

Irish National Survey of Sexual Health (INISH)



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Aim and Objectives: The last dedicated national survey on sexual behaviour and reproductive health in Ireland was carried out in 2010. Since then, the cultural, legal and social context of sexuality has undergone remarkable changes, which necessitate a new, nationally representative study in this area. Therefore, the HSE Sexual Health Programme launched a Sexual Health and Crisis Pregnancy Research Award to fund such a national survey. The winner of the grant was the Irish National Survey of Sexual Health (INISH), proposed by the team at the Health Promotion Research Centre at the University of Galway.

INISH is a comprehensive study designed to gain an understanding of the landscape of sexual health and well-being within the Republic of Ireland. Recognising the intrinsic connection between sexual health and overall well-being, the study endeavours to address existing gaps in knowledge through rigorous research efforts. The work for this project addresses the knowledge gaps outlined in the Irish National Sexual Health Strategy 2015–2020 and builds on the recommendations of a scoping study commissioned by the HSE Sexual Health Programme in 2021. The INISH study will:

- (1) Explore which method(s) are the most feasible for a nationally representative survey on sexual health and crisis pregnancy in Ireland, and provide a cost estimation for potential method(s).
- (2) Develop a full study protocol for a nationally representative survey, covering ethics, data collection and management, and knowledge translation.
- (3) Provide guidance, supervision and assistance to an external contractor carrying out the data collection.

Design/Methods: INISH will be conducted in two phases. The first phase will be a feasibility study that establishes appropriate methods for conducting a nationally representative survey on sexual health, developing comprehensive study protocols, and providing guidance and oversight to execute the same. The feasibility study will be carried out with approximately 300 participants between January and June 2025. Based on the results of the feasibility study, the second phase of INISH will be a nationally representative study that aims to survey over 3,000 participants between January and November 2027. The feasibility study will test different methods and techniques (including web-based surveys and computer-assisted interviewing) and provide cost calculations for the nationally representative survey.

Public Patient Involvement: We have recruited members for the General and Special Populations Advisory Panels, using various venues and channels. With over 100 expressions of interest, the project has adopted open panel format with up to 25 members participating in these regularly. The members invited to the General panel are representative of the gender, age, educational, social, sexual, racial, and geographical diversity of Ireland, whereas employees of organisations advocating for and representing marginalised populations were invited to the Special Populations Panel. This panel therefore represents sexual minorities, young adults, people with disabilities, family work, rehabilitation care, people living with HIV, and the homeless population. Populations that are not yet adequately represented in the SPPI are the elderly, immigrants and asylum seekers, drug users, people with chronic conditions, gender minorities and sex workers. Between November 2023 and August 2024, there have been five panel meetings contributing to the selection of the most important sexual health issues to be surveyed. The panels will be involved in all stages of the project as we proceed.

Results: Anticipated outcomes from this project encompass not only an in-depth understanding of sexual health behaviours within Ireland but also the facilitation of evidence-based policy formulation and service provision. By recognising prevalent attitudes and barriers surrounding sexual health, the study aims to provide actionable insights to the HSE SHP for the improvement of sexual health outcomes nationwide.

Knowledge Translation and Dissemination: We intend to disseminate the results widely through social media, research reports and scientific publications. We expect that these documents and knowledge products will inform national and international policy in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, service delivery, and future research.