

Support for Mental Health Projects in Irish Communities Abroad

1. In the section on ‘Supporting the Diaspora’ the Diaspora Policy includes a specific reference to Mental Health, and includes as one of the key actions a commitment to ‘increase our focus on the issue of mental health of emigrants.
2. A session on Mental Health was specifically included on the programme for the recent Global Irish Civic Forum, and it was highlighted as a key issue of concern among participants. Representatives of Irish community welfare and support organisations in particular highlighted that emigration and the experience of living away from home can be psychologically and emotionally challenging. There may be various reasons why emigrants face mental health challenges, including isolation, the stress of emigration and poor living conditions. There may be links to factors prior to departure from Ireland and, in some cases, the impact of alcohol or substance abuse.
3. Through the Emigrant Support Programme, the Department currently supports, on a demand driven basis, projects that are designed to deliver improved mental health and help access statutory mental health services, in particular for the most vulnerable, including those with complex needs, newly-arrived migrants and the elderly.
4. Irish Abroad Unit is working on developing a more coherent and strategic approach to funding mental health projects, in particular in order to meet emerging needs or where cultural differences and/or language barriers may be more acutely felt by emigrants, e.g. in Europe and Asia. There are also areas where interventions should be particularly culturally sensitive, e.g. among survivors of institutional abuse living in Britain. The Unit is working with Consular Division and has met with the HSE’s National Office for Suicide Prevention. A number of proposed actions include: facilitating access to culturally sensitive counselling, improved crisis services, and better mental health training for consular staff (at HQ and missions abroad) and funded welfare organisations.

Irish Abroad Unit

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