



Union of Students in Ireland
Aontas na Mac Léinn in Éirinn

USI Health Promotion Strategy
(2021-2024)



About USI

"The Union of Students in Ireland (USI) is the sole representative body for students in Ireland and represents 354,000 students in over thirty member colleges across Ireland, North and South. Throughout its history, USI has worked relentlessly in the pursuit of student rights in all areas of the student experience."

The goal of USI is to work for the rights of students and for a fairer and more equal third-level education system in Ireland. USI is a full member of the European Students' Union (ESU) which represents students from 46 National Students' Unions in 39 countries, and a member of Eurodoc, the European Council for Doctoral Candidates and Junior Researchers. USI's policies are set directly by students at our Annual Congress and updates are provided on our work to our interim decision-making body, National Council and through Member Organisations accountability structures such as Class Representative/Student Council meetings.

Background

The Union of Students in Ireland have a proud history of campaigning and contributing to national policy and campaigns, including many aspects of wellbeing to benefit and support student health. With the growing awareness around holistic wellbeing and the changing economic, political and geographical environments, the creation of an all-encompassing health promotion strategy is a positive step in the right direction to allow the USI Vice President for Welfare and local Students' Union Officers to support students, campaign on relevant health issues and offer training that benefits its members. This strategy will also allow Students' Unions to engage and contribute to national frameworks to benefit the overall student demographic. The USI Health Promotion Strategy should be reviewed annually and amended accordingly.

Health promotion as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) is the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve, their overall health. In order to reach a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, an individual or group must be able to identify and to realise aspirations, to satisfy needs, and to change or cope with the environment.

Good health is a major resource for social, economic and personal development and an important dimension of the quality of life. Political, economic, social, cultural, environmental, behavioural and biological factors can all influence a person's health. To fully understand health, one must approach it in a holistic and whole way. One aspect of health benefits, impacts or overlaps with another. The five founding pillars the Ottawa Charter of 1986 comprises of, is the approach the USI Health Promotion Strategy should follow. The following five pillars should act as a guide for future health promotion campaigns and initiatives.

1. Building public policy
2. Creating supportive environments
3. Strengthening community action
4. Developing personal skills
5. Re-orienting health care services towards prevention of illness and promotion of health

Building Policy:

Creating, contributing and updating policy that is reflective of the student body of USI and its stakeholders.

Creating Supportive Environments:

Adapting to ever changing environments to allow the dynamic patterns of life, work and leisure have a significant better impact on health. Environments can be urban, rural or change of life of a student, all of which is pivotal in USI's approach to campaigns, policy and work carried out to support students.

Strengthening community action:

Community development to allow Students' Unions and students on the ground to be able to access and direct public health initiatives to support and develop self-help for one's health matters. This requires full and continuous access to information, learning opportunities for health in addition to funded supports.

Developing personal skills:

Health promotion supports personal and social development by providing information and education around health and by enhancing life skills. This includes having improved access to relevant training opportunities, information and campaigns to educate students on illnesses, overall health and wellbeing and support services available to them.

Re-orienting health care:

The responsibility for health promotion in health services is shared among individuals, community groups, health professionals, health service institutions and the Government. The responsibility of health expands into every sector, and it is up to health care services/providers to focus on the individual in respect of one's community and background. This allows for services to operate at the highest and most efficient level to meet the individual needs of their students. The further development of education and outreach programmes encourages students to reach out for help when needed and facilitates professionals to inform themselves on the most up to date materials and research.

USI Sexual Health

This strategy aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of positive sexual wellbeing and encourage prevention of sexual health difficulties which shall be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and local Students' Unions wherever possible.

The World Health Organisation describes sexual health as “a state of physical, mental and social wellbeing in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence”.

USI aims to promote positive sexual health and wellbeing and fight for access to sexual health information, education and services for students.

Collaborations and Partnerships

USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to engaging with sexual health organisations. USI recognises the need to work with other organisation in the sexual health sector to further our aims and ambitions.

Objectives:

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of sexual health education and consent.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with Students' Unions and external organisations, such as HSE Sexual Health, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, the Active* Consent Team, HIV Ireland, UCC Bystander Intervention, Irish Family Planning Agency and many others.
- To build a coalition between students and Students' Unions for effective lobbying for sexual health supports and legislative changes.
- To consult with sexual health organisations to inform USI sexual health campaigns.

Actions:

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.

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- Retain and develop partnership with the HSE in relation to sexual health campaigns in particular Sexual Health Awareness and Guidance (SHAG) week.
 - Sustain membership to committees, such as Sexual Health Advisory Group and National Sexual Health Communications Working Group under the HSE etc.
 - Sustain working relationship with the DRCC, Rape Crisis Network, Active* Consent, UCC Bystander Intervention, the National Advisory Committee, HEA Advisory Committee on Gender-Based Violence and THEA PROPEL project.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- To aim, where possible, to establish links with local and national organisations to build a partnership and promote local supports to students in campus communities.
- To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote sexual health and consent supports and resources.

Training and Supports for Students' Unions

USI encourages Students' Unions to run campaigns and/or distribute information to students on sexual health and guidance as well as consent so that students can educate themselves and make informed decisions that are best for them. USI aims to offer training to Students' Unions during Students' Union Training (SUT) and Students' Union Top-Up Training (SUT+) around sexual health awareness, consent education, bystander intervention and dealing with sensitive disclosures around sexual violence and harassment.

