



**ISSUE 36**

# **SOPH NEWS**

## Welcome to the 36th Edition of SoPH News



Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the Summer edition of SoPH News – The School of Public Health (SoPH) e-newsletter. This Newsletter covers our activities and outputs since our last issue up to early May.

However, I wish to reflect on a recent event that has impacted on all of us. Our dear colleague, Pawel Hursztyn, sadly was involved in a serious accident whilst climbing in East Cork on 5<sup>th</sup> July. Even though Pawel's situation is stable, there will be life altering consequences, which require a long-term rehabilitation trajectory. I have been touched by Pawel's resilience and determination, and also by the supportive messages and initiatives for Pawel and his family by all staff members. Our thoughts are with Pawel, and we are with Pawel and his family on this journey!

During the Spring Conferings, we saw a large number of students graduating at the Spring Conferings, with 64 MPH students representing all continents, and also graduates from the Master in Infection Prevention and Control. There was a great buzz and excitement among the students and their proud families and staff members!

I am very pleased that the first Research Forum took place in March, organised by Dr Darren Dahly, Vicky Murphy, Frances Buckley and Sofia Bettella, and which was attended by many staff members. Sincere thanks to Dr Erin Crowley and Mary-Claire O'regan for their excellent and most useful contributions.

As a surprise event on the day, the Professor Ivan J Perry Award for MPH students was established in conjunction with this event, and important acknowledgement of Professor Perry's longstanding leadership of more than two decades of the School of Public Health.

Sincere congratulations to Professor Ali Khashan, Professor Frances Shiely and Professor Janas Harrington on their promotions to Professor (scale 2), which are extraordinary achievements in their academic careers.

From a research and development perspective, staff members of the School of Public Health have demonstrated exceptional achievements in successful research grants at both national and international and at early, mid-career and senior level, which is a very encouraging development in terms of both research quality and leadership in Public Health and Public Mental Health.

Looking at the scope of this Newsletter, the Public Health impacts are wide ranging, including food policy, climate change, infant health, stroke prevention, substance misuse, suicide prevention and social protections.

On this note, I would like to thank you all for your most valuable input and commitment to the work of the School of Public Health, at all levels. I also would like to thank our colleagues from the NSRF, CRF UCC, HSE Public Health and NCRI for the excellent collaboration, both in terms of teaching, research and service and community engagement.

I hope you enjoy this Summer 2025 edition of our Newsletter.

Best wishes,  
Professor Ella Arensman

### EDITOR:

Sofia Bettella

### MEDIA

### PROMOTION:

Caroline Seacy

### COVER

### PHOTOS:

Tomás Tyner



# TEACHING NEWS

## SoPH Spring Conferring Celebrations

Comhghairdeas  
le rang 2025!

During the Spring 2025 Summer Conferring Ceremonies, we celebrated several SoPH students. With 64 MPH students representing all continents, and also graduates from the Master's in Infection Prevention and Control.

These ceremonies were a time of joy, celebration and reflection, marking the culmination of years of hard work and dedication for our graduates. The atmosphere was filled with pride as families, friends, and faculty gathered to honor the achievements of our newest alumni.

Thank you to each and every one of the graduates, their family members, and to all the staff who contributed to this excellent achievement!



### Michael John Cassar's Journey

### MSc in Occupational Health graduate

On the 27th of March, my family and I departed Malta for Cork, with a connecting flight through Brussels. The journey began smoothly, but 20 minutes into the flight, a passenger suffered a heart attack. Fortunately, a doctor and two nurses were on board to assist, necessitating an emergency landing in Palermo. While the passenger received the necessary medical care, this delay of nearly two hours caused us to miss our connecting flight to Cork.



The only available alternative was a morning flight on 28th of March, scheduled to arrive in Cork at 10:10 am. However, upon reaching the gate, we faced yet another setback – an additional hour's delay due to heavy fog. This meant I would miss my conferring ceremony completely, a crushing disappointment to all of us, including those 'live streaming' back home.

Despite these setbacks, we headed straight to University College Cork upon arrival. I quickly collected my gown and made my way to the Aula Maxima, where I encountered Drs. Mallorie and Caleb Leduc. Without hesitation, they stepped in to assist, guiding me to Devere Hall and explaining my travel challenges to the conferring staff. Thanks to their support and the understanding of the conferring staff, I was able to participate in the 12:30 ceremony.

I am immensely grateful to Drs. Leduc, President O'Halloran, and the entire conferring team for their empathy and swift action. These collective efforts ensured that, despite the unexpected hurdles, I could celebrate this significant milestone with my family.



# STAFF UPDATES

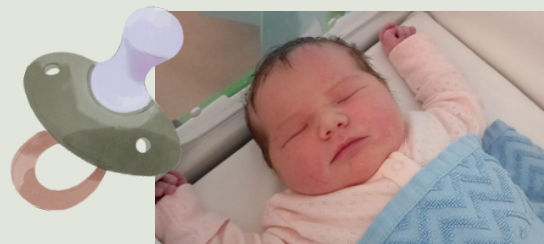


**CONGRATULATIONS TO ALI KHASHAN, FRANCES SHIELY AND JANAS HARRINGTON WHO WERE PROMOTED TO PROFESSOR (Scale 2)**

## Baby News!

Grace, the daughter of NSRF colleagues Niall & Caroline, was born June 3rd

***We send our sincere congratulations to the family!***



## Supporting Pawel Hursztyn

**[CLICK HERE TO DONATE](#)**

Following the sad news that we shared earlier this month about our dear colleague Pawel Hursztyn's accident, we would like to thank everyone for the messages of support that have been shared with Pawel and his family over the past few weeks. Pawel and his family have experienced your support as very comforting during this incredibly difficult time.

In order to support Pawel and his family, a GoFundMe page has been set up to support their family now and for the time to come. We know that Pawel has touched many of us through his colleagueship, friendship, and his generosity of spirit and determination. Together, we now have the opportunity to offer support to him and his family to navigate the road ahead and give Pawel the best possible chance to thrive in his recovery. Also, please share this invitation for support with your own networks. This way we may reach wider audience.

We kindly invite you to share this message and the GoFundMe link within your own networks, so we can reach a wider audience and offer Pawel and his family the strongest possible support. <https://gofund.me/1a266683>

Thank you again for your compassion and support.



