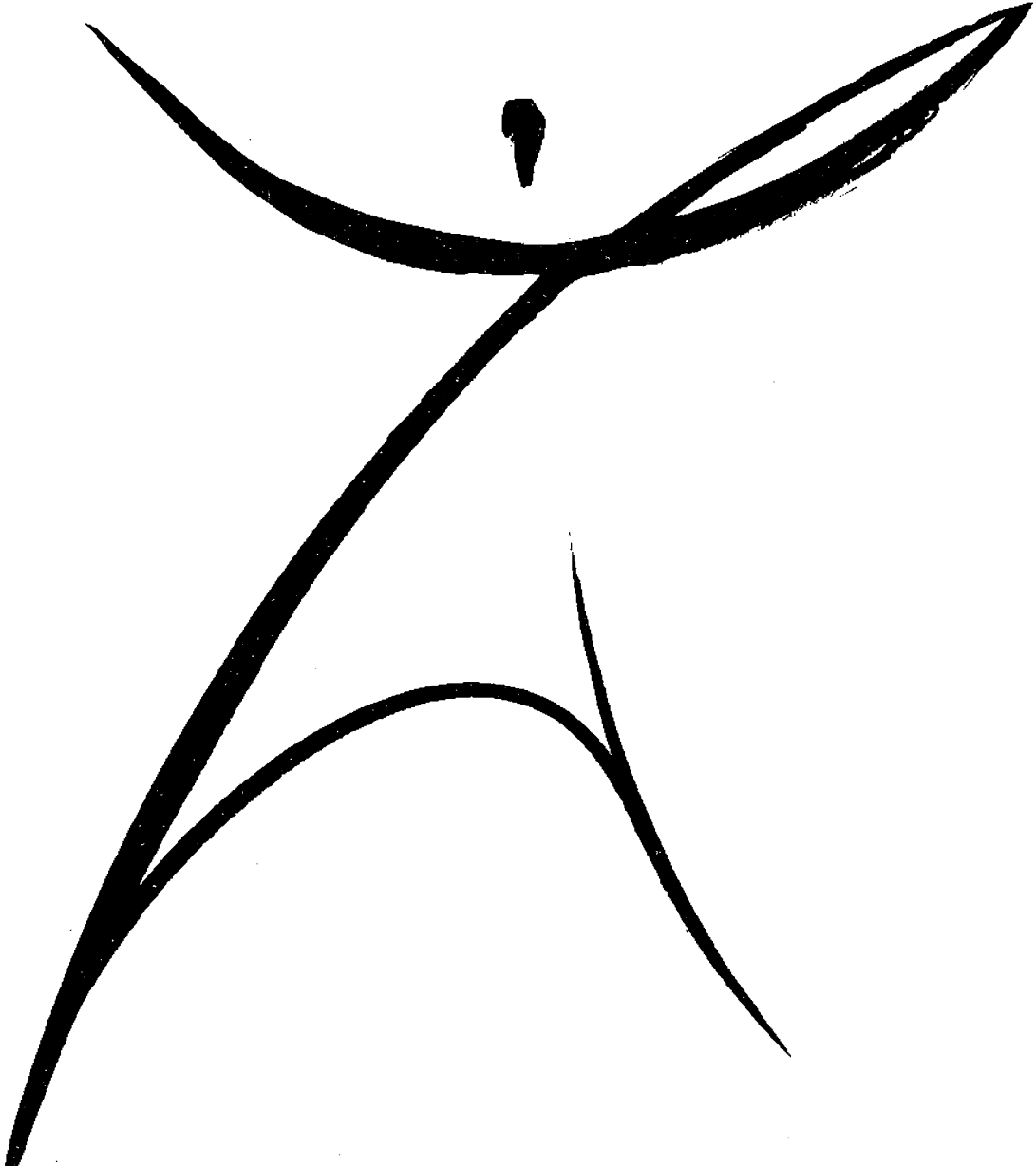


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NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH PROMOTION  
Report of the Sub-Committee on Young People



## FOREWORD

I am very pleased to be associated with the production of this report on health promotion and young people. This document is a natural follow on to the National Health Promotion Strategy which I launched in 1995, and the National Strategy for Health which was published by the Government in 1994.