Objectives:

- To equip Students' Unions with the skills and information needed to form campaigns to promote sexual health awareness and consent.
- For Students' Union to be equipped with the information needed to ensure campaigns are gender and LGBTQ+ inclusive.
- To equip officers in their work in relation to sexual health promotion and consent.
- For Students' Union Officers to be equipped with the knowledge to support fellow students who have experienced sexual harassment and violence.
- For Students' Union Officers to have the tools to contribute to on-campus policies around sexual health, promoting consent and ending sexual violence and harassment.

Actions:

- Provide training for relevant officers during the summer term in sexual health and consent promotion.

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- Liaise with the VP Equality and Citizenship to ensure all campaigns are gender and LGBTQ+ inclusive.
 - Support officers in establishing links with local, community-based support and national services.
 - Organise relevant training for officers in relation to consent, such as disclosure training etc.
 - Support Students' Unions in establishing local links to support their work in promoting consent and sexual health.
 - Students' Unions to be equipped with the skills and information necessary to develop and review campus policy and to represent students on management committees.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.
- Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.
- Aim to establish local links with national and community- based services and identify a referral path for students in need.
- Seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to sexual health promotion and consent.
- Aim to develop and review new or existing campus sexual health and consent policies.

Prevention

High quality sexual health education promotes positive mental and physical wellbeing. Education and access to information is important throughout life, particularly for 'at risk' and vulnerable groups. (Leo Varadkar, Minister for Health, National Sexual Health Strategy 2015-2020.)

Objectives:

- ⊘ Reduce the rates of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) and HIV among students.
- ⊘ Increase sexual health and relationships literacy.
- ⊘ Develop a culture to support sexual health and wellbeing.
- ⊘ Promote an environment of openness among students to reduce the negative impact of stigma relating to sexual health and wellbeing.
- ⊘ Promote active consent education and initiatives.
- ⊘ Eradicate sexual violence and harassment on campuses.

Actions:

- € Continue to work with national bodies on sexual violence and harassment in third level education.
- € Co-ordinate national sexual health, awareness and guidance campaigns to promote awareness around sexual health, the National Condom Distribution Service, stigma reduction around STIs, emergency contraception, accessibility of PrEP & PEP, information on options available during pregnancy, methods of contraception and consent education.
- € Promote the message of active consent at USI's Annual Congress and all relevant USI run events.
- € Continue to lobby for consent classes to be ran during inductions and be embedded within course structures long-term.
- € Promote STI screening services and awareness around getting tested.
- € Seek a seat for USI on the HSE outbreak committee
- € Work with the HSE to establish a point of contact on sexual health for USI to work with.
- € Keep the shag.usi.ie website regularly updated.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- Source accurate information that is relevant to the student body in relation to sexual health awareness and consent.
- Facilitate, with the support from USI, training modules identified for sexual health promotion and consent for student leaders.
- Where possible aim to promote campaigns and initiatives that reduces stigma and encourages an open attitude towards the treatment of sexual health and consent issues.
- To engage with medical centres to introduce sexual health clinics and sexual health support.
- Liaise with services and local clinics to promote STI checks to students.

Screening, Treatment and Support Services

The availability and quality of appropriate campus and community support services is vital in the promotion of student wellbeing. The promotion of these services is equally

important to inform students of their availability and encourage them to seek help when needed.

Objective:

- Improve access to accessible quality sexual health services for students.
- Promote sexual health supports to students in need.

Actions:

- Assess, develop and implement guidance on STI and HIV testing for students.
- Promote services such as home testing to ensure more students get tested.
- Include stigma reduction material, in relation to sexual health in national campaigns.
- Lobby for funding to expand campaigns in sexual health promotion and consent.
- Lobby for investment into support services in relation to sexual health and consent, especially in campus-based services, and in rural areas.
- Engage with other groups who are campaigning for maximum pricing for emergency contraception, with the aim of setting a national maximum price for emergency contraception.
- Promote the National Condom Distribution Service on campuses.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Establish a referral pathway locally for students in need of sexual health supports.
- Students' Union Officers should aim to partake, where possible, in lobbying opportunities with support from their regional officers locally and the VP Welfare on a national basis.

USI Smoking Cessation

This strategy segment aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of wellbeing, prevention and reduction of tobacco related harm, to be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and affiliated Students' Unions.

Smoking levels in Ireland, remain at around 38.7% (18-34) for young adults. Around 6,000 people die from smoking related disease every year. In addition, according to the HSE, 1 in 2 smokers will die from a tobacco related disease. Education at second and third level is crucial in terms of informing students about the health consequences of smoking tobacco. The USI Vice President for Welfare must follow the Smoking Cessation Strategy and assist local officers in following through with its aims and recommendations.

Collaborations and Partnerships

USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to organisations working together to reduce tobacco related harm. USI recognises the need to work with others in the sector to further our aims and ambitions in this area.

Objectives:

- To build partnerships with external organisation such as the HSE, the Irish Cancer Society, Irish Heart, Healthy Ireland, ISHA and others to promote the negative impacts of smoking on our health and smoking cessation among third level students.
- To involve external organisations in the planning of USI campaigns relating to smoking cessation.
- To engage in the development of submissions, frameworks and national policies as they arise.