# SCHOOL NEWS

## A memorable SoPH day at the Mardyke

The **1st School of Public Health Research Forum & 7th Public Health in Action Seminar** took place on Thursday 20th March at the Mardyke Pavilion. This was the first of a series of Research Fora, facilitated by Dr Darren Dahly, to be held three to four times per year. The Forum was open to all staff, with a particular focus on early and mid-career researchers. Topics covered included the development of research proposals for funding calls, research ethics, and research administrative requirements among others. The first half of the day featured presentations from esteemed colleagues:

- Mary-Claire O'Regan, Business Manager, CRF-UCC
- Erin Crowley, Academic Studies Coordinator, CRF-UCC and Cork Cancer Trials Group
- Darren Dahly, SPH and CRF-UCC

After a networking lunch, we returned to our seats for the Public Health in Action Seminar with special guest Professor Ivan Perry. Ivan's talk was titled 'Primary prevention of cardiovascular disease: opportunities and challenges', Professor Ivan Perry's talk was the seventh in the series of monthly research seminars.





# SCHOOL NEWS

## CORK CITY LIFELONG LEARNING FESTIVAL

FOOD POLICY RESEARCH TEAM



In April, as part of the Cork City Lifelong Learning Festival, the Food Policy Research Team invited members of the public to hear about our work and discuss how we can make our food systems and food environments healthier and more sustainable. “Building sustainable food systems for resilient rebels” outlined our work on FEAST, FOODPATH, and other projects. Prof Janas Harrington shared an overview of the work of the Cork Food Policy Council, and especially the draft Food Strategy the Council is currently developing for Cork City. Our attendees were small in number (9 in total) but quite diverse, including people from Cork city and county as well as newcomers to Ireland, retired people, current UCC staff, and students, a couple of gardeners and food producers, and one engineer. The attendees were generous and engaged, and we had a lively and positive discussion about sustainability, nutrition and food justice. This year’s event was something of a pilot, but following its success, we hope to build on this with a larger event at next year’s Lifelong Learning Festival.



## Prof Gülşah Kaner’s visit to the School of Public Health



In the first week of May, we were delighted to welcome our ERA4Health, FOODPATH colleague, Prof. Gülşah Kaner, to Cork and UCC. She joined the Food Policy Research Team, toured our vibrant campus, and visited the School of Public Health. Gülşah, who serves as Head of the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at Izmir Katip Çelebi University in Türkiye, plays a vital role in leading her country’s contribution to the FOODPATH project.

Türkiye’s participation has recently included the development of the Healthy Food Environment Policy Index (Food-EPI Türkiye). This comprehensive effort involved mapping national policies, engaging with government officials, and hosting a successful expert workshop earlier this year. This milestone represents significant progress in identifying and addressing food-related health inequalities across the region.

We were lucky to enjoy some beautiful spring sunshine in Cork and took the opportunity to share a lovely lunch in Lea’s at the Glucksman with Gülşah. A warm thank you to her for her continued leadership and collaboration on this important work.





# SCHOOL NEWS

## Translating Knowledge into Practice: *Insights from the DAFNE Diabetes Knowledge Exchange Seminar*

The Health Implementation Research Hub co-hosted a one-day knowledge exchange seminar along with the HSE Diabetes National Clinical Programme in October 2024. The seminar, entitled "Building on experience: practice and progress in DAFNE diabetes education", aimed to share experiences of those participating in or delivering the DAFNE programme, and foster connections among knowledge users committed to improving diabetes care. It also provided a platform to share findings from the CUSTOMISE research project funded by the HRB Research Leader Award.

DAFNE (Dose Adjustment for Normal Eating) is a structured patient education programme recommended in the guideline for adults with Type 1 Diabetes (T1D) from the National Clinical Effectiveness Committee (NCEC). It is currently being offered in 24 hospitals across Ireland to adults with a recent diagnosis of T1D by DAFNE teams composed of qualified dietitians, nurses and consultant endocrinologists. Thirty-one healthcare professionals from 16 DAFNE centres attended the seminar held in Athlone.



The programme featured three keynote talks. Dr Rose Stewart, Consultant Clinical Psychologist with the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board and Adult Diabetes Psychology lead for BCUHB and NHS Wales, opened the seminar with a keynote, entitled "Being human in the age of digital diabetes". Dr Sheena McHugh, from the School of Public Health, UCC, presented findings from the CUSTOMISE project. She presented the findings from a series of tailoring exercises undertaken with DAFNE teams to develop tailored implementation strategies. The final keynote, "Developments in DAFNE Education", was delivered by Dr Jackie Elliott, Chair of the DAFNE UK Executive Board, who shared updates from central DAFNE management, including results from patient-reported outcome measures collected in England.

People living with type 1 diabetes who had completed the DAFNE programme (DAFNE graduates) took part in panel discussions. Their role was to share their lived experiences of the programme. Healthcare professionals who deliver the programme (DAFNE educators) also took part in separate panels. Their aim was to share their perspectives from the frontlines of diabetes education. Based on an evaluation of the seminar, 94% of the attendees said the event would benefit their professional practice. 100% made professional connections at the event, and 100% want more events like this in the future.

The event was part of the project **"Translating the tailoring process to improve the implementation of diabetes care"** funded by the Health Research Board Knowledge Translation Award (HRB-KTA-2022-018) led by Principal Investigator Dr Sheena McHugh and organised by Research Assistant Julia Banasiak with help on the day from Dr Aoife O'Mahony.



### PICTURED: BACK ROW LEFT TO RIGHT

Dr Cathy Breen, Dr Claire Kerins, Dr Kate Gajewska, Dr Michael Lockhart, Dr Sheena McHugh, Prof Sean Dinneen, Ms Margaret Humphreys, Ms Julia Banasiak, Dr Aoife O'Mahony.  
Front row left to right: Dr Jackie Elliott, Dr Rose Stewart, Ms Louise Holland



To learn more about the event, visit:  
[News / University College Cork](https://news.ucc.ie)  
Contact us: [hirh@ucc.ie](mailto:hirh@ucc.ie)



# SCHOOL NEWS

## ERASMUS+ CLIMATEMED Conference

In October 2024, Prof. Frances Shiely hosted the CLIMATEMED conference – Climate, Health, and Sustainable Development: Local and Global Perspectives. Partners from University of Pecs, Hungary, University of Szeged, Hungary, George Emil Palade University of Medicine, Pharmacy, Sciences and Technology, Romania, and University of Novi Sad, Serbia attended. Dr Monica O'Mullane presented on behalf of the SPH – Developing a module on Health Impact Assessment. Dr Ger Mullally from MaREI, Ms Denise Cahill, HSE, Dr Catriona Curtin, CHANGE project UCC Ms Maria Young and Mr Peter Medway, Cork Co. all presented.