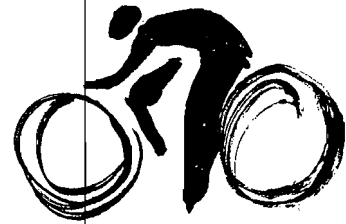
Today there is a greater than ever interest in health, how to achieve it, maintain it and make the most of it. I welcome this interest and I am very conscious of the natural advantage young people have, by virtue of their age, in possessing all round levels of good health and wellbeing. Our task is to ensure that this natural advantage is not lost, nor taken for granted, rather that it is supported and re-enforced by programmes and initiatives that will encourage the young person to exercise the healthier choice in a natural and easy manner. This applies whether the issue be nutrition, maintenance of good relationships or the ability not to become involved in substance misuse.

This document assesses current provision, sets out priorities and makes concrete recommendations which, when implemented, will facilitate the development of health and wellbeing for all our young people. I would like to thank those who contributed to the production of this report and congratulate everyone involved.

Brian O'Shea T.D.  
Minister of State at the Department of Health

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1994 the Government launched a National Health Strategy, 'Shaping a Healthier Future'. Subsequently in 1995 a Health Promotion Strategy was launched. To support this Strategy a National Consultative Committee on Health Promotion was established. One of the main areas that this committee sought to address was the health of young people. To facilitate addressing this area a specific Sub-Committee on young people was established.

This report arises from discussions that took place during the Sub-Committee meetings of the National Consultative Committee on Health Promotion. Additionally a number of meetings took place with young people to ascertain their views on their most immediate health education/promotion concerns and their views have been integrated into the report. The report was circulated to a number of relevant organisations for comment and appropriate relevant responses have been integrated into this report.

## OVERVIEW

In the main young people are healthy, act responsibly and have a healthy outlook towards life. They are enthusiastic, energetic and willing to embrace the opportunities presented to them to engage and participate fully in an active and fulfilling lifestyle. Whilst this is true for many, the challenge for the health promoter is to capitalise on this natural advantage whilst also seeking to involve those who do not have a healthy lifestyle or who are prepared to take unhealthy risks. In addressing the needs of this target audience a useful phrase to remember is 'starting where young people are'. This can be ascertained by consulting with, and including young people, where possible, in the development and implementation phases of any initiatives. This concept of involvement and participation, with accompanying implications for self-esteem and empowerment, is a useful one to be borne in mind in any health promotion initiative but it is particularly relevant when specifically addressing this target audience.

Benefits accrue in specifically addressing this target audience because it is widely recognised that the attitudes and behaviours acquired early on in life greatly influence patterns of behaviour at later stages in a person's life, but there is also direct immediate benefit in that some young people, through engaging in a variety of behaviours put their current health status at risk. Whilst heart disease and cancers are the biggest killers in Ireland today, they are not the immediate concerns of this target audience in that the threat they present is seen as being at some remove from the young person's daily experience. However, in terms of lost years of life, other problems such as accidents, which can occur in rural or urban settings, and suicides, exact a heavy toll. The trauma of the accidental death or a suicide on the family cannot be overstated. Even where the end result is not fatal, injuries and accidents can have horrific consequences. In Health Promotion we are also concerned about quality of life as well as morbidity and mortality rates, and consequently, we have to address a wide range of issues that affect health and wellbeing.

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S HEALTH IN A BROADER CONTEXT.

At the outset it is important to acknowledge the fact that young people are an integral part of family, community, and environmental settings, so, in efforts to directly impact on young people, consideration must be given to the wider influences that exert enormous pressure on a young person's life. People's social, physical and economic situations - their broader environment i.e. where they live, work, and relax, greatly influence their prospects for better health. This is why Health Promotion, if it is to be successful, must rely on inter-sectoral activity that seeks to harness the potential contribution of many relevant disciplines and sectors in effecting the introduction of healthy lifestyles in the widest possible arenas. It is also essential that the appropriate structures to facilitate delivery of Health Promotion for this target audience are in place. It is necessary for legislation to play its role in facilitating effective Health Promotion. Many initiatives can be strengthened by the availability of relevant, enforceable and effective legislation e.g. in the area of tobacco sales to young people.

### ISSUES FACING YOUNG PEOPLE

Whilst the aim must be to educate and encourage all young people to adopt an all round healthy lifestyle, there are particular issues that will always be relevant to this target audience. At early stages in a child's life infectious diseases pose the greatest threat to wellbeing, but as the young person develops, other threats to health and wellbeing emerge. Smoking, drinking alcohol, drug taking, examination pressure and stress, relationships and sexual experimentation all may carry health risks depending on how the young person copes with these situations. It is important that young people know and learn basic facts on health matters but what is also important is that they are given opportunities to develop skills and self-confidence which are needed to develop and maintain healthy lifestyles. Lifestyle is crucial in influencing health and is important, but knowledge and skills are required to master behaviour change and put healthy intentions into practice.