Actions:

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.
- Support Students' Unions in establishing local and national links to support their work in the area of smoking cessation.
- € To strengthen old partnerships and build new ones.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- To aim, where possible, to establish links with local and national organisations to develop resources and promote local supports to students in the campus community.
- To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote supports, resources and preventions.
- Liaise with health promotion staff and services on campus to provide support and resources to students interested in giving up smoking.

Training and Supports for Students' Unions

USI aims to provide training to Students' Union Officers to have the knowledge and tools to run local campaigns and distribute information to students on tobacco and associated risks to promote smoking cessation.

Objectives:

- To equip officers with the knowledge to run informed smoking cessation campaigns.
- To inform Students' Union Officers of the risks associated with smoking and the positive impact of smoking cessation.
- To educate Students' Unions about policy development to review and lobby for the introduction of policy in this area on their campuses.

Actions:

- Provide a training module for relevant officers during the summer term on smoking cessation.
- Support Students' Unions in establishing links with national and local, community-based support services to identify referral paths for students.
- Support officers in influencing campus-based policy in relation to smoking cessation.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.

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- Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.
 - Aim to establish local links with both national and local, community-based services and identify a referral path for students in need.
 - Seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to smoking cessations such as “Smoke Free Campus” initiatives.

Treatment and Support Services

The availability and quality of appropriate campus and community support services is vital in the promotion of positive student wellbeing. The promotion of these services is needed to inform students that they are there and encourage them to seek support when needed.

Objectives:

- Improve access to accessible support services for students.
- To liaise with external organisations to identify and promote appropriate initiatives to support students who aim to give up smoking.

Actions:

- Liaise with the HSE to identify support services in campus catchment areas.
- Promote the use of online supports to assist students in smoking cessation.
- Support Students’ Unions in initiating the development or review of a college-wide smoking policy where one is not already in place.

Suggested Actions for Students’ Unions:

- Initiate the development or review of a college-wide smoking policy.
- Promote the use of online supports to assist smoking cessation in campaigns.
- Promote campus supports to ensure students seek help when needed.

USI Physical Health

This strategy aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of physical wellbeing, healthy eating and body image to be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and local Students' Unions.

USI aims to promote physical activity, healthy eating and a positive body image and fight for access to health information, education and services for students.

All third level institutions should be encouraged to adopt the concept that they should be a 'health promoting college'. HEIs should actively address issues concerning physical health, healthy eating and body image.

Collaborations and Partnerships

USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to health promotion. USI recognises the need to work with others in the health sector to further our aims and ambitions.

Objectives:

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of physical health, healthy eating and body confidence.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with students' unions and external organisations.
- To promote initiatives and investment to encourage more sustainable and active forms of transport by students as a means of increasing overall physical activity levels and reducing carbon emissions in partnership with Smarter Travel Campus.

Actions:

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.
- Build on the partnerships with Bodywhys, ISHA, SpunOut and Student Sport Ireland.
- Consult with external partnerships to inform USI campaigns and develop national frameworks, reports and policies in this area.

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- Support initiatives to increase healthy eating, physical activity levels and improved body image.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- € To aim, where possible, to establish links with national and local organisations to develop resources and promote local supports to students in the campus community.
- € To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote healthy eating, improved physical health and body image.
- € Review and/or lobby for the development of policies and initiatives on healthy eating, physical health and body image in your HEI.

Training and Supports for Students' Unions

USI aims to provide training to Students' Union Officers so they have the knowledge and tools to run campaigns and/or distribute information to students on physical health, healthy eating and body confidence.

Objectives:

- To run a training event during the summer months around this topic.
- To Support Students' Unions in developing campaigns and initiatives to promote physical exercise, healthy eating and improved body confidence.
- To support Students' Unions in lobbying for policy development and implementation in this area on their campuses.

Actions:

- Liaise with external organisations to facilitate a training event aimed at Students' Union Officers to equip them in promoting healthy eating, physical activity and improved body image on campus.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.
- Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.

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- Aim to establish local links with national and local, community-based services and identify a referral path for students in need.
 - Seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to health promotion policies.

Support Services and Health Promotion Initiatives

The availability and quality of appropriate campus and community support services is vital in the promotion of student wellbeing. The promotion of these services is equally important to inform students of their availability and encourage them to seek help when needed.

Objective:

- To inform students of available supports in relation to physical health, healthy eating and body confidence.
- To promote physical activity among the student population.
- To encourage students to partake in home-cooking exercises and healthy eating.
- To promote support services to students experiencing low body confidence and self-esteem.
- To ensure students with disabilities can fully participate in activities and events organised.
- Narrow the gender gap in the provision of sport through clubs.
- Promote awareness around eating disorders and body image.

Actions:

- ⊘ Develop a new social networking initiative to encourage friendships and support for non-competitive club members to engage in physical activity.
- ⊘ Promote a diverse range of sports among the student population.
- ⊘ Co-ordinate a national campaign to encourage students include awareness around physical health, healthy eating, disordered eating and body image.
- ⊘ Promote sport clubs that particularly appeal to female students to narrow the gender gap in sport. (20x20 campaign)
- ⊘ Promote opportunities for students to try new sporting activities as part of their progress through third level education.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

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- Provide information to students on a campus level on physical health, healthy eating and body confidence.
 - Promote campus based physical activity initiatives.
 - Establish referral pathways for students experiencing low body confidence.
 - Support initiatives on campus to encourage students to eat healthy and learn to cook healthy affordable meals.
 - Local Students' Unions should work with their respective Sports Units/ Departments who have the skills and expertise in the area to help develop resources and facilities.