## CONTRIBUTION TO THE INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL SECURITY ASSOCIATION (ISSA) CONFERENCE

***On 15th and 16th May 2025, the ISSA European Network (IEN) organised a conference on the topic of: Supporting Health and Activity for a Longer Working Life, hosted in London by the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH).***

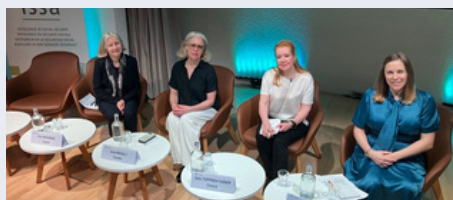
Prof Ella Arensman presented a plenary lecture on evidence-based mental health promotion in workplace settings, with a specific focus on outcomes of the EU MENTUPP Project: Mental Health Promotion in Occupational Settings.

Health is a fundamental pillar for labour market inclusion over the life course, facilitating activity and employment. Changing disease patterns, new occupational safety and health risks, and the rising prevalence of mental health conditions challenge the objective of a longer and fulfilled working life in Europe.

Social security systems across the continent are therefore strengthening their efforts to promote health and mental health and ensure that persons who encounter health-related challenges receive timely and appropriate support to remain or re-integrate into the labour market. Conscious of the importance of the workplace setting, these measures increasingly consider the close link with changing life courses, evolving gender inequalities and care responsibilities as well as work-life balance attitudes.

The objective of the ISSA Conference was to provide a platform to exchange on these recent social security innovations, measures and experiences with a view to enhancing the understanding of the priority challenges and to identifying effective approaches and good practices.

There was a specific focus on key specific groups and health risks that require coordinated responses by different social security schemes, including the rising prevalence of mental health conditions, the need for tailored measures for older workers and adapted approaches to ensure access to occupational health services for all workers.





# SCHOOL NEWS

## FOODPATH Group Model Building Workshops



The FOODPATH team in the School of Public Health held Group Model Building workshops with residents of the Togher, Ballyphehane, Greenmount, Deerpark and the Lough communities, and with people who work in health and nutrition related roles in the community.

The goal of the workshops was to work with both these groups to build a system map of the food environment in this area of the city. We based our sessions on the template established by our FOODPATH colleagues at Wageningen University, who adapted this process to map food environments and, specifically, to identify inequities and leverage points for change to improve the food environments in Cork City.

The sessions were truly insightful and constructive, and we are very grateful to the participants who shared their time and knowledge so generously with us. We look forward to sharing the map they built and comparing it to that built by the communities in the Netherlands, Poland, and Belgium.

The leverage points for change and possible actions identified by our participants will also feed into the City Food Strategy which is currently being developed by the Cork Food Policy Council.

All the members of the School of Public Health Food Policy Research Team contributed to the planning and implementation of the workshops. Current MPH student Nora O'Connor, who is researching the GMB process for her masters' thesis, also played a key role in researching and planning the workshops.



# Food Path

FOOD Systems & Policy PATHways for  
Equal Population Nutrition in Europe

click **HERE**  
for the  
project  
website

# SCHOOL NEWS

## Webinar held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2025 on the HIA of the Core Strategy of the Cork City Development Plan (2022–2028)

On Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> May a webinar took place sharing the process, learnings and findings of the HIA undertaken in 2024 on the Core Strategy of the Cork City Development Plan (2022–2028).

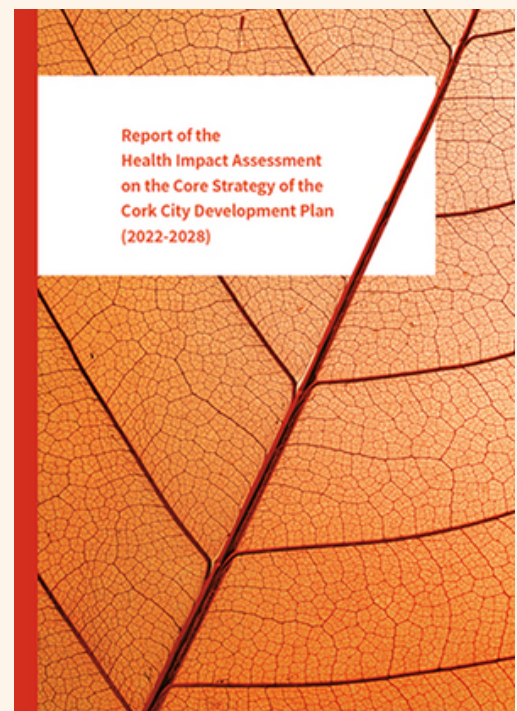
This HIA was carried out as part of the [HIA-IM](#) project, which is co-hosted in UCC between the School of Public Health and the Institute for Social Science in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (ISS21), UCC. Both academic departments also co-hosted the webinar. HIA-IM is funded by the HRB under the Emerging Investigator Award held by Dr Monica O'Mullane. Dr Tara Kenny is the Postdoctoral Researcher on the project. Kirsty Nash worked as the Research Assistant on the project in 2024, when this HIA was being undertaken.

The HIA-IM project seeks to enhance the practice of HIA in Ireland by creating a HIA implementation model to inform this practice going forward. The project draws on implementation science frameworks and an action research approach to create this model iteratively over the course of conducting two HIAs. The first HIA was carried out on the Core Strategy of the Cork City Development Plan (2022–2028) in 2024, and the second one is currently being done on the Climate Action Plan (2024).

The webinar was an opportunity to present and discuss this first HIA carried out on a strategic development plan across the island of Ireland. The webinar included speakers from the HIA team who worked on undertaking the assessment, including Dr Monica O'Mullane (PI on the HIA-IM project and member of the HIA Working Group), Dr Mary O'Mahony (Public Health Specialist HSE South, Chairperson of the HIA Steering Group, and Adjunct Clinical Senior Lecturer in the School of Public Health) and Karen O'Mahony (Senior Executive Planner, Cork City Council and member of the HIA Working Group).

The webinar was recorded and is available [here](#). 41 people were in attendance.

At the webinar, Monica outlined the process undertaken for carrying out the HIA. Mary and Karen presented their reflections on their experience of being involved in the HIA. Both spoke about the benefits of working in an intersectoral process on the city development plan, and also on the need to create opportunities for streamlining HIA into current working practices.

