



STRATEGY SUMMARY

TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF CRISIS PREGNANCY

crisispregnancyagency
Formulating & Implementing a National Strategy



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2004-2006

WHAT IS THE STRATEGY TO ADDRESS THE ISSUE OF CRISIS PREGNANCY?

The Crisis Pregnancy Agency, established by Statutory Instrument No. 446 of 2001, is tasked with three functions that are specified in the Establishment Order. The functions of the Agency are as follows:

"to provide for:

- (a) a reduction in the number of crisis pregnancies by the provision of education, advice and contraceptive services
- (b) a reduction in the number of women with crisis pregnancies who opt for abortion by offering services and supports which make other options more attractive
- (c) the provision of counselling and medical services after crisis pregnancy"¹.

The **Strategy to Address the Issue of Crisis Pregnancy** ("the Strategy") was published by the Crisis Pregnancy Agency in November 2003 after a comprehensive consultation process. The Strategy provides a framework for understanding and addressing the causes and consequences of crisis pregnancy and details how the Agency proposes to achieve the objectives set out above.

It is the belief of the Agency that the achievement of its strategic objectives over its ten-year remit will reduce the incidence of crisis pregnancy and the number of women who choose abortion.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The Strategy is aimed at both policymakers and service providers - those who can bring about the changes in policy and practice necessary to reduce the rate of crisis pregnancy and improve the experience of those women faced with a crisis pregnancy.

WHY WAS IT PRODUCED – AND BY WHOM?

In 2000 the All-Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution, in dealing with the subject of abortion, concluded that "a major problem facing Ireland is the large number of crisis pregnancies....There is an urgent need to take measures to reduce the number of crisis pregnancies"². The Committee's report also discussed the needs of women faced with crisis pregnancy and how these needs could be adequately addressed. The Committee recommended the establishment of an agency specifically charged with the responsibility to develop a strategy to reduce the number of crisis pregnancies and to ensure that women faced with a crisis pregnancy are offered "real and positive alternatives"².

The **Crisis Pregnancy Agency** ("the Agency") was set up in 2001 as a direct response to this recommendation. Under the terms of the Agency's Establishment Order, the Agency must prepare a national strategy to address the issue of crisis pregnancy and must work with appropriate partners to promote and co-ordinate the attainment of the objectives it sets¹.

WHAT IS CRISIS PREGNANCY?

Legislation defines crisis pregnancy as "a pregnancy which is neither planned nor desired by the woman concerned, and which represents a personal crisis for her"¹. The Agency understands this definition to include the experience of those women for whom a planned or desired pregnancy develops into a crisis over time due to a change in circumstances.

WHAT IS THE AGENCY'S APPROACH?

The Agency is a government body involved in strategy, planning and co-ordination that works with all relevant statutory and voluntary organisations. The Agency will keep women at risk of or experiencing crisis pregnancy at the centre of its concerns at all times. This approach will ensure that the Agency's work:

- is based on partnership with relevant organisations

- makes a contribution to the development of public policy
- is accountable
- adds value to the existing range of statutory and voluntary services
- is innovative and courageous in the creation of new kinds of solutions
- improves quality in order to develop best practice.

These plans appear in more detail in the full Strategy.

To progress the Strategy, the Agency will:

- **undertake research** to understand better what factors lead to crisis pregnancy and what actions will help most in prevention and in supporting people who have crisis pregnancies
- **develop policy** that assists in prevention and in supporting people who have crisis pregnancies
- **develop standards** for services in the field of crisis pregnancy
- **improve knowledge and skills** among a number of groups, including people at risk of experiencing a crisis pregnancy, service providers and the families of people who experience crisis pregnancy
- **build the capacity of services** in the field of crisis pregnancy by developing partnerships with relevant organisations
- **influence change** in key areas (such as income supports, employment, education, childcare and accommodation) which affect the decision-making of people who experience crisis pregnancy
- work towards **creating cultural change** so that Irish society fosters safer sexual behaviour and is more supportive in its attitudes towards women experiencing crisis pregnancy.