Encouraging responsibility in personal and social aspects of health, and promoting feelings of self-esteem will better prepare young Irish people to deal with difficult situations when they arise. Access to facilities and opportunities to take part in health promoting activities will facilitate a process of self-development.

#### The Media

The importance of the media in influencing the lifestyles of young people must be acknowledged and used to encourage and promote health. Accordingly it becomes increasingly necessary for young people to have exposure to learning situations that will allow them to interpret and make their own assessments of information and ideas that are presented through various media.





## Technology

It is considered to be of extreme importance to make use of appropriate modern technology to convey information and to influence young people in their health related behaviour. This can be done by making use of specific computer programmes, and kiosk type information booths.

## Data Base

The availability of good base line data with respect to young people's health-related behaviours would be of enormous benefit in determining priorities. Initiatives must be accompanied by evaluation measures to assess effectiveness, and good base line data will greatly aid this process.

## EXISTING HEALTH EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROMOTION INITIATIVES

The Sub-Committee recognises that there are many Health Education and Health Promotion initiatives already in existence that are targeted either directly or indirectly at young people. Broadly speaking these may be categorised into 3 headings:

- i) Young People  
Initiatives targeted at young people themselves - in both primary and second level schools, and the informal education sector.
- ii) Home and Family  
Initiatives targeted at the home and family which are primarily to do with parent education.
- iii) Those who work with young people  
Initiatives targeting at those who work with young people i.e. teachers and youth leaders.

Appropriate legislation can be very effective in supporting particular initiatives in any of the areas referred to above.

A summary of initiatives is attached in Appendix 1.

## NEEDS OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Despite the fact that there are many initiatives already underway, these initiatives do not always extend to all young people in all parts of the country. The Sub-Committee would like to see programmes and initiatives developed that would:

- enhance individuals knowledge, motivation, and skills to acquire and maintain health;
- increase positive health behaviour;
- decrease health damaging behaviour;
- enhance the major roles of the family and other social networks like schools in developing healthy lifestyles;
- improve opportunities for people to develop and use their health potential.

The Sub-Committee acknowledges that many of the initiatives already in place contain some or all of the above features but what merits attention is the requirement to obtain a more comprehensive and structured approach that would permit greater accessibility to greater numbers.

It must also be borne in mind that there are populations where literacy skills are poor and consequently appropriate materials should be available for this target audience.

It is also recognised that a disproportionate number of females are involved in education and training in the health education/promotion area and that the area generally could benefit from greater male participation.

More specifically, this means challenges for health promotion that can be categorised in four broad areas. These are

- disease prevention
- acquiring healthy lifestyles
- developing health skills and
- creating healthy environments or settings.

Within each of these areas there are a number of topics or issues that can be identified as meriting attention.

### **Disease Prevention**

Cardiovascular diseases and cancers are the major causes of premature mortality and morbidity and whilst they do appear to be at a step removed from this target audience it is vital to keep prevention of these diseases in mind.

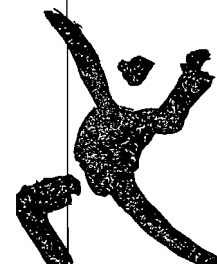
Other areas of direct relevance are:

- Respiratory diseases
- Sexual health diseases
- Mental distress and illness
- Physical disability and handicap
- Dental and oral health
- Injuries and accidents
- Maternal and child health.

### **Healthy Lifestyles**

In pursuing a healthy lifestyle the following issues have direct relevance:

- Smoking
- Alcohol and drugs
- Nutrition
- Physical exercise
- Stress and violent behaviour.





## Health Skills

Putting a healthy lifestyle into practice requires:

- Possessing the appropriate knowledge
- Attitudinal development
- Self-confidence and self-esteem
- Coping and stress management skills
- Skills for the building and maintenance of relationships
- Parenting skills
- Safety (road, fire and water) skills
- Self-help and mutual support abilities.

## Healthy Environments or Settings

The role that the broader setting can play in determining health must receive attention and these settings are of great relevance:

- Families
- Schools
- Communities
- Work and workplace.