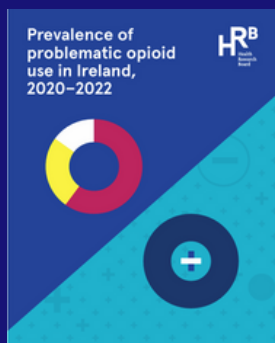


Scan QR to access online report, archived on UCC Cora, with the Report's technical annex





# SCHOOL NEWS



[access a digital copy HERE](#)

## New School of Public Health report on problematic opioid use in Ireland published

### NEW REPORT

Problematic opioid use is a significant problem in Ireland and across the world. Opioids, which include heroin, morphine, methadone, codeine, hydrocodone, fentanyl and tramadol, are addictive, sedating, narcotic drugs. While some of these drugs have valid medical purposes, their misuse as 'street drugs' can lead to many health and social issues for users and society. However, measuring the prevalence of opioid use is challenging. Given the nature of this population, a simple head count is not feasible and general population surveys are known to be ineffective at capturing this 'hidden' population. Because people who use drugs fear stigmatisation and are often marginalised in society, the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) recommends the use of indirect approaches, such as the capture-recapture (CRC) method, to estimate the prevalence of problematic (high-risk) drug users.

A new study commissioned by the Health Research Board (HRB), led by Dr Seán Millar from the School of Public Health UCC, estimated the prevalence of problematic opioid use in Ireland from 2020 to 2022 utilising a four-source CRC methodology. The analysis incorporated three data sources from opioid substitution treatment records obtained from the Central Treatment List, which includes clinics, general practitioners and prisons. The fourth data source was provided by the Probation Service.

Main findings from the report include the following:

- In 2022, it was estimated that approximately 19,460 people in Ireland had problem opioid use
- A significant majority of these people were male (68%)
- Over three-quarters (75%) were in the older age group of 35–64-year-olds
- There were an estimated 11,100 problem opioid users in county Dublin in 2022, a rate over three times higher than in the rest of Ireland

The report also found that opioid use among 15–34-year-olds has declined, while levels of problem opioid use among people aged 35–64 have increased, with over three-in-four problem opioid users in this category.

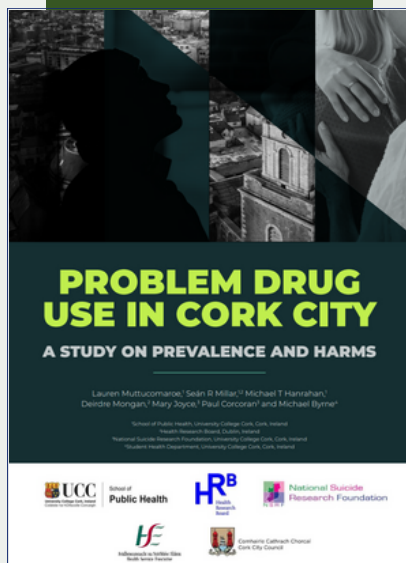
Commenting on the report, lead author Dr Michael Hanrahan said:

"The continued decrease in opioid use among younger people, particularly in the 15–24 age group, is positive, and may be due to several factors. For example, we know from other studies that heroin, which is the main opioid used in Ireland, is viewed more negatively by young people. Also, improvements in addiction services may be helping to break the cycle of young people introducing their peers to opioids. The rise in opioid use within the 35–64 age group suggests an ageing cohort effect, as the proportion of those in this older age group has increased by almost one third since 2014."

HRB Chief Executive Dr Mairead O'Driscoll concludes:

"The HRB continues to provide a clear picture of the level of drug use within the population and trends among users. This enables policy makers and service providers to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions and predict where action is needed."

# SCHOOL NEWS



*"Our study suggests that almost one-third of opioid users in Cork city are unknown to treatment services"*

– DR SEÁN MILLAR



## PROBLEM DRUG USE IN CORK CITY

### A study on prevalence and harms

Problem drug use (PDU) is defined as recurrent drug use that is causing harm to an individual, or is placing them at a high probability or risk of suffering harm. Substances associated with PDU include opioids, cocaine (powder and crack), amphetamines, benzodiazepines, Z-drugs and gabapentinoids. PDU can lead to many harms for populations and individuals. Such harms include increased criminal activity, drug-related litter, increased risk of infectious diseases passed on from shared syringes and needles, substance use disorders, overdoses and death.

To date, studies on PDU in Ireland have largely been conducted at a national level or have concentrated on Dublin city, as a majority of PDU has historically taken place within inner city Dublin. Research undertaken by the School of Public Health, UCC, and colleagues in the Health Research Board and National Suicide Research Foundation examined the scale of PDU in Cork city using multiple indicators.

The study, which was led by Dr Seán Millar and Dr Michael Byrne, estimated that there were 859 (95% confidence interval [CI]: 774–1,079) problematic opioid users in Cork city in 2022, which equates to a prevalence rate of 5.59 (95% CI: 5.04–7.02) opioid users per 1,000 population. In 2022, almost one-third of opioid users in Cork city were unknown to services. Between 2019 and 2022 the prevalence of opioid use remained relatively stable, with a majority of users being male and aged between 35 and 64 years. However, the needle exchange programme in Cork city has shown a general increase in the number of syringes exchanged since 2019, with an average of 6,685 syringes being provided each month from pharmacy-based sites in 2023. Data from household surveys demonstrate an increase in the use of cocaine (including crack) and amphetamines, with these increases being noticeably pronounced among young adults. The main problem drug for cases entering treatment in Cork city for PDU has shifted; since 2019, trends indicate a gradual reduction in the number of cases entering treatment for opioids, with an increase in the number of cases accessing treatment services for cocaine use.

For the years 2019–2023, benzodiazepines were the main drug implicated in non-fatal overdose cases in Cork city, followed by opioids, with an average of one opioid overdose occurring each week. Between 2018 and 2021 there was a total of 487 self-harm presentations related to PDU by Cork city residents; benzodiazepines were the main drug implicated in self-harm presentations (63.2%), followed by opioids (30.6%), gabapentinoids (11.9%) and cocaine (9.0%). During this period, there was a total of 140 poisoning deaths due to PDU recorded, with an average of 35 deaths each year. Opioids were the main drug implicated in poisoning deaths (75.7%), followed by benzodiazepines (59.3%), gabapentinoids (27.9%) and cocaine (14.3%).

