

Young Fine Gael Policy Priorities

HEALTH ◀



FOREWORD

Young Fine Gael is taking a leading role on the issue of health. Health is increasingly a policy area which has particular importance for young adults. YFG is using its influence throughout the country to raise awareness of this important issue.

At the outset of our term the National Executive prioritised Health, both Mental health and Sexual health, as one of our main policy objectives.

A person's health is of paramount importance and we in YFG feel that younger people's concerns are being forgotten in the discussion. We in YFG feel strongly that young people have a contribution to make in forming policy in this area; we welcome Minister for State Helen McEntee's initiative to form a Mental Health Taskforce in tackling one of the most pressing issues facing younger people in Ireland.

We are hopeful that the proposals which we put forward will be taken into consideration by the Department of Health as we are confident that they are workable, realistic and will be of real benefit to Young People.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marian O'Donnell'.

Marian O'Donnell
YFG President

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health is arguably one of the most important issues facing young people in Ireland today. Suicide is a leading cause of death among young people. The rate of youth suicide in Ireland is the fifth highest in the EU at 15.7 per 100,000 for 15-24 year olds. In Ireland; rates for completed suicide are notably high among young men aged 16-34 years¹, who accounted for almost 40% of deaths by suicide in 2003. A study of young Irish men aged 18-34 years revealed that 78% knew someone who had died by suicide, 42% knew more than one person, and 17% had a close friend who completed suicide². As the evidence shows, young people are disproportionately affected by suicide and mental health illness, it is for these reasons that YFG has placed Mental Health as one of our policy priorities for this term.

1 YFG proposes that SafeTALK be made a mandatory module for senior cycle students in secondary schools

- a:** SafeTALK is a half day training programme that prepares participants to identify persons with thoughts of suicide and connect them to suicide first aid resources.
- b:** Participants learn how to provide practical help to persons with thoughts of suicide in only a few hours.
- c:** YFG believes that this initiative will go some way in training students to see if a friend or classmate is struggling and will know how to address it.

2 YFG proposes that a dedicated counsellor be made available to all second level schools.

- a:** While there currently is a Career Guidance teacher in almost all schools the function they perform is concentrated on future prospects with some emotional support on the periphery.
- b:** YFG believes that this is not only unfair to the student but also to the teacher.
- c:** YFG is calling for funding to be ring-fenced for a dedicated emotional support counsellor to be made available to all willing schools.
- d:** YFG believes that this measure will give students a dedicated support structure that they may need in schools. Students need to know that they have someone to talk to and support them if they are suffering from mental health issues.

1. National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP) (2005). Reach out: National strategy for action on suicide prevention 2005-2014. Dublin: Health Service Executive.

2. Begley, M., Chambers, D., Corcoran, P., & Gallagher, J. (2004). The male perspective: Young men's outlook on life. Cork: University College Cork Press.

3 YFG proposes a greater emphasis on Youth Mental Health services to be located in local Primary Healthcare Centre

- a: Many young people feel the need at times to seek professional medical help in relation to mental health.
- b: To avail of these services many will have to attend their local hospital, this creates a further stigma around mental health issues.
- c: By having an integrated Primary Clinic in a local setting that includes GP services, counselling and in some cases psychiatric services, this normalises the visit and will go some way to removing the stigma some people feel of having to present themselves in a hospital setting to avail of mental health services.

4 YFG proposes a cross departmental approach to funding Health services in third level education

- a: As Universities and IT's have expanded their student numbers they have failed to expand their services, particularly their welfare services for students. This has led to a situation where some students could be waiting between 2 and 3 weeks for an appointment to see a counsellor.
- b: 10,000 students across Ireland are attending a counsellor at any one time, which represents between 6 & 8% of students on every campus³.
- c: These delays are unacceptable and there is a need for the Dept. of Health and the Dept. of Education to work together with the Universities and IT's to ensure that the funding is there to provide more services for students.
- d: There is also a need to ensure those using these services have access to mental health services when the college is not in term. Students should be transferred back to local services to ensure that their needs are met during the summer holidays or before they graduate.

3. Thompson, S. (2017). 'There is a tsunami of their-level students with mental health problems', The Irish Times, available at: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/there-is-a-tsunami-of-third-level-students-with-mental-health-problems-1.2924516>.



yfg



Fine Gael National Headquarters,
51 Upper Mount Street, Dublin 2
Phone: 01 619 8444 **Fax:** 01 662 5046
Email: yfg@yfg.ie **Web:** www.yfg.ie