USI Mental Health

This strategy aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of mental wellbeing and prevention of mental health difficulties which shall be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and local Students' Unions.

Mental Health is a fundamental part to a person's overall wellbeing. USI is committed to promoting positive mental health among students, lobbying for increased support services to help students when needed and develop further campaigns to raise awareness around mental illness and the stigma associated with it.

Collaborations and Partnerships

USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to mental health organisations. USI recognises the need to work with others in the mental health sector to further our aims and ambitions.

Objectives:

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of mental health.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with Students' Unions and external organisations.
- To build upon a coalition for effective lobbying for mental health supports and legislative change.
- To build a network of partners and stakeholders across third level institutions in Ireland.

Actions:

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.
- Sustain coalitions, such as the Connecting for Life Working Group.
- Sustain membership to organisations such as Mental Health Reform.
- Build and strengthen partnerships with Mental Health Reform, PCHEI, SpunOut, STAND, Belong To, Aware, NOSP and others.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

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- To aim, where possible, to establish links with national and local organisations to develop resources and promote local supports to students in the campus community.
 - To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote mental health supports and resources.

Training and Support for Students' Unions

USI believes, through knowledge gained by working with young people as student leaders, and through our lived experience as students, that Students' Union Officers are uniquely positioned to work for the better mental health of our student populations. We recognise that the lack of education and funding for resources in Students' Unions contributes to stress and pressure among officers. USI aims to train Students' Union Officers in the area of mental health to ensure they are as supported and best equipped to deal with sensitive casework queries throughout their term.

Objectives:

- ⊘ To support officers throughout their term in dealing with casework in relation to mental health.
- ⊘ To equip officers with the skills and tools necessary to promote understanding of and a positive approach to mental health and help seeking on campus.
- ⊘ To support officers to develop new initiatives to improve the mental health of their student population.
- ⊘ For Students' Unions to be encouraged to seek consultation with mental health professionals, where possible.
- ⊘ For Students' Unions to be equipped with the skills and information necessary to partake in lobbying efforts.
- ⊘ For Students' Unions to be equipped with the skills and information necessary to develop and review campus policy and to seek representation on board and committees overseeing mental health policy.
- ⊘ For Students' Union officers to be aware of selfcare best practice and promote the importance of selfcare to officers in their line of work.

Actions:

- ⊘ Provide training for relevant officers during the summer term around mental health and dealing with casework such as Mental Health First Aid, Safe Talk or ASIST.
- ⊘ Provide an online mental health resource pack for Students' Unions through the USI Mental Health Hub on the USI website.

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- € Support officers in establishing links with national and local, community-based support services to establish referral pathways and to support their work in promoting positive mental health, coping skills and therapies.
 - € Provide training around lobbying and policy development and implementation.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.
- Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.
- Aim to establish local links with national and local, community-based services and identify a referral path for students in need.
- Utilise support from the USI Vice President for Welfare to debrief and discuss casework.
- To follow best practice for selfcare during officer terms.
- To seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to mental health.

Stigma Reduction and Awareness Campaigns

It is vitally important for USI to aim to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues in the student population and encourage an open, non-judgemental positive attitude towards the discussion and treatment of mental illness. Stigma is a barrier that deters students from accessing mental health supports. The number of those in receipt of mental health services is considered to be far lower than the level of need. USI is committed to breaking the stigma in reaching out for mental health supports.

Objectives:

- To support and develop new initiatives that will reduce stigma around mental illness among third level students.
- To equip officers in developing new campaigns and initiatives on campus to reduce stigma associated with mental illness.
- To encourage and support campus events to promote positive mental health.
- To encourage new student media to promote positive mental health in campus publications.
- To encourage students to reach out to professional support services when they are struggling.
- To promote material from those who have lived experience to reduce stigma and encourage open discussion around mental health.

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- To promote stigma reduction in national campaigns.
 - To encourage students to reach out for support as a good health practice before it gets overwhelming.
 - Consult with external organisations in the development of national campaigns and provision of resources.

Actions:

- € Develop the USI Mental Health website and social media platforms to share information and resources on student mental health.
- € Run national awareness campaigns around student mental health and support Students' Union in the roll-out in their local on campus and themed weeks.
- € Maintain relationships with organisations that promote stigma reduction and mental health.
- € Encourage the development of on campus mental health initiatives and policies.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- Where possible aim to promote national and local campaigns and initiatives that reduce stigma and promote positive mental health.
- Partner with local and national services and organisations to run awareness campaigns on campus.

Suicide Prevention

In the past few years, there has been a significant shift in the way third level institutions view their role with respect to the wellbeing and more specifically, mental health of their students. Suicide Prevention initiatives rolled out across the country have positively contributed to educating students and the wider community in the areas of mental illness, suicidal ideation and removing the shame previously associated with mental health difficulties.

USI believe college communities must strive to be a safe, supportive and understanding environment for students. Targeted initiatives and campaigns are welcomed to increase awareness around mental health literacy and supports that are offered to encourage positive mental health among students.