The authors note that the study shows that PDU is taking place in Cork city, with a number of associated harms. Although Cork city has a variety of harm reduction services that deal with education, assessment, treatment and post-treatment support, the authors suggest that the disconnect between problem drug users and these programmes may benefit from additional services. The authors also recommend ongoing research on PDU in Cork city for effective service planning and to allow policymakers to evaluate the impact of strategies aimed at reducing drug-related harms.



# SCHOOL NEWS

## SoPH in the News



The two reports featured above, and other drugs-related research conducted by the School of Public Health, have appeared in several articles in the press. Click on the images below to access a selection of these news items.

**Study pinpoints 'critical period' to intervene when combating drug use**



The research with cocaine use is associated with early substance use, with a strong gradient of risk between age of first alcohol and cocaine use.

**Report recommends supervised drug consumption facility for Cork city**

Thursday, 8 March 2025 11:37  
By News Team



**Opioid addiction three times higher in Dublin than the rest of Ireland, new study finds**



**Two traumatic events in a child's life doubles their chances of problematic drug use — study**



**Over 850 opioid users in Cork city in 2022, report finds**



**Increase in cocaine use and people's use of opioids in Cork city 'problematic' among drug study findings**

An increase in cocaine use was noticeably pronounced among those aged 15-34, with almost 4% of young adults who participated in the 2019-20 survey reporting use of cocaine in the last year compared to 1.3% in 2014-15.



Irish Independent

**Trauma from warring parents more likely to push young adults to drugs than effects of divorce**



## Priority Setting for Perinatal Mental Health

Perinatal mental health refers to the emotional and psychological well-being of parents during the perinatal period (the period from conception up to one year after birth). Support for perinatal mental health should be evidence-based. Identifying priorities for future perinatal mental health research with those who conduct and use this research is important to ensure that research in Ireland is focusing on key priority areas.

On 12th March 2025, Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar led a workshop with 104 national stakeholders to identify priority areas for research on perinatal mental health in Ireland. This event was funded by an HRB Conference and Event Sponsorship Scheme. Stakeholders included, midwives, nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, family support workers, occupational therapists, public health nurses, social workers, researchers, academics, and professionals from government and non-governmental organisations. The workshop began with two talks:

one from Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar on "Understanding and reducing perinatal stress and anxiety in Ireland"; and the second from Prof Deirdre Daly and Dr Susan Hannon (TCD) on "Findings from the MAMMI study". Following these talks, via small group discussions and two rounds of ranking ideas, the top 10 research priorities were agreed. These priorities highlight key areas for future research, with the next step to explore these priorities with individuals with experience of pregnancy and postpartum. This will improve early prevention of perinatal mental health issues and improve support provision for women and their partners.

### Supporting Perinatal Mental Health in Ireland

#### Top 10 Perinatal Mental Health Research Priorities in Ireland

Presented in order of priority

1. Intervention & prevention
2. Inclusivity
3. Infant mental health & attachment
4. Partners/fathers
5. Perinatal/birth trauma
6. Transition to parenthood
7. Support provision & access
8. Informational support for women, partners, & society
9. Supports, information, & training for HCPs
10. Better data



# SCHOOL NEWS

## Karen Matvienko-Sikar at launch of the RCSI Women's Health Research Network

Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar gave an invited talk on "Perinatal Mental Health: Determinants and Interventions" at the "Advancing Women's Health Research in Ireland: Bridging Gaps and Building Collaborative Pathways" event in RCSI on March 11<sup>th</sup> 2025. The event took place to mark the launch of the RCSI Women's Health Research Network, and involved researchers, healthcare professionals, policymakers and patient advocates.



## MENTBEST Limerick Alliance Launch



On December 5th the NSRF launched the Limerick Alliance for Mental Health Support, as part of the EU-funded – MENTBEST project, inaugurated by the Deputy Lord Mayor of Limerick City and County, Cllr Dan McSweeney.

This seminar brought together public and private stakeholders, including representatives connected to the 4-level intervention framework and individuals with lived experience, creating a platform for dialogue and collaboration.

The event was warmly received, fostering discussions on expanding the network, enhancing collaboration opportunities, and engaging in specialised training initiatives. Participants explored pathways to join the Limerick Alliance Advisory Group and discussed strategies for involving additional stakeholders to strengthen collective efforts in advancing mental health support across the region.

[Learn more by visiting the project website](#)





# MEET

## Kristen Peralta-Herrera



Kristen Peralta-Herrera is a researcher on the Food Policy Research Team with Professor Janas Harrington and is currently working on the FOODPATH project. She has a Master's degree in Public Health from University College Cork, and a Bachelor of Medicine, Surgery, and Midwifery from Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León. Her research interests include diet-related non-communicable diseases, disease prevention, health promotion, and the impact of policies on sustainable practices.

## Nora O'Connor



Nora O'Connor is currently studying for a Master's in public health and has joined the Health Food Policy Team with Professor Janas Harrington, working as an intern on FOODPATH WP1 and WP3. She has an undergraduate degree in health and life sciences from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Nora is interested in research regarding nutrition, obesity, and the social determinants of health and how we can build environments that are conducive to a healthy lifestyle for everyone.

## Jennifer "Pip" McCauley

Master of Public Health student Jennifer "Pip" McCauley has partnered with the Primary Care Research into Cancer (PRiCAN) research group at RCSI, Dublin, as part of her 2025 Master's dissertation project. PRiCAN is dedicated to practical solutions for enhancing the prevention, screening and early detection of cancer within primary healthcare settings. Toward this end, Ms McCauley will support the creation of a Markov model to analyse the potential effects of multi-cancer early detection tests on cancer stage at diagnosis compared to standard of care. This model will use real-world data from the Irish primary healthcare setting to generate relevant predictions for the potential utility of these emerging diagnostic tools. Ms McCauley is grateful to the SoPH faculty for their support in this meaningful partnership and looks forward to working closely with the PRiCAN team to enhance the patient journey from the earliest symptoms of cancer through timely diagnosis.

# MEET

## Caroline Barron



Caroline Barron is currently studying for a BSc in Public Health Sciences. For her twelve-week placement, Caroline is working as an intern on FOODPATH with Professor Janas Harrington. Caroline is interested in research regarding nutrition and health, especially how lifestyle behaviours affect health and well-being.

SCOPE is a HRB-funded project led by Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar. The aim of the SCOPE project is to develop a standardized outcome measurement set, including reliable, valid, and appropriate measures of core infant-feeding outcomes for implementation in research and practice.

