



## **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 conducted 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, which was awarded to the team at the Health Promotion Research Centre at the University of Galway. The Irish National Survey of Sexual Health (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 project addresses the knowledge gaps that had been outlined in the Irish National Sexual Health Strategy ([2025–2030](#)) that was launched at the Health Promotion Annual Conference at University of Galway on 26 June 2025. The methodology of the study is developed in line with the recommendations of a scoping study commissioned by the HSE Sexual Health Programme in 2021.

INISH's objectives are:

- (1) To 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) To develop a full study protocol for a nationally representative survey, covering ethics, data collection and management, and knowledge translation.
- (3) To provide guidance, supervision and assistance to an external contractor carrying out the data collection.

### **Ethics:**

University of Galway provided full Data Protection and Research Ethics approval for the survey (DPIA Reference Number: DPIA2024021; REC Application ID: 2024.06.011).

## **Design/Methods:**

The INISH study is being conducted in two phases. The first phase is 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 the external company who collect the data. The feasibility study was carried out between July–September 2025, with 305 participants covering the gender, age and geographical diversity in the Republic of Ireland. Data was collected by Ipsos B&A, the largest market research company in Ireland, who were selected in a competitive public procurement procedure.

Based on extensive discussions with experts and reviewing the relevant literature, the INISH Team developed a survey instrument that consists of three parts. The first part uses a Computer-assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) technique: the interviewer asks basic sociodemographic and health-related questions and records the participant's responses on a tablet, using a pre-programmed survey platform. In the next phase, the participant enters their responses related to their sexual and reproductive behaviours and experiences onto the same platform (Computer-assisted Self-interview, CASI). The third part reverts to CAPI, with the interviewer asking questions related to sexual attitudes and further sociodemographic characteristics. At the CAPI sections, show cards are used to assist the participant with multiple-choice questions. This approach is adapted from [the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles](#) (United Kingdom), one of the world's leading nationally representative population health surveys in the area of sexual health.

During the feasibility study, comprehensive feedback was collected from the participants and the interviewers. Prior to commencement of the study, extensive briefing sessions were conducted with interviewers. These included interviewers familiarising with the full survey instrument and the methodology, recruitment and safety and well-being of participants and interviewers. Given the sensitive and potentially distress-inducing nature of the survey, safety and responding mechanisms were built into the study. Interviewers and participants indicated their momentary mood using a visual analogue scale immediately before and after the interviews. Participants could comment on the survey instrument and the procedure, and interviewers were instructed to make detailed notes on each interview, including any irregularity and signs of participant distress. During data collection, online check-in sessions were conducted in small groups that included four to six interviewers, a University of Galway researcher and an Ipsos staff in each group.

Based on the results of the feasibility study, the second phase will involve a nationally representative study that aims to survey over 3,000 participants aged 18–59, between January and November 2027.

## **Public and 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 an open panel format with up to 25 members participating regularly. The members invited to the General Population Panel represent 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 Special Populations Advisory Panel are the elderly, immigrants and asylum seekers, drug users, people with chronic conditions, gender minorities and sex workers. Between November 2023 and November 2025, there have been six panel meetings contributing to the selection of the most important sexual health issues to be surveyed. The panels have been involved in all stages of the project as it progresses. One General Populations Advisory Panel Member acted as co-author in a publication stemming from the study, and other Panel Members' testimonials are shared on the [project website](#).

### **Results:**

Outcomes of the study will deepen our understanding of sexual health behaviours and their psycho-social context within Ireland and contribute to evidence-based policy formulation and service provision. By mapping enablers and barriers of using sexual and reproductive health services, the study aims to provide actionable insights to the HSE SHP for the improvement of sexual health outcomes nationwide.

### **Knowledge Translation and Dissemination:**

At the Health Promotion Annual Conference 2025, we presented a poster [on the PPI element of the study](#), and a keynote talk on [the lifecourse approach to investigating sexual health](#) that also showcased INISH. The former Research Manager at HSE SHP, Dr Éadaoin Butler facilitated a workshop that gauged interest for [secondary analysis of INISH data](#).

The results will be disseminated 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.