Objectives:

- Increase campus capacity to prevent and respond to suicidal ideation.
- Enhance communications and awareness of support services among students.
- Build awareness of positive mental health and its important relationship with academic and workplace success.
- Promote personal growth and development among students to prevent mental illness.
- Provide suicide intervention training appropriate for students.

Actions:

- ⊘ Research and collaborate with organisations to facilitate training in suicide intervention skills for students and Students' Union Officers.
- ⊘ Support Students' Unions in developing an on-campus Emergency Suicide Intervention protocol.
- ⊘ Develop an online promotion plan for USI to facilitate help seeking promotion on social media platforms.
- ⊘ Encourage officers to provide support information to students in financial difficulty.
- ⊘ Include promotions on various therapies and counselling services in national mental health campaigns.
- ⊘ Promote the provision of staff roles to facilitate a supportive environment and lobby for improved mental health training and resources for academic and other staff.
- ⊘ Promote selfcare, help-seeking and wellbeing in academic courses.

- ⊘ Create awareness of post-trauma resources, providing support where necessary for Students' Unions to develop a protocol for responding to a traumatic event on campus such as a student death by suicide.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- To attend, where possible, training provided or promoted by USI to equip officers with the skills and tools needed to support students.
- Ensure that sources of help and support are well publicised on campus.
- To promote campus-based services and programmes that encourage coping skills among students.
- To develop new initiatives on campus in relation to Suicide Prevention and Postvention Therapy and Help-Seeking promotion.

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- Develop a referral pathway to mental health supports for students struggling with their mental health.

Funding of Support Services

According to the USI National Report on Student Mental Health (2019):

- Students are experiencing extremely severe levels of anxiety (38.4%), depression (29.9%) and stress (17.3%).
- Close to one third (32.2%) had a formal diagnosis of a mental health difficulty at some point in their lives.
- One fifth (20.9%) did not have someone to talk to about their personal and emotional difficulties.
- A free on campus counselling service was important to students.

Student Counselling Services are hugely important in supporting students through their mental health journey. Students avail of the counselling supports for many different reasons relating to stress, anxiety, depression, isolation, bereavements, diagnosed mental health illnesses and much more. Unfortunately, the majority of Student Counselling Services are understaffed and under-resourced due to the lack of funding allocated to the higher education system. This results in services having limited availability and accessibility of these services, often leading to long waiting lists.

Given the increasing numbers of students reporting mental health issues. this causes serious concern for USI. We are committed to ensuring the highest level of efficiency and support for our students when it comes to their mental health. USI increased funding into Mental Health Services and initiatives to ensure the need of students is met.

Objectives:

- € To protect and improve funding for mental health services, projects and initiatives within our college communities, off campus and online
- € To improve our lobbying efforts through the developments of reports to capture personal anecdotes.
- € To lobby for the implementation of the Scottish Lancet model which advocates for a whole campus approach to supporting student mental health by having a greater

integration and cooperation between services, internally and externally, such as between the Student Counselling Services, peer supports, academic advisors, Students' Unions, healthy campus initiatives, emergency care, community mental health services and a multi-disciplinary campus care team.

Actions:

- € Lobby for annual sustainable core funding in the budgets, ensuring funding for mental health services and initiatives are ring-fenced.
- € Lobby for the introduction of community based 24/7 crisis intervention services.
- € Retain membership of Mental Health Reform and actively partake in the coalition of organisations campaigning to transform mental health and wellbeing supports in Ireland.

- € Support Students' Unions in their lobbying efforts to secure funding for their on campus mental health supports.
- € Work with PCHEI and ISHA to research access and integration of support services on campus and in local areas.

- € Lobby for the development and implementation of the Scottish Lancet model to be integrated into the Irish higher education system.

- € Working with the Vice President for Academic Affairs, build upon the 'Wellbeing in the Curriculum' report being completed in partnership with the National Forum, and work on embedding mental health & wellbeing within the curriculum across the third-level sector.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- Students' Union Officers should aim to partake, where possible, in lobbying opportunities with support from regional officers locally and the VP Welfare on a national basis.
- Establish a referral pathway for students in need of mental health supports.

USI Gambling Harm Reduction

This strategy aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of wellbeing and prevention of gambling dependency, which shall be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and local Students' Unions.

There is currently no sufficient legislation to combat Problem Gambling in Ireland. The USI Vice President for Welfare shall follow the USI Gambling harm reduction strategy and shall assist local officers in following through with its objectives.

Collaborations and Partnerships

USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to organisations working to reduce gambling related harm. USI recognises the need to work with other organisations with experience and expert knowledge in the sector to further our aims and ambitions.

Objectives:

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of gambling harm reduction.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with Students' Unions and external organisations such as Gambling Awareness Trust, Problem Gambling Ireland, Helplink, Gamblers Anonymous and others.

Actions:

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.
- Support Students' Unions in establishing local and national links to support their work in the area of gambling harm reduction.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- To aim, where possible, to establish links with national and local organisations to develop resources and promote local supports to students in the campus community.
- To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote gambling dependency supports, resources and preventions.

Training and Supports for Students' Unions

USI shall provide training to Students' Union Officer so they can run awareness campaigns and distribute information to students on gambling and associated harm.

Objectives:

- For Students' Unions to be equipped with the skills and information to run campaigns to promote support services available and highlight gambling awareness.
- To equip Students' Union Officers to support students at risk of developing gambling dependency.
- To support Students' Union Officers in their lobbying efforts for policy to be developed and implemented in their area in their HEI.

