

The Wellness Alliance: (draft)

Our Vision is an Ireland in which Wellness is a lived, core value at individual, community and national levels, as part of a holistic health model for affordable, empowered and dignified living, a model that can serve as a template for the wider world.

Our Mission is to identify, develop and deliver targeted Wellness initiatives in Ireland, but with global potential, on a basis which is collaborative, inclusive, measurable, scaleable, sustainable and transformative.

This initiative is set in the context of the vision for the country articulated by Taoiseach Enda Kenny to make Ireland, by 2016, the best small country in the world in which to do business, in which to raise a family, and in which to grow old with dignity and respect.

Rationale:

The cost of health care has been growing faster than GDP in most developed countries. The patterns of disease burden have shifted from infectious diseases to chronic which are now the leading cause of illness, disability, and death accounting for the majority of health care expenditures in developed countries. In Ireland it has been estimated that approximately 80% of primary care consultations and 60% of bed days used in acute hospitals are related to chronic illness. It is further estimated that these conditions account for over 70% of all health care expenditure. The requirement for long term care is almost exclusively related to the sequelae of chronic illness. Irish data indicate that there will be rises of 50% to 80% in the number of cases of cancer, diabetes, and other chronic diseases over the next decade.

The challenge therefore for current and future generations is how to achieve and optimise the health of a population without having its costs continue to absorb an ever increasing proportion of the economy-an unsustainable task!

A small set of common risk factors are responsible for most of the main chronic diseases (WHO 2011). These risk factors are, in principle, modifiable and largely the same in men and women:

- unhealthy diet
- physical inactivity;
- tobacco use
- harmful use of alcohol

These causes are expressed through the intermediate risk factors of raised blood pressure, raised glucose levels, abnormal blood lipids, overweight and obesity. The relationship between the major modifiable risk factors and the main chronic diseases is similar in all regions of the world. We can begin to adopt a new integrated approach to support a Wellness rather than a sickness model of care by addressing these risk factors in a systematic and cross sectorial manner by working together as part of what we are calling the "Wellness Alliance".

Wellness Alliance

The concept of a Wellness Alliance is now put forward to develop practical and sustainable ways in which the concept might be advanced through the creation of a "Wellness Footprint". The members of the Wellness Alliance would be those

organisations that have a financial and social interest in keeping the population healthy (e.g., insurance companies, technology and social media companies, health and wellness industry, health, education, and other public sector bodies, the retail sector, philanthropic and corporate services social responsibility groups).

The Wellness Alliance has a NGO Governance Structure in place to support these goals. This Corporate Structure is a “not for profit” Foundation registered in Ireland and with Revenue. This is the vehicle that will allow formal relationships with the various parties.

A number of elements are suggested for initial development.

- 1) A Wellness group/network should be established, to work on the development, implementation, and embedding of the idea of Wellness in Ireland. This should be representative of the broad sectorial interests and operate as an “open source docking station” for a range of diverse initiatives in the field of Wellness.
- 2) It is recognised that inconsistent tools are currently used to measure “Wellness” with no common definition of the term or methods of gathering the information. Benchmarking or comparative analysis becomes impossible. It is thus important that evidence based clinically valid measures are used in developing what might be termed a Wellness Footprint which leads to action rather than simply further analysis (World Economic Forum 2008).
- 3) A concept of Wellness tokens could be explored which could be used to incentivise changes in habits towards health promotion and disease prevention by encouraging healthy behaviours and emphasising preventive health care. Such an approach would also be a means of financing supportive care so that the elderly, the chronically ill and the disabled can remain in their own homes in line with social policy and mitigate or indeed negate delay their entry into a long-term care facility where the costs escalate and quality of life diminishes (ref work of Bernard Lietaer