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Key Issues Affecting Addiction and Counselling Services in Ireland

1. Underfunding and Resource Constraints

Addiction services face chronic underfunding, with providers struggling to maintain existing treatment beds and facilities. There has been little increase in baseline funding despite rising demand, inflation, and the need for facility upgrades^[1].

2. Escalating Substance Use Trends

Ireland has seen sharp increases in cocaine and crack cocaine use, with cocaine overtaking opioids as the most common problem drug. There is also a significant rise in problem gambling and persistent high rates of alcohol use disorder^{[1][2]}.

3. Dual Diagnosis and Service Gaps

Individuals with both mental health and substance use disorders (dual diagnosis) face major barriers. Services are poorly integrated, with few pathways for those needing both mental health and addiction support, leading to exclusion and poorer outcomes^{[3][4]}.

4. Stigma and Criminalisation

Fear of stigma and legal consequences deters people from seeking help. Criminalisation of drug use often funnels individuals into the justice system instead of treatment, perpetuating cycles of addiction and marginalisation^{[5][6]}.

5. Geographic Disparities and Rural Isolation

Access to services is inconsistent, especially outside major urban centres. Rural communities face significant travel times, lack of transport, and fewer local resources, contributing to isolation and untreated addiction^{[6][7]}.

6. Insufficient Residential and Detox Facilities

There is a shortage of residential detox and stabilisation beds, particularly for those with complex needs such as crack cocaine and benzodiazepine dependence. This leaves many without viable treatment options and increases health risks^[7].



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7. Lack of Early Intervention and Prevention

Early intervention services for both substance use and mental health issues are limited. Long waiting lists—sometimes up to 18 months—delay access to care, making timely intervention difficult^{[3][6]}.

8. Poor Interagency Collaboration

There is a lack of coordination between addiction, mental health, and social services. This results in fragmented care, unclear pathways, and individuals falling through service gaps^{[3][4]}.

9. Inadequate Data and Service Penetration

A significant proportion of those with substance use problems do not receive treatment. Only about 10–14% of problem drug users access services, indicating that many remain untreated and unaccounted for in official statistics^{[2][8]}.

10. Ageing Infrastructure and Service Capacity

Many treatment facilities operate in outdated buildings requiring urgent repairs and modernisation. This affects the quality and safety of care, as well as the ability to expand capacity to meet growing demand^[4].

These issues highlight the urgent need for increased investment, integrated care pathways, and a shift toward a health-based approach to addiction in Ireland. Without addressing these barriers, many individuals will continue to experience exclusion, untreated addiction, and preventable harm.

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1. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41468950.html>
2. <https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/socialinclusion/drug-treatment-in-ireland-key-patterns-and-trends-2014-2021.pdf>
3. <https://mentalhealthreform.ie/news/action-needed-to-address-barriers-faced-by-people-with-a-dual-diagnosis/>
4. [https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/30747/7/NEIC Substance misuse issues needs analysis.pdf](https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/30747/7/NEIC%20Substance%20misuse%20issues%20needs%20analysis.pdf)

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5. <https://www.breakingnews.ie/ireland/our-system-is-broken-reforming-irelands-approach-to-treating-drug-addiction-1592463.html>
6. https://www.drugs.ie/downloadDocs/2017/ReducingHarmSupportingRecovery2017_2025.pdf
7. <https://www.deepend.ie/blog/deep-end-ireland-policy-document-on-drug-services-in-ireland>
8. <https://www.imo.ie/IMO-Position-Paper-on-Addiction-and-Dependency.pdf>

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