For more information on SCOPE : <https://eiascope.com/>



## SCOPE

Standardised measurement for  
Childhood Obesity Prevention

## Dimity Dutch



The SCOPE Project has recently welcomed Dimity Dutch to the research team as a post-doctoral researcher. Her background is as a Dietitian and completed a Bachelor of Nutrition and Dietetics (Honours) at Flinders University in South Australia. Dimity conducted her PhD at Flinders University where she developed and tested a brief screening tool to measure children's health behaviours (dietary intake, physical activity, screen time and sleep) to facilitate health-promoting conversations between caregivers and practitioners in primary health care. Dimity also has experience as a research assistant working across many projects to support optimal growth, health, and development in early childhood. Dimity is very excited to join the SCOPE team, connect with UCC researchers, and explore the beauty of Ireland.

## Grace Hernan



The SCOPE team are excited to have Grace Hernan joining for the Summer after being awarded the prestigious Health Research Board Summer Student Scholarship. Grace is currently completing her undergraduate degree in applied psychology at UCC. Her summer project is titled "Healthcare professionals' experiences and preferences when assessing infant feeding and child anthropometry outcomes". This will be an invaluable project and an important contribution to the international evidence-base for measuring health outcomes in early childhood.



## LAUNCH OF NEW RESEARCH PROGRAMMES

# Horizon Europe funding



Dr Mohamad Saab secured €6m from Horizon Europe to conduct research on cancer survivorship. TRANSCEND XR – Co-creation and implementation of an intervention to improve the understanding of Testicular cANcER late effects and unmet Supportive CarE NeedS of AYA survivors using eXtended Reality is a multinational clinical trial. Prof. Frances Shiely and Dr Sheena McHugh are co-applicants and will co-lead the clinical trial and implementation science work packages, which respectively will run for five years from 2025–2030.

PICTURED L TO R: Dr Maria O'Malley, School of Nursing and Midwifery (SNM), Dr David Murphy, School of Computer Science and IT, Prof. Josephine Hegarty, SNM, Dr Mohamad Saab, SNM, Dr Aileen Murphy, Dept. of Economics, Dr Ann Kirby, Dept. of Economics, Dr Sheena McHugh, SPH, Prof. Jack Gleeson, UCC & HSE, Prof. Frances Shiely, HRB CRF-UCC & SPH.

## Launch of the E-SHEILD project at UCC

The E-SHEILD project was launched in University College Cork (UCC) on 29 February 2025 at an event attended by harm-reduction experts, policymakers, and student representatives. With further higher education institutions (HEIs) expected to adopt the initiative, E-SHEILD marks the beginning of a coordinated national effort to reduce drug-related harms and risks among students across Ireland.

The E-SHEILD project, which is based in UCC and is funded by the Department of Health, is a multi-strand initiative that aims to support HEIs in tackling student drug use by providing students with the MyUSE app and guiding HEIs to implement the Framework for Response to the Use of Illicit Substances within Higher Education.

E-SHEILD was developed in response to findings from the Drug Use in Higher Education in Ireland (DUHEI) survey, which gathered responses from over 11,500 students across 21 HEIs. The findings demonstrated the high prevalence of drug use in the Irish student population, with more than one-half of participants reporting use of illicit substances. Importantly, more than one-half of students surveyed felt that drug use has a negative impact on student life, and more than one-half of current drug users were found to be at moderate or substantial risk of harms arising from their drug use. These results highlighted the need for evidence-based and student-centred interventions, an approach E-SHEILD takes by combining digital innovation, behavioural science and institutional policy reform.



Dr. Michael Byrne  
Student Health



Dr. Samantha Dockray  
Applied Psychology



Prof. Ciara Heavin  
Business Information Syst.



Dr. Seán Millar  
Public Health



Dr. Conor Linehan  
Applied Psychology



Dr. Sheena McHugh  
Public Health



Siobhán Thomas  
Applied Psychology



Piotr Janus  
Business Information Systems

The E-SHEILD Research Group includes Dr Michael Byrne, Head of UCC Student Health; Dr Samantha Dockray and Dr Conor Linehan, School of Applied Psychology; Professor Ciara Heavin, Business Information Systems; Dr Seán Millar, School of Public Health and European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) national focal point; Dr Sheena McHugh, School of Public Health; Piotr Janus, Business Information Systems and Siobhán Thomas, Project Manager. The programme will support students and HEIs to reduce harms experienced through drug use. It also aims to reduce the overall number of students choosing to take drugs. Each participating Irish HEI will be provided with MyUSE, a prevention, education, and behavioural change intervention digital tool that aims to increase mindful decision-making with respect to drug use, cultivate harm reduction practices in the HEI context, and promote alternatives to drug use activities.

Dr Samantha Dockray led the development of the MyUSE algorithm, which draws on evidence-based science to deliver 29 behavioural change techniques to students in HEIs. The MyUSE app was developed for all students, whether they use drugs or not, and provides individualised information and supports in order to reduce harms associated with drug use that can enhance students' psychosocial well-being.

The second strand of the E-SHEILD project will see the implementation of a framework in conjunction with local and regional Drug and Alcohol Task Forces. This second strand provides an action plan to address the use of illicit substances and related harms, and it includes four core actions: (1) developing institution-specific policies; (2) implementing a plan; (3) assigning a senior officer to develop and implement these; and (4) seeking student engagement.

**E-SHEILD**

Enabling Students and Higher Education Institutions to Lead the Response on Drugs

# AWARDS



**CHERISH**

Choosing Healthy Eating for Infant Health

## Primary Care Research Seed Funding Award for Re-CHERISH

We are delighted to share that Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar was recently awarded a Primary Care Research Seed Funding Award from the Health Research Board Primary Care Clinical Trials Network Ireland (HRB PC CTNI) for work refining the Choosing Healthy Eating for Infant Health (CHERISH) intervention.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE INFO](#)

The Choosing Healthy Eating for Infant Health (CHERISH) intervention was created to support caregivers' infant feeding practices (e.g. complementary feeding) and help parents with healthy feeding for their babies. CHERISH was developed to be delivered by healthcare professionals in primary care centres during childhood vaccination visits (when infants are 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 12 months, and 13 months old). The Re-CHERISH project was established to identify potential refinements to the recruitment processes and intervention delivery to maximise the likelihood of successful future implementation and evaluation of the CHERISH intervention. A previous HRB PC CTNI seed funding award supported:

1. Identification and development of potential refinements through evaluation of the previous preliminary feasibility study data by a multidisciplinary team (including experts in population health, health promotion, nutrition and dietetics, infant feeding and childhood obesity prevention, primary care trials methodology, behaviour change, implementation science, and participatory research).
2. Evaluation of the feasibility and acceptability of these proposed refinements through a survey with parents/caregivers capturing their attitudes and perspectives on the refinements.

