (2012)
- National Vetting Bureau Acts 2012–2016
- Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012

- Children First Act 2015
- Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017
- Children and Family Relationships Act 2015
- Criminal Justice (Female Genital Mutilation) Act 2012.

The Health (Regulation of Termination of Pregnancy) Act 2018 came into effect on 1 January 2019. This Act sets out the law governing termination of pregnancy and impacts on the way in which crisis pregnancy services are provided in Ireland. It will be important to keep abreast of these changes in the context of sexual health promotion training for professionals.

Strategy development

The SHCPP has developed this comprehensive training strategy to support the professionals and organisations who work with the general population and, in particular, with at-risk and vulnerable groups. It provides strategic direction for the SHCPP on how best to support individuals and organisations working in the areas of health, social care, education, community and youth work to build on their sexual health promotion capacity.

To date, sexual health promotion training for professionals has been provided by HSE Health Promotion and Improvement teams nationally and by a number of NGOs. With a few exceptions, SHCPP-funded training has largely been in response to local or regional initiatives. While there have been many examples of good practice, there was a need for a more strategic and standardised approach to meet the requirements of the National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020 and beyond, and to provide a level of equity in training provision nationally.

Consultation

To inform this strategy, the SHCPP consulted with stakeholders about the sexual health promotion and education needs of at-risk and vulnerable groups and the associated training needs of the workers who support them. These professional training needs relate to those at undergraduate level and to continuous professional development training provided by employer organisations and by external training providers. The SHCPP also set out to review current sexual health promotion training provision alongside an investigation into the needs and priorities of partner organisations with a view to setting out a clear approach to standardising SHCPP-funded sexual health promotion training. An overview of the extensive stakeholder engagement is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Overview of stakeholder engagement

Approach

The development process for this strategy is set out in Figure 2 below. The process included the following major activities:

- Identification and engagement with key stakeholder organisations involved in sexual health promotion and the education of professionals working with at-risk and vulnerable people
- Development of a contextual synopsis, highlighting key factors impacting or likely to impact on the development and delivery of this strategy
- Wide-ranging engagement with stakeholders through a workshop and surveys to derive the emerging strategic themes in shaping this strategy
- Visioning workshops with the SHCPP working group to develop the strategy
- Validation workshops with the SHCPP team to validate and finalise the strategy

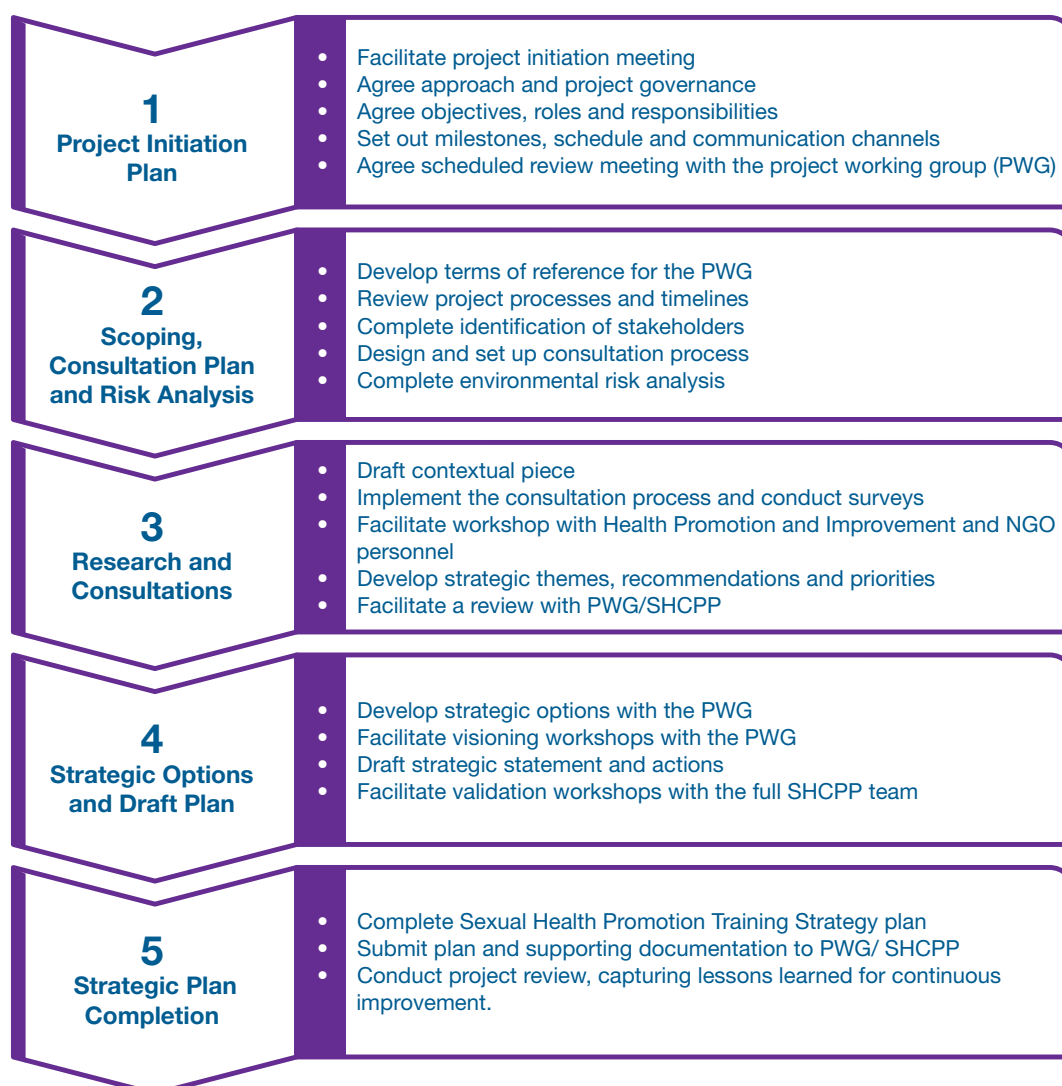


Figure 2: Strategy development process