## PRIORITIES

It is evident from the four main areas referred to in the foregoing section that it will not be possible to address all these issues in a comprehensive fashion immediately and for this reason it is necessary to prioritise some areas for more immediate attention as follows:

### Peer Influences

It is increasingly recognised that when young people are involved in, and responsible for, their own learning, there are enormous benefits to all concerned, and for this reason the inclusion of a peer dimension in initiatives is a principle that is considered very important.

### Sexual Health

A person's sense of self and their self perception is significantly influenced by the confidence they possess in relation to their sexuality. Therefore it is essential that young people are given every possible opportunity to develop a positive and responsible attitude to their own, and others, sexuality. A concern in this area is the number of teenagers having unwanted pregnancies and consequently, initiatives must be undertaken to address this issue. Allied to this is a need for parenting programmes which acknowledge that quality of life and accompanying levels of wellbeing and health can be significantly influenced by the quality of parenting that any child receives. Helping people fulfil their potential in their role as parents is an area that merits significant attention.



## **Drugs**

Currently the problem of drug misuse and all the accompanying hardship that is involved is one that is receiving particular attention and every effort must be made to promote lifestyles that do not involve the misuse of drugs. It is easy to get carried away by sensational reports of illegal drug misuse but the consumption of other licit drugs such as alcohol and tobacco is a major cause for concern, as also is the consumption of over-the-counter drugs such as tranquillisers and sleeping tablets.

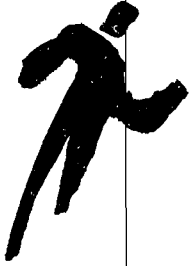
## **Accidents**

Accidents are the main cause of death amongst young people and therefore accident prevention is an area that needs to be addressed. Risk taking is part of a young person's life and an integral part of development, however possessing risk management and risk minimisation skills could be very beneficial in many situations. This is particularly true when it comes to developing road, water, and fire safety skills, which enable people to practise healthier lifestyles.

## **Nutrition and Exercise**

A balanced diet and regular exercise will contribute positively to health. However, there are particular concerns when people do not observe good practise with regard to these two aspects of lifestyle. Eating disorders cause particular problems for a small number of young people, particularly females, and although this is a complex problem it is a sufficient cause for concern to warrant educational and promotional intervention. Increasingly osteoporosis is a cause for concern and it is a major contributor to accidental injury. The importance of good diet and regular exercise must be emphasised, particularly to young females, in order to maintain bone density. In saying this it must also be recognised that young women are frequently more informed about dietary matters than young men and consequently the basic information needs of young men must not be overlooked.





## SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

More specifically the Sub-Committee recommends that the following areas be addressed, or initiatives be undertaken, as a matter of urgency:

### **Recommendation:**

More extensive research be undertaken on the needs of young people

### **Action:**

- Conduct appropriate research which would give greater insight into the health needs of young people, as expressed by young people.

### **Recommendation:**

Support for mothers/parents of young people in disadvantaged settings.

### **Action:**

- Liaison between Departments of Health and Education to develop common strategies to promote the health and welfare of pre-school children, bearing in mind the recently established 'early start' programme which contributes to this area specifically through its emphasis on the role of parents.
- Standardisation/quality control on parenting courses and their extension to all areas.

### **Recommendation:**

Provision of alternative entertainment/activity for young people, to reduce dependence on the pub and encourage confidence-building activities. In certain cases certification or some other method of validation for participation will be valuable for the young person.

### **Action:**

- Broader range of sports and activities on offer to young people in schools, which are validated in a way similar to more 'mainstream' activities.
- Summer schemes/camps.
- Encourage information communication structures and networks which are so important to young people. These can occur in coffee shops, music venues or on the internet;
- Provision of leadership skills courses and coaching and administrative skills courses.

**Recommendation:**

Improve nutrition and dietary habits

**Action:**

- Pilot projects - e.g. 'cooking for fun' in youth clubs, school cookery clubs, development of classroom materials based on gender and food.

**Recommendation:**

Promote positive attitudes to safety amongst young people.

**Action:**

- Liaison between the Departments of the Environment, Health and Education to ensure that safety education is further developed and supported at both primary and second level schools. New initiatives to be examined by the National Safety Council - e.g. information packs and promotional aids to support the teaching in the classroom.
- Introduce an awareness raising programme that alerts people to the necessity for adequate safety on the farm and in the workplace.