Actions:

- Provide a training module for relevant officers during the summer term on the issue of gambling awareness and harm reduction.
- Support Students' Unio Officers in establishing links with national and local, community-based support services.
- Provide Students' Unions with resources and training opportunities where possible both locally and nationally.
- Students' Unions to be equipped with the skills and information necessary to develop and review campus policy and to represent students on management boards/committees.

Suggested action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.
- Seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to health promotion.
- Aim to develop and review new or existing campus gambling policies.

Prevention

USI notes the addictive nature of gambling and how easily accessible gambling can be with

the development of apps and having the location of betting outlets in close proximity of campuses.

Objectives:

- € To raise awareness amongst the student population on harm prevention and gambling cessation and to encourage Students' Unions to run local campaigns on the issue.
- € To reduce the occurrence of problem gambling by aiming to educate students on the risks of developing dependency through awareness campaigns.
- € To raise awareness of the services available to students who have a gambling dependency.

Action:

- Continue to work with national bodies to source accurate information that is relevant to the student body.
- Co-ordinate a national campaign to promote awareness of gambling harm reduction and promote students reaching out for professional support.
- Support Students' Unions in promoting and developing resources to inform their students of the risks associated with gambling and gambling dependency.
- Support Students' Unions in rolling out training modules for gambling harm reduction for student leaders on campus.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- Where possible aim to promote campaigns and initiatives that reduces stigma and encourages an open attitude towards the treatment of gambling dependency.
- Source accurate information that is relevant to the student body in relation to gambling.
- Promote resources to inform students of the risks associated with gambling and support relevant national campaigns and initiatives that aim to do the same.
- Facilitate, with support from USI, training modules for gambling harm reduction for student leaders.

Support Services

The availability and quality of appropriate campus and community support services is vital in the promotion of student wellbeing. USI is committed to ensuring students have the most efficient and accessible support services for gambling dependency.

Objectives:

- To improve access to accessible quality support services for students.
- Promote reaching out to professional support services for those students who are struggling with a gambling dependency.
- Lobby for increased specialised supports and initiatives to support with gambling dependency.

Actions:

- Liaise with the HSE and other relevant bodies to map support services available to campuses across Ireland.
- Support Students' Unions in creating a referral pathway for students affected by gambling and those who are at risk of developing a dependency.
- Provide training, where available, for relevant officers in the area of gambling dependency and harm reduction.
- Lobby for the funding of support services for gambling dependency.
- Lobby the Government for the implementation of a gambling regulator as outlined in the Programme for Government 2020.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Establish a referral pathway locally for students affected by gambling and at risk of developing addiction.
- Students' Union Officers should aim to partake, where possible, in lobbying opportunities with support from the regional officers locally and the Vice President for Welfare nationally.

USI Alcohol Harm Reduction

This strategy segment aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of wellbeing and prevention and reduction of alcohol related harm which shall be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and affiliated Students' Unions.

USI will promote 'low risk drinking' behaviour and increase awareness of the potential harmful or negative effects of excessive alcohol consumption and alcohol dependency. The USI Vice President for Welfare shall follow the USI Alcohol Harm Reduction strategy and assist local Students' Union Officers in following through with its objectives and actions.

Collaborations and Partnerships

USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to organisations working together to reduce alcohol related harm. USI recognises the need to work with others in the sector to further our aims and ambitions.

Objectives:

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of alcohol harm reduction.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations such as Alcohol Ireland, REACT, Drinkaware, Alcoholics Anonymous, Alcohol Forum and others.

Actions:

- Seek support from external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.
- Collaborate and consult with external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- To aim, where possible, to establish links with national and local organisations to develop resources and promote local supports to students in the campus community.
- To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote alcohol dependency supports, resources and preventions.
- To support the implementation of the REACT action plans at a campus level.

Training and Supports for Students' Unions

USI shall facilitate training to Students' Unions to encourage them to run awareness campaigns and distribute information to students on alcohol dependency and the risks associated with over-consumption.

Objectives:

- To equip officers with tools and knowledge in their work on alcohol harm reduction and alcohol dependency.
- To equip officers to support students at risk of developing alcohol dependency.

Actions:

- Provide training for relevant officers during the summer term on the issue of alcohol awareness and alcohol dependency.
- Support officers in establishing links with national and local, community-based support services.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.
- Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.
- Aim to establish local links with community-based services and identify a referral pathway for students in need.
- Seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to the oversight of alcohol policies.
- Aim to develop and review new or existing alcohol policies.

Prevention

USI aims to promote a positive social, academic, and residential environment that supports student wellbeing. Managing the risks associated with alcohol dependency and over-consumption is extremely important in terms of health promotion. USI aims to minimise the risks through prevention awareness and offering support to local Students' Unions wherever needed.

Objectives:

- To raise awareness campaigns for the student population on alcohol dependency, over-consumption and harm reduction recommendations to encourage Students' Unions to run local campaigns on the issue.
- To encourage alternative drink choices among the student population.
- To provide education and resources to Students' Union to ensure they are supported when rolling out their local campaigns.
- To partner with external organisations to be fully aware of the emerging risks across Ireland and to address them accordingly.