The Agency is a policy-making organisation with a specific remit. Most of the actions contained in the Strategy will be undertaken by the bodies and groups which have statutory responsibility or which provide services in areas that have an impact on people experiencing crisis pregnancy.

WHAT EVIDENCE INFORMS THE STRATEGY?

The Strategy is based on national and international research. There are many gaps in available evidence, so an important feature of the Strategy is to undertake research to fill the gaps. For example, little is known at the moment about men's attitudes to contraception and the prevention of crisis pregnancy. With Agency

research now underway in this area, it will be possible to target actions more accurately in the future.

Not all unplanned pregnancies are experienced as crises, and some planned pregnancies become crises. The many reasons behind these facts are detailed in the full Strategy. Similarly, there are many factors which relate to the prevention of crisis pregnancy and how people in the situation make decisions. For example:

- International research points to some **effective ways of preventing crisis pregnancy**, such as more appropriate and available sex education and sexual health services, and more easily available contraception, including emergency contraception.
- National and international research shows that **women experiencing crisis pregnancy make decisions** about what course of action to take based on their experience of relationships, their living situations, the level of support they have, their goals and aspirations, their financial and emotional states and many other variables.

These factors and many others are detailed in the Strategy document.

HOW WILL THE STRATEGY REDUCE THE NUMBER OF CRISIS PREGNANCIES?

The Strategy details many actions aimed at reducing the number of crisis pregnancies through the provision of education, advice and contraceptive services. The goals of the Strategy aim to:

- develop people's **knowledge and skills** so that they know how to avoid crisis pregnancy
- develop services so that people have the **means** to prevent crisis pregnancy
- foster a **culture** which supports decisions in favour of safer sexual health and also motivates and stimulates individuals to make safer sexual choices.

In implementing the Strategy actions for reducing the number of crisis pregnancies, the Agency will:

- **facilitate cohesion** at policy level
- ensure that **policy gaps are filled**
- **work in partnership with the Department of Education and Science to strengthen the delivery of relationships and sexuality education** in schools and other settings

- **conduct surveys** to find out more about people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, so that **actions can be targeted more accurately**
- encourage the development of a **national strategy on reproductive and sexual health**
- produce **standards for contraception services**
- make recommendations to ensure that **contraceptive services are more widely and easily available**
- work to improve access to **emergency contraception**
- lobby for the **reduction of VAT on condoms**
- **inform policymakers and key decision-makers** about critical issues in research and practice
- develop **better information** about how to prevent crisis pregnancy
- **promote prevention** in the media and by other means
- **improve the skills** of parents, doctors, teachers and many others who can guide and support people to take care of their sexual health
- work towards **cultural change** that fosters safer sexual practices and the prevention of crisis pregnancy.

These actions appear in more detail in the full Strategy.

HOW WILL THE STRATEGY REDUCE THE NUMBER OF WOMEN WITH CRISIS PREGNANCIES WHO OPT FOR ABORTION?

The Strategy details plans for many actions aimed at reducing the number of women who experience a crisis pregnancy and who opt for abortion, by offering supports and services which make other options more attractive. The most effective way to bring down the rate of abortion is to reduce the overall number of crisis pregnancies, as detailed above.

In addition to the above, the Strategy aims to make the options of parenting and adoption more attractive to women experiencing crisis pregnancy. This involves bringing about far-reaching change in attitudes, policies, services and supports and will see the Agency working in partnership with the Adoption Board.

Implementing the Strategic plan for reducing the number of women with crisis pregnancies who opt for abortion will see the Agency work to:

- **provide better supports** for lone parents
- **inform policymakers and key decision-makers** about critical issues

in research and practice

- work with our partners to improve the availability of **low-cost childcare**
- work with our partners to improve **income supports** for lone parents
- work with our partners to make it easier for lone parents to stay in **education, training and employment**
- improve access to **crisis pregnancy counselling**
- produce **standards and protocols** for crisis pregnancy counselling
- provide more **training** for crisis pregnancy counsellors
- develop and distribute **better information** about crisis pregnancy counselling through the further development of the **Positive Options** campaign and other methods
- find ways of **helping women who conceal their pregnancies**
- improve supports for **teenage parents**
- undertake a number of initiatives to change **negative perceptions of adoption**
- encourage **reform of adoption legislation** to bring it up to date and make adoption more attractive
- train crisis pregnancy counsellors and others to **present adoption as a viable option** for people experiencing crisis pregnancy
- **facilitate cohesion** concerning policies which affect lone parents
- **improve information** on adoption and parenthood.

