



Minceirs Whiden (Cant for Traveller talking ) Ireland only all Traveller Forum would like to thank the Special Joint Committee for the opportunity to make a presentation on Traveller Health – 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2019

We have to start of this submission as we do with all submissions by stating the obvious that the Traveller community is in crisis, the evidence is there for everyone to see, the Traveller community is at the top of every negative statistic and the bottom of positive outcomes in Irish Society, i.e. education, employment, health, life expectancy, health and mental health, addiction, and escalating suicide rates.

We are haemorrhaging people, through chronic illness, ill health, addiction and suicide. The underlying causes are poverty and poor living conditions, social isolation and exclusion.

The Traveller community is losing our ability to cope and endure, we are dealing with layer upon layers of grief. For decades the Traveller community has experiences unrelenting anti-Traveller bias and racism, we are the most disadvantaged, discriminated and marginalised community in Irish society.

***Urgent action is needed to turn these challenges around. The Irish Traveller population currently is less than 40,000 people.***

Today we are talking about the inequalities in Traveller health/mental health and the actions need to address these inequalities, to do this we cannot leave out the contributing factors that contribute to crisis in Traveller health and mental health, that is the Crisis in Traveller Accommodation, the poor education attainment for the Traveller community, the high levels for unemployment, Social Inclusion – Anti Traveller bias and Racism. These issues are interlinked and negatively impacting on Travellers health and wellbeing.

To resolve the crisis and destruction that we are witnessing happening with the Traveller community we must understand their inter-connectivity and take a holistic approach and address each of these issues.

**These are not insurmountable issues to fix** - with commitment and resolution they can be fixed, and we will be a better people and country for it.

The neglect and inequality the Traveller community and the pockets deprived and long-term disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland have experiences and endure is a stain on the character of our Nation. That must be put right.

Ireland is an only a Small country, but we can Stand Proud with the nations around the world for the contributions our country has made on the World Stage, however we must address our internal challenges and support the people our nation as left behind for far too long.

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Successive governments have failed to put in place decisive actions to resolve the inequalities that exist within our country that has allowed so many of our people to be left behind, doing the best they can, trying to survive in conditions and with challenges that in many cases is hard to imagine would exist in a 1<sup>st</sup> world country like Ireland.

Sadly, too often the many contributions from individuals from the Traveller community and disadvantaged communities throughout Ireland that make our nation what it is have been forgotten or under appreciated.

*As a nation we cannot continue to blame people from marginalised, disadvantaged and deprived communities for the situation they are born into and trying to survive in, it is time to reach out and pull up the citizens our nation as left behind for decades.*

*We are not problem people or problem communities we are people and communities with problems that are the direct result of generational poverty and exclusion, we need help and support to overcome the challenges our communities are facing. Decisive governmental actions and implementation of equality-based policies are needed to address these inequalities and challenges.*

#### **Some Statistic for the Traveller community.**

- Life expectancy for Traveller men is 15.1 years & Traveller women 11.5 years less than men/women in the general population.
- Infant mortality rate is 3.7 times higher.
- Suicide rate among Traveller men is 6.6 times higher and accounts for 11% of Traveller deaths.

We currently have no statistic on suicide rates with Traveller women, but it has become a very worrying trend in recent years as too has the number of Traveller youth boy and girls committing suicide

#### **Key Recommendations**

1. Publish and implement the National Traveller Health Action Plan as a matter of urgency, including the establishment of an institutional mechanism with the HSE and Department of Health to drive its' delivery and implementation. The Plan must be inclusive of clear targets, indicators, outcomes, timeframes and budget lines.
2. Sláintecare recommends access to universal GP care within 5 years. We recommend that Travellers be prioritized and fast-tracked in this process. We further recommend that with immediate effect all Travellers employed in Primary Health Care Projects are entitled to a medical card (similar to Disability/Community Service Programme/CE). This is circa 300 medical cards.
3. The Traveller specific health infrastructure, including Traveller Health Units and Traveller Primary Health Care Projects, should be protected and receive increased resources for their expansion and development in line with the National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy (Action 76). It is important that health reforms do not undermine the work and progress of the THUs given their institutional knowledge and their impact on the ground.
4. Ensure that a clear budget is allocated and protected to address Traveller health inequalities at national level.
5. National Traveller Suicide intervention /prevention strategy implemented as a matter of urgency.