## APPENDIX 1

### SUMMARY OF HEALTH EDUCATION AND PROMOTION INITIATIVES TARGETED AT YOUNG PEOPLE.

#### INITIATIVES TARGETED AT YOUNG PEOPLE THEMSELVES

##### 1. Broad Health Education Programmes

The Health Promotion Unit has supported the development of broad comprehensive education programmes at Health Board level. Most notably these include the BÍ Folláin, Primary School Health Education Programme, developed in the Mid Western Health Board, the Learning for Life Materials for second level schools developed by Tipperary V.E.C. and the Lifeskills Programme for second level and primary schools, developed in the North Western Health Board.

##### 2. Child Abuse Prevention Programme - 'Stay Safe'

This Programme was originally devised by the Eastern Health Board with the support of the Health Promotion Unit and is now available to all primary schools throughout the country. A team of social workers and teachers have provided in-service training for primary teachers from all schools. The Departments of Health and Education are represented on the Steering Committee and the Health Promotion Unit has provided funding for the printing of materials.

##### 3. Nutrition Education At Primary Schools

A Nutrition Education in Primary Schools programme has been developed by the Health Promotion Unit in conjunction with the Department of Education and the North Western Health Board. This Programme, which is aimed at 3rd and 4th class levels in primary school, is available to all primary schools.

##### 4. Smokebusters

This is a smoking prevention programme which was developed by the Irish Cancer Society and is run by them in conjunction with the Eastern Health Board, the Health Promotion Unit and the Department of Education. It's main aim is to delay or prevent the onset of cigarette smoking amongst 7-11 year olds in primary schools.

##### 5. AIDS Education Resource Materials

This resource was developed by the Health Promotion Unit in conjunction with the Psychological Service of the Department of Education.

These materials are targeted at the 14-18 age group and aims to:

- provide information on the causes, transmission and prevention of AIDS;
- help pupils explore attitudes to AIDS;
- encourage pupils to practise behaviours that will prevent them acquiring AIDS;
- promote among pupils a mature attitude in assuming responsibility for their own health and the health of others;
- inform students of community resources available for coping with AIDS.

## **6. 'On My Own Two Feet' - Substance Abuse Prevention Programme**

The overall aim of "On My Own Two Feet" is to enable students to develop their ability to make informed decisions about the use of drugs in their lives. The Programme is a joint initiative between the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and the Psychological Service of the Department of Education, in conjunction with Mater Dei Counselling Centre. It receives some financial support from the European Commission. It is a comprehensive drug education programme which involves the whole school staff of second level schools.

The materials consist of 5 modules - Identity and Self-Esteem; Assertive Communication; Feelings; Attitudes and Influences and Decision Making. Other areas addressed by the Programme include parental involvement, student responsibility and the media.

## **7. The Health Promoting School Network**

The Health Promoting School Network is a pilot programme which is being developed jointly by the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health and the Psychological Service of the Department of Education with assistance from the Marino Institute of Education. It receives financial support from DG V of the European Commission. Twenty primary and twenty second level schools are participating in this Programme which is co-ordinated by a Project Officer. The Programme is examining the impact of issues such as school ethos, attitudes of staff and school environment on the implementation of health promotion initiatives in the school.

## **8. Health Promoting College**

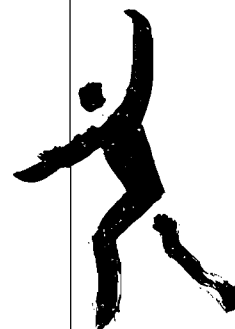
The Health Promoting College initiative commenced as a pilot project in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick in 1996. This project is considering how a third level college can introduce and implement health promotion principles and practices.

## **9. Relationships and Sexuality Education**

Currently the Department of Education along with the partners in Education is developing an initiative which will facilitate schools in addressing the area of relationships and sexuality education. This involves provision of sample materials, development of policy and in-service training for teachers.

## **10. Smoking Cessation and Reduction Programme (SCRAP)**

This is a peer-led anti-smoking programme which was developed by the Health Promotion Unit in conjunction with the Irish Cancer Society, the National Youth Federation and with support from the Department of Education. It is aimed at 12/13 year olds who are in the 1st year of second level education.





## 11. Peer Education - a Manual

This manual was developed by the National Youth Federation in conjunction with the Health Promotion Unit. It is a resource which provides practical guidance, information and a model for peer education with session outlines for those working with young people aged approximately 14 - 24 years. The manual is divided into three sections: Peer Education - An Introduction; Training Peer Educators; and HIV/AIDS and Sexuality.