The recent PC CTNI seed funding award will enable further research examining the feasibility and acceptability of the proposed refinements to healthcare professionals (HCPs), gain insights about how these refinements may work in practice, enable modification of refinements, if needed, and inform decision making on the final refinements for inclusion in the CHERISH intervention.

PC CTNI Seed Funding Awards fund projects that have the potential to be highly impactful and successful in leveraging larger scale research funding in the future. Dr Karen Matvienko-Sikar is supported in this work by Eibhlín Looney, Moira Duffy, Dr Dimity Dutch, Prof Patricia Kearney, Dr Sheena McHugh and Dr Kate O'Neill from the School of Public Health.



# AWARDS

## HSE Special Innovation Award



Pictured Prof Claire Buckley, Dr Aileen Callanan, Prof Patricia Kearney, Dr Diarmuid Quinlan

Dr Aileen Callanan, School of Public Health UCC, was awarded a HSE Special Innovation Award in December 2024. The winning initiative focused on stroke prevention in older people across Cork and Kerry. This research was part of Aileen's PhD, with close collaboration between Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, HSE, School of Public Health and Department of General Practice, UCC and Primary Care. The team extend their warm thanks to the participating GPs, GP nurses and patients across Cork and Kerry for their enthusiastic support, COVID-19 pandemic notwithstanding! This initiative spotlights the strategic value of close collaboration between HSE, primary care and academia to address important healthcare issues.

The research was funded by Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, Ms Priscilla Lynch (Head of Primary Care, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, HSE) and Ms Susanne O'Sullivan (General Manager, Cork Kerry Community Healthcare, HSE), and supervised by Prof Colin Bradley (Department of General Practice), Prof Patricia Kearney (School of Public Health) and Prof Claire Buckley (School of Public Health and National Health Service Improvement Team, HSE), and Dr Diarmuid Quinlan (Irish College of GPs).

Aileen is the lead author for the winning publication, a peer-reviewed paper 'Opportunistic atrial fibrillation screening in primary care in Ireland: results of a pilot screening programme'.

<https://openheart.bmj.com/content/11/1/e002563>



# UPDATES FROM THE NSRF

## Leading Research, Shaping Change

### NEW STRATEGIC PLAN LAUNCH

On February 11th 2025, the NSRF launched the Foundation's new Strategic Plan in the Aula Maxima in University College Cork. The day commenced with welcoming addresses from Professor Helen Whelton, Head of the College of Medicine and Health at University College Cork (UCC), and Mr John Meehan, Head of the HSE National Office for Suicide Prevention (NOSP).



The strategic plan was introduced by Dr Eve Griffin, our Chief Executive Officer, and Professor Ella Arensman, Chief Scientist, who provided context, development insights, and highlighted priority areas.

The event showcased examples of the NSRF's research impact and collaboration, both nationally and internationally, presented by Dr Alexandra Fleischmann from the World Health Organization, as well as Dr Paul Corcoran, Head of Research at NSRF, and Senior Postdoctoral Researcher Dr Michelle O'Driscoll. Their insights underscored the critical role of research in informing policy and practice in mental health.

A panel discussion followed, moderated by Professor Philip Dodd, Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Mental Health Policy Specialist at the Department of Health. The panel brought together prominent figures in the field and collaborators: Ms. Fiona Tuomey, CEO of HUGG; Professor Ivan Perry, Emeritus Professor of Public Health at UCC; Dr Siobhán Cusack, Director of Research Strategy and Projects at UCC; and Dr Eric Kelleher, Consultant Liaison Psychiatrist at Cork University Hospital and Mercy University Hospital.

After the formal presentations and an insightful Q&A session, attendees enjoyed a lunch break and a networking event. This event reinforced the importance of collaboration and served as an exciting opportunity to set the stage for the implementation of our new strategic plan.



Read the strategy in full [HERE](#)

## National Self-Harm Registry Report '22-'23

**THE REGISTRY FULFILLS A MAJOR OBJECTIVE IN PROVIDING TIMELY DATA ON TRENDS AND GROUPS AT HIGH RISK OF SELF-HARM**

The National Self-Harm Registry Ireland (NSHRI) was established in 2000 by the National Suicide Research Foundation, working in collaboration with the School of Public Health, University College Cork. The NSHRI is funded by the Health Service Executive's National Office for Suicide Prevention. It is the world's first national registry of cases of intentional self-harm presenting to hospital emergency departments and is recognised by the World Health Organisation as a template for such surveillance systems.

During the onset and waves of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions, the NSHRI was able to provide regular briefings on the impact on hospital-presenting self-harm based on a sub-sample of hospitals where data collection was possible. Now, with near complete national data for 2020-2023, we are better able to review and assess the impact of the pandemic. This report relates to hospital-presenting self-harm in 2022 and 2023.



Click here to view the **2022** and **2023** 'Statistics At a Glance' infographics.

[Click here to access the full NSHRI Report.](#)





# UPDATES FROM THE NSRF

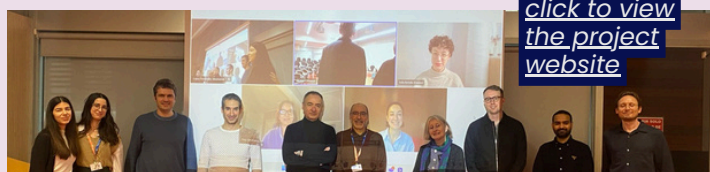


## EU PERMANENS Consortium Meeting

*Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona, SPAIN*

On February 25th 2025, NSRF-UCC team members Prof Ella Arensman, Dr Madhav Bhargav, Mx Sofia Bettella, and the rest of the PERMANENS team convened for an intensive Full Day Meeting in Barcelona. The consortium tackled several key topics that will shape the project's next steps:

- **Refining Predictive Models:** We made progress on how we're defining the models for self-harm prediction.
- **Structure of the CDSS:** We progressed in defining the structure of our Clinical Decision Support System (CDSS), building on findings from different work packages.
- **Evidence-Based Guidelines:** We discussed our review of existing, evidence-based guidelines on self-harm and how they can inform our CDSS moving forward.
- **Perspectives from the Field:** We gathered further valuable insights from both professionals and individuals with lived experience on how self-harm is addressed in emergency departments. Their input is critical in shaping a more effective approach.
- **Next Steps – Small-Scale Testing:** We're gearing up for small-scale testing, marking the next big milestone in our project.