These plans and many others appear in more detail in the full Strategy.

HOW WILL THE STRATEGY ENSURE THE PROVISION OF COUNSELLING AND MEDICAL SERVICES AFTER CRISIS PREGNANCY?

The full Strategy contains plans for many actions aimed at ensuring the provision of counselling and medical services after crisis pregnancy. This is particularly important for women who have had abortions, many of whom never receive post-abortion counselling or medical check-ups. The Agency believes that this basic provision may need to be supplemented by other targeted services, the nature of which will become clear only over time.

The Strategy recognises that not everyone will need these services but aims to ensure that:

- people recognise when they might need help
- quality services are available and accessible when required.

This involves bringing about changes in attitudes, services and supports. **In implementing the Strategy's plan to ensure the provision of counselling and medical supports after crisis pregnancy, the Agency will:**

- conduct more **research** into this relatively undeveloped area
- **inform policymakers and key decision-makers** about critical issues in research and practice
- gathering of information from women who have had crisis pregnancies and abortions and mapping their needs
- develop affordable, accessible **services** to meet those needs
- produce **standards and protocols** for post-crisis pregnancy services
- develop and distribute **information** about post-crisis pregnancy services
- provide **training** for post-crisis pregnancy counsellors and for medical personnel who work with women who have had crisis pregnancies.

These plans and many others appear in more detail in the full Strategy.

HOW WILL THE STRATEGY WORK TO STIMULATE CULTURAL CHANGE?

International research shows that social and cultural attitudes and values influence all aspects of preventing or coping with crisis pregnancy. The full Strategy contains plans for many actions aimed at stimulating cultural change. Irish society has already changed a great deal – for example, having a baby outside marriage is much more acceptable than it used to be.

The Strategy aims to influence the broad mass of Irish society, as well as policymakers and practitioners. It envisages the creation of a supportive social environment in which:

- people are empowered to make safe, responsible choices
- sexual health can be debated openly and maturely
- people experiencing crisis pregnancy and the choices they make are not judged or condemned
- negative, damaging and misleading messages about sexual health and crisis pregnancy are challenged.

Some of the Strategy's main plans for stimulating cultural change include:

- **creating links with key influencers** – people working in the media, policymakers, academics, service providers and others who have an

- impact on the way in which attitude and opinion is formed in Ireland
- **targeting** media programmes to **specific audiences**
- delivering **information** campaigns.

These plans and many others appear in more detail in the full Strategy.

WHAT ELSE IS IN THE FULL STRATEGY?

As well as providing more detail on all aspects of its plans for tackling crisis pregnancy, the full Strategy includes information on:

- the research programme that supports the actions being taken
- how the Strategy will be measured and evaluated
- how learning from this process will be disseminated.

The full Strategy contains the detailed Priority Action Plan which lays out the main actions to be undertaken from 2004-2006. Some of the work has already started in 2002-3. At the end of the three year period, the Strategy will be reviewed and, if necessary, revised in light of research and evaluation findings.

HOW CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

The full text of the **Strategy to Address the Issue of Crisis Pregnancy** is available for download in PDF format at www.crisispregnancy.ie

A hardcopy of the document is available upon request from the Crisis Pregnancy Agency, 89-94 Capel Street, Dublin 1, Republic of Ireland.

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For further information about the Strategy, please contact the office of the Crisis Pregnancy Agency.

References

1: Statutory Instrument No.446 of 2001, Crisis Pregnancy Agency, Establishment Order, 2001. (available on www.crisispregnancy.ie and Irish government websites).

2: The All Party Oireachtas Committee on the Constitution: Fifth Progress Report: Abortion (November 2000)

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