## 12. National Youth Health Programme

The National Youth Health Programme is a partnership between the National Youth Council of Ireland, the Health Promotion Unit and the Youth Affairs Section of the Department of Education. The aim of the Programme is to develop Health Education resources and provide training in health issues specific to young people. This Programme employs an Education Officer who facilitates training courses. Its resources include:

i) 'Drink Awareness for Youth' (DAY)

The principal aim of this Programme is to increase awareness within society generally, and among young people especially, of the effects, consequences and dangers involved in the misuse of abuse of alcohol.

ii) Solvent Abuse resource materials

This resource allows youth leaders and teachers to tackle the issue of solvent abuse. It incorporates the enhancement of self-esteem and decision making skills.

iii) 'Get Into Life' - cancer education materials

These materials aim to enable young people to examine their own lifestyles and adopt healthy behaviour that will be a defence against health threatening illnesses such as cancer.

iv) Youth Work Support Pack for Dealing with the Drugs Issue

This pack addresses the drugs issue by providing youth and community organisations with a framework for exploring their individual roles in relation to the drugs issue at organisational level.

## 13. AIDS Awareness in 3rd Level Colleges

AIDS awareness messages have been placed in the washroom/toilet areas of the majority of third level colleges. This programme has been welcomed as a very effective medium to target these messages at a specific group of young people.

## 13. T.E.A.C.H.

T.E.A.C.H. stands for Teach Everyone About Cancer and Health. This is a cross curricular health education programme aimed at 12 - 15 year olds developed by the North Western Health Board. The aim of the materials is to provide a sharper focus on developing healthy lifestyles in relation to tobacco use, nutrition and over-exposure to the sun.

## INITIATIVES TARGETED AT HOME AND FAMILY BASED ON PARENT EDUCATION

### 15. Home-School Liaison Initiative

This Department of Education initiative in primary and second level schools is directed specifically at enhancing parenting skills with regard to the education and nurturing of children.

### 16. Parent Education on Alcohol, Drugs and Family Communication

This Programme has been developed by the Health Promotion Unit in conjunction with the Cork Social and Health Education Project of the Southern Health Board.

This project recognises that young people and their parents must be provided with assistance to help them deal with the problems posed by both licit and illicit drugs. To this end, a course has been developed which focuses, not only on drugs themselves, but also on the skills and personal attributes that help people deal with drug situations. These skills relate to such areas as listening; communication; self-esteem; conflict resolution; discipline and similar issues.

### 17. Parenting for Prevention

This Programme was developed by Community Awareness of Drugs - a voluntary organisation - with financial and practical assistance from the Health Promotion Unit. It aims to assist parents in exploring attitudes, beliefs and decisions about the issue of drug misuse.





## INITIATIVES TARGETING TEACHERS AND YOUTH LEADERS

### 18. Infection Control Guidelines for Schools

This joint Department of Health/Department of Education initiative was undertaken in conjunction with a consultant paediatrician with a special interest in infectious diseases. An infection control manual has been developed for all schools which should assist school personnel in differentiating between infections which are less serious and those which need medical attention. It gives an easy to follow guide on what each infection is, how it is transmitted and how to break the chain of infection.

### 19. Action For Life

This is a health related exercise programme designed to help teachers prepare and present their school Physical Education programme. It is funded by the Department of Education, the Health Promotion Unit, and the Irish Heart Foundation.

### 20. Drugs Questions - Local Answers

This is a community-based training programme for health/education professionals, Gardai, youth workers and others interested in drug-related problems which they meet in their work.

### 21. Leadership Training Programme for Primary Prevention of Drugs Misuse

This Programme which is a CROSSCARE (Catholic Social Service Conference) initiative, is being partially funded by the Health Promotion Unit, the European Commission and CROSSCARE.

It is a pilot project which aims to develop and implement a flexible process to facilitate the people in the target communities in tackling their own drug prevention issues, and to enable the local people to develop their own skills and resources so that they may address these issues more effectively.

### 22. Fás Le Chéile

This is a programme for parents developed by the North Western Health Board which trains parent group leaders to run courses for parents in conjunction with their local primary school.

### 23. Information and Education Materials

The Health Promotion Unit has developed a wide range of educational materials, including leaflets, posters and videos for young people. These cover issues such as nutrition, alcohol, drugs, smoking and exercise. All materials are available free of charge, on request, from the Unit's public office.



**This report was compiled by the Sub-committee of the National  
Consultative Committee on Health Promotion**

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