[click to view the project website](#)

## SHOAR

Examining individual & psychosocial determinants of **Self-Harm & suicidality in Older Adults**: improving Risk assessment & management



In Ireland, there is limited research into self-harm and suicide in older adults. Specifically, the profile of older adults who self-harm is not well known, or what factors affect older people who self-harm.

To gain a better understanding of self-harm in older adults, and to inform policy, patients, clinicians, and the Irish healthcare system, this study examined the factors that lead to older adults hurting themselves.

Funded by the Irish Research Council under a Government of Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowship, SHOAR was a two-year research project led by Dr Isabela Troya which had as an aim to examine individual and psychosocial determinants of self-harm in older adults to improve risk assessment and management of self-harm in later life. Based in the School of Public Health and the National Suicide Research Foundation at University College Cork, SHOAR started in June 2022 and has now officially come to an end. We would like to summarise key findings of this research (see text box on the right), link readers to academic and non-academic outputs of the study and share what we will be doing next (click link in green above).

[CLICK HERE TO READ THE FINDINGS AND LEARN MORE](#)

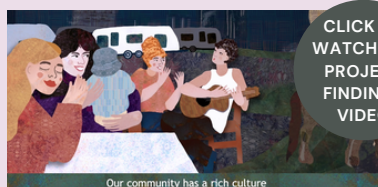


## Global Indigenous Studies from Multiple Perspectives Conference



Dr Katerina Kavalidou and Dr James O'Mahony from the School of Nursing and Midwifery, UCC, presented their Department of Health funded research representing Irish Traveller women's experiences of attending hospital emergency departments (ED) when experiencing suicidal ideation, at the inaugural Global Indigenous Studies from Multiple Perspectives Conference in Indianapolis from November 15th-17th, 2024.

They further presented their findings through an animated video, co-produced with Traveller women.



[CLICK TO WATCH THE PROJECT FINDINGS VIDEO](#)

## SAMAGH Simulation Training at UCC's ASSERT



[Click HERE to watch our SAMAGH information video](#)

SAMAGH (Self-Harm Assessment and Management programme for General Hospitals) is an advanced training program designed to improve the assessment, management, and support of high-risk self-harm patients. The program consists of an E-Learning program and a face-to-face simulation training course facilitated by experienced clinicians.

The most recent on-site training sessions took place on 10th and 11th March at UCC's ASSERT Centre. Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) and psychiatrists participated in the simulated learning experience. The training focused on implementing biopsychosocial assessment, enhancing clinical decision-making, peer-learning, and patient care through real-life case scenarios of people who present with self-harm to Irish ED settings.

# UPCOMING EVENTS



Health  
Implementation  
Research Hub

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> August

Venue: WGB G21



**UCC** | School of Public Health  
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh  
University College Cork, Ireland  
Scoil na Sláinte Poiblí



Health  
Research  
Board

## Upcoming NVivo Training at SoPH

Date: 13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> August 2025 – Venue: WGB G21

The Health Implementation Research Hub (HIRH) is hosting an **NVivo** training workshop open to postgraduate students and staff in the School of Public Health. The training is free, funded by Dr Sheena McHugh's HRB Research Leader Award. It will be delivered by **Ben Meehan**, Lumivero. The training will take place over two days, on the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of August.

Day one is a comprehensive introduction to NVivo, focusing on the requisite management decisions and choices one should make at the beginning of one's project. Up to 40 places are available for Day 1. Day 2 is for researchers who already have data they can work with and is focused on analysing, retrieval and reporting on data. Up to 20 places are available (first come, first served).

To book a place, please fill out the booking form

Please note:

- All attendees must bring their own laptop (Window devices only, No MACs) with the NVivo software already downloaded.
- NVivo is available to all staff and students registered in UCC. Registered students can [access this software through Student IT](#).
- Participants on Day 2 must have data they can work on during the workshop.

## The CoMH Research Conference

Join us on Wednesday 3rd September 2025

READ MORE [HERE](#)

### The College of Medicine & Health 2025 Research Conference

“Academic Health Sciences System”

- 09:00 to 17:00 Wednesday 3rd September
- Western Gateway Building, University College Cork

Registration is now open!



The theme of the conference this year is the **“Academic Health Sciences System.”** The annual CoMH Research Conference is an important event in the College calendar that showcases the array of interdisciplinary research and innovation taking place across our College and three large research centres, supported by our HRB-Clinical Research Facility, all working in partnership with a diverse array of local, national and international collaborators.


Don't miss the opportunity to connect with colleagues from across UCC and our external partners in the HSE. Guest speakers from UCC and the HSE will be announced shortly so **register now to secure your place!**

Click  
HERE to  
register



# PUBLICATIONS



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# CONTACT INFO



## **SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

Fourth Floor  
Western Gateway Building  
University College Cork  
Cork, Ireland

### ***General inquiries:***

Tel 00353 21 420 5500

email:

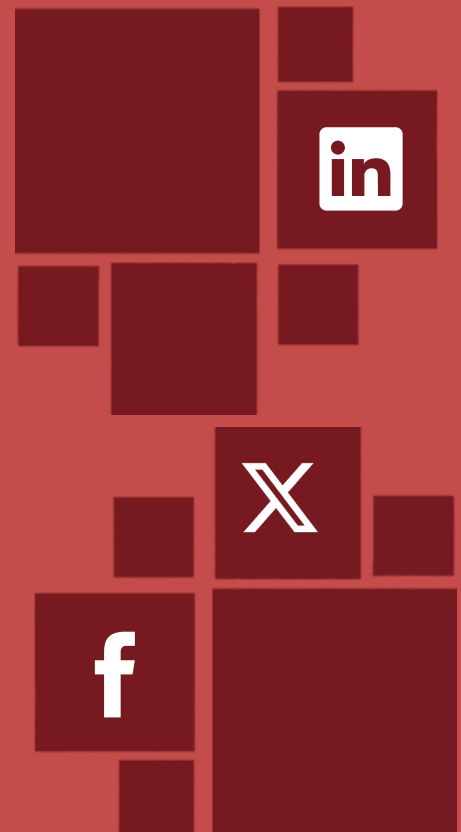
[schoolofpublichealth@ucc.ie](mailto:schoolofpublichealth@ucc.ie)

### ***Programme inquiries:***

email: [sphprogrammes@ucc.ie](mailto:sphprogrammes@ucc.ie)

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**WE WELCOME  
SUBMISSIONS**