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SIMON TELLS OIREACTHAS COMMITTEE THAT HOMELESSNESS CANNOT BE ENDED WITHOUT RESOURCES TO SUPPORT PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX NEEDS

The Homelessness Charity highlights the importance of protecting the resources needed to address complex needs amongst people experiencing homelessness

The Simon Communities of Ireland today told members of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on the Environment, Heritage and Local Government that if the Government's commitments to end homelessness in Ireland by 2010 are to be achieved the housing, health and social care needs of people experiencing homelessness must be addressed immediately.

Speaking after the Committee meeting, Patrick Burke, CEO of the Simon Communities of Ireland said: "We know that housing is an essential element of any plan to end homelessness. However, homelessness is about more than housing; it is also about physical and mental health, it is about drug and alcohol use and it is about combinations of these problems or 'complex needs'. Our delegation told members of the Oireachtas Committee that the 2010 commitments cannot be realised until the accommodation, health and social care needs of these people are addressed. It is essential that such supports are properly resourced.

A local Simon Community conducted a Health Audit of all 183 people using their services during the first week of September this year. The Audit - entitled Sick and Tired of Homelessness – A Health Profile of People Using Cork Simon - found that 58% had a diagnosed mental health condition, 48% had a diagnosed physical health condition, while 77% had either a physical health or a mental health condition. 82 percent reported using alcohol, almost half of which were described as heavy users. Thirty – nine percent used drugs, 40 percent of which were described as heavy users, and 36% used both alcohol and drugs, 37% of which were described as heavy users of both. Fifty two per cent of those with a diagnosed mental health condition also used alcohol and/or drugs.

Patrick Burke continued: "This study helps to build a picture of what we mean by complex needs: mental and physical ill-health, problem drug and alcohol use, fractured family relations, education and training needs, poverty and exclusion. As the health audit indicates, people with all of these needs tend to be the people who are long-term homeless. It helps to highlight how vulnerable and isolated these people are.

Mr Burke went on to say: "We used this opportunity to remind those present of the Government's commitments to end rough sleeping and long-term homelessness in Ireland by 2010. The Simon Communities of Ireland fully understand the difficult financial times we are all currently living in but this government has stated on many occasions that they are committed to protecting people who are poor and vulnerable. People who are homeless or at risk of homelessness definitely fall into this category. It is critical that we do not turn the clock back on the progress that has been made in addressing homelessness in recent years. Full implementation of the National Homeless Strategy must be resourced as this is the only way to ensure that the 2010 commitments are achieved. We firmly believe that these commitments can still be realised and we are fully committed to working with all parties to make this happen."

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Note for Editors

About the Simon Communities of Ireland:

The Simon Communities of Ireland is an affiliation of local Communities in Cork, Dublin, Dundalk, Galway, the Midlands, the Mid West, the North West and the South East. In addition, the National Office performs a coordinating role in terms of campaigning in the areas of housing/homeless policy and the wider poverty and social inclusion agenda; best practice in service delivery and working with people who are homeless; and in the area of full time volunteering promoting excellence and providing accredited training.

The Simon Communities throughout Ireland provide the best possible care, accommodation and support for people experiencing homelessness and those at risk. Together, with people who are homeless, we tackle the root causes, promote innovative responses and urge the government to fulfil their commitments. Simon delivers support and service to almost 5,000 people who experience - or are at risk of - homelessness on an annual basis.

About the 2010 Commitments:

The Government has committed achieving the following commitments by 2010

- Ending long-term homelessness (the occupation of emergency accommodation for longer than 6 months). This commitment was included in the Towards 2016 Social Partnership Agreement is restated in the new Homeless Strategy 'The Way Home' published Aug 2008. This commitment was recently confirmed in the renegotiated Programme for Government (Oct 2009).
- Eliminating the need to sleep rough, this commitment is clearly articulated in new Homeless Strategy 'The Way Home' published Aug 2008.

About Sick and Tired of Homelessness – A Health Profile of People Using Cork Simon:

This Health Audit was conducted among all people using Cork Simon services during the first week of September 2009 to build a picture of some of those needs and to highlight the complex nature of homelessness among people using those services. Sick and Tired of Homelessness records diagnosed mental and physical health conditions, alcohol and drug use, behaviour issues and referrals to the Adult Homeless Multi Disciplinary Team (AHMDT).

About Complex Needs:

People with complex needs can be defined as having "...multiple interconnecting needs that span medical and social issues. Individuals with 'complex needs' may have mental health issues, combined with substance misuse problems, and learning disability. At the same time they may experience social exclusion, such as living in poor housing, with few opportunities for meaningful activities and leisure".

(Rankin & Regan. (2004) as cited in Cox, G. & McVerry, P. (2006) 'Social Care & Drug Users in Ireland'. Policy Paper 2. Drug Policy Action Group. Dublin

Download the full presentation at www.simon.ie