Actions:

- Continue to work with national bodies on the issue of sexual violence and assault related to alcohol consumption.
- Co-ordinate a national campaign to promote awareness of alcohol risks and promote services to students in need.
- Support Students' Unions in promoting and developing a programme for campus-based alcohol-free events.
- Support and promote alcohol-reduction campaigns and initiatives.
- Support Students' Unions in developing re-hydration stations with watercoolers around campus and during events.
- Facilitate an alcohol-free social activity during USI annual Congress.

Suggested Action for MOs:

- Source accurate information that is relevant to the student body in relation to alcohol.
- Promote resources to inform students of the risks associated with alcohol over-consumption and dependency in addition to supporting relevant national campaigns and initiatives that aim to do the same.
- Facilitate, with support from USI, training modules identified for alcohol harm reduction for student leaders.
- Partner with local and national support services and organisations to develop resources and campaigns.

Supply, Access and Availability

Currently Ireland has one of the highest levels of alcohol consumption in the European Union. By ensuring that key factors influencing alcohol supply, such as price, availability and marketing, are regulated and controlled, alcohol-related harm can be reduced.

Objectives:

- Protect members from the effects of low-cost selling, over-availability and excessive and subliminal marketing practices.

Actions:

- Lobby for a mandatory code of practice in alcohol marketing.
- Lobby for the banning of alcohol sponsorship of sporting events.
- Lobby to discourage student-targeted marketing, promotion and sponsorship by the alcohol industry.
- Provide policy training and support to Students' Unions to encourage the development of on-campus alcohol policies and distribute the "National Framework to Develop A College Alcohol Policy" document.
- Continue to collaborate with REACT and support Students' Unions in realising the action points set out in the report.

Suggested action for Students' Unions:

- Strive to remove high-risk alcohol promotion from their campuses.
- Assist clubs and societies in sourcing sponsorship from sources other than the alcohol industry.
- Track and report any high-risk promotions on campus or in the community area.
- Liaise with college authorities to develop a college-wide alcohol policy where one is not already in place.

Support Services

The availability and quality of appropriate campus and community support services is vital in the promotion of student wellbeing. USI recognises the importance of the promotion of these services to raise awareness around access and what is available to them.

Objectives:

- Improve access to effective quality support services for students.
- Promote the importance of reaching out when an issue is identified.
- Lobby for annual core funding to be ring-fenced for alcohol-related support services and initiatives.

Actions:

-
- Liaise with the REACT team to map support services available to campuses across Ireland.
 - Support Students' Unions in creating a referral pathway for students affected alcohol dependency and the risks associated with over-consumption.
 - Promote the use of an online brief intervention tool such as Drinks Meter, etc.
 - Provide training for relevant officers in SOAR through collaboration with the HSE.
 - Liaise with unions and ISHA to promote brief intervention screening services on campus.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Engage with the REACT programme to realise the action points set out to respond to excessive alcohol consumption in third level.
- Establish a referral pathway for students affected by addictions and at risk of developing addiction.
- Promote the use of an online brief intervention tool such as Drinks Calculator through Drinkaware, etc. on a campus and national level.
- Support the introduction of brief intervention screening services, online or through support services, on campus.

USI Drug Harm Reduction

This segment of the USI Health Promotion Strategy aims to provide a framework for good practice for the support of students, the promotion of wellbeing and prevention and reduction of drug related harm which shall be implemented by both the Union of Students in Ireland and affiliated Students' Unions.

Education at second and third level is extremely important in terms of informing students about drug harm reduction and the risks using drugs may have on their wellbeing. It will be important to use the findings of the Drug Use in Higher Education survey that was launched this year in 2021, to inform future USI campaigns and policy development in this area.

According to the National Student Drugs Survey (2015), 82% of students reported having tried illegal drugs. The use of drugs is becoming more common in third level education. The USI Vice President for Welfare shall follow the USI Drugs Harm Reduction strategy segment and assist local Students' Union Officers in following through with its recommendations and objectives.

Collaborations and Partnerships

USI acknowledges the importance of collaborations and partnerships when it comes to organisations working to support drug harm reduction initiatives. USI recognises the need to work with others in the sector to further our aims and ambitions.

Objectives:

- To build support for the work that USI does in the area of drug harm reduction and celebrating recovery.
- To develop new initiatives through collaborations with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations such as HSE Social Inclusion, Recovery Academy, the Ana Liffey Drug Project and others.
- To establish a point of contact within the HSE Social Inclusion to develop resources and campaign materials to support Students Unions to further campaigns, policies and inform them of emerging trends.
- To liaise with activist groups such as SSDP to expand campaigns and resources.

Actions:

- Seek support with external organisations to strengthen campaigns on the issue.

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- Collaborate and consult with Students' Unions, student groups and external organisations to support and develop new campaigns, resources, research and training.
 - Support Students' Unions in establishing national and local links to support their work in the area of drug harm reduction and celebrating recovery.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- To aim, where possible, to establish links with local and national organisations to develop resources and promote support services to students in the campus community.
- To support the development of local coalitions and committees that aim to promote supports, resources and preventions around drug dependency, harm reduction and celebrating recovery.
- Establish links with local SSDP branches and other organisations to expand upon campaigns, resources and initiatives.

Training and Supports for Students' Unions

USI aims to provide training to Students' Unions across the country to support them in the roll out of campaigns and distribution of information on drug dependency, associated risks and celebrating recovery.

Objectives:

- To equip officers in their work on drug dependency, harm reduction and recovery.
- To equip officers to support students who are at risk of having a drug dependency.

Actions:

- € Provide a training module for relevant Students' Union Officers during the summer term on drug awareness, drug dependency, associated risk and recovery.
- € Support Students' Union Officers in establishing links with national and local, community-based support services to identify referral pathways for students.

Suggested Actions for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, attend training events promoted or organised by USI.

-
- Utilise appropriate resources and supports provided through USI or locally by relevant organisations and support services.
 - Aim to establish national and local links with community-based services and identify a referral pathway for students in need.
 - Seek, where possible, representation on campus decision making boards/committees in relation to health promotion and drug use.
 - Aim to develop and review new or existing campus health policies relating to drug use and misuse.

Prevention

USI aims to promote a positive social, academic, and residential environment that supports student wellbeing. A key component of harm reduction is education and awareness. USI aims to run effective campaigns around drug dependency, the risks associated with prolonged drug use and overdose and celebrate a person's recovery journey. USI shall also lobby for increased support services to help students with drug use and dependency.

Objectives:

- To raise awareness through campaigns amongst the student population on drug harm reduction, risks associated and recovery and to encourage Students' Unions to run local campaigns on the issue.
- To encourage students to actively seek information on the risks associated with drug use and sign-post students to information resources and supports available to them.

Actions:

- Continue to work with national bodies to source accurate information that is relevant to the student body.
- Co-ordinate a national campaign to promote awareness of drug harm reduction, the risks associated with drug use, drug dependency, the benefits of recovery and promote help seeking.
- Support Students' Unions in promoting and developing resources to inform their students on drug usage.
- Support and promote drug awareness campaigns ran by HSE Social Inclusions and other organisations such as "What's In The Pill".
- Support Students' Unions in rolling out training modules for drug harm reduction for students and student leaders.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Source accurate information that is relevant to the student body in relation to drugs.
- Promote resources to inform students of the risks associated with drug use and support relevant national campaigns and initiatives that aim to do the same.
- Facilitate, with support from USI, training modules for drug harm reduction for student leaders.

Support Services

The availability and accessibility of effective campus and community support services is vital in the promotion of student wellbeing. Awareness campaigns to highlight support services is extremely important in reducing the stigma in reaching out for help when needed.

Objectives:

- Improve access to support services for students.
- To liaise with external organisations such as ISHA identify and promote appropriate screening initiatives to support students in difficulty.
- To lobby for increased funding for drug specific supports and initiatives.

Actions:

- Liaise with the HSE Social Inclusion to map and identify support services on campus and in the local community.
- Support Students' Unions in identifying a referral pathway for students affected by addictions and at risk of developing an addiction.
- Promote the use of an online brief intervention tool such as Drugs Meter with Drugaware.
- Provide training for relevant Students Union Officers in SOAR through collaboration with the HSE.
- Liaise with unions and external organisations to identify and promote screening initiatives to support students in difficulty.
- Support Students' Unions in initiating the development or review of a college-wide drugs policy where one is not already in place.
- Lobby for the next Government to invest in treatment and health facilities along with educational programmes to inform young people about drug use and associated risks.

Suggested Action for Students' Unions:

- Where possible, partake in lobbying opportunities both nationally and locally for the increase of investment in treatment and health facilities, along with educational programmes.
- Initiate the development or review of a college-wide drugs policy.
- Promote the use of an online brief intervention tool such as Drugs Meter etc.
- Promote campus supports to ensure students seek help when needed.

Risk Management

In preparation, a range of significant / strategic risks facing the strategy's implementation were identified which are as follows:

- Budgetary and insufficient or inadequate budgets to meet campaign delivery costs.
- USI having to discontinue work and down-size campaigns/Officer resources
- Failure to achieve collaborations on the action points set in the strategy. For the strategy to be effective USI will need to foster support from external organisations and establish links with institutions and external stakeholders.
- Changing of the Executive Team and retaining institutional memory.
- Changing of environments in the health care area, socially and politically.
- Workload of the organisation and the officers.
- Failure to ensure that the strategic and operational policies of USI are properly developed and implemented, and that targets are met.

Risk Mitigation:

The Union of Students in Ireland will, over the life of this segments strategic plan, evaluate the above risks and will ensure that all actions and initiatives undertaken manage these challenges pro-actively, with actions being identified and implemented without delay, so that our mandate can be fulfilled and effectively delivered for our members.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it is valuable for USI to have a comprehensive Health Promotion Strategy, including all elements of student wellbeing such as sexual health, smoking cessation, physical health, mental health, gambling, alcohol and drug harm reduction. This allows for the Vice President for Welfare and relevant Students' Union Officers to coordinate educational campaigns and lobby for policy changes to be implemented with a long-term

sustainable view in mind.

It is expected that the USI Vice President for Welfare will review this strategy annually, provide progress updates to the Welfare Working Group and wider members of National Council and update the strategy accordingly wherever deemed necessary. It is necessary for USI to follow the recommendations of this strategy to promote positive wellbeing with a holistic approach among the student demographic. The strategic objectives for health promotion in third level between now and July 2024 are set out in this strategy and reflect the ambition and intent of the Union of Students in Ireland to deliver on its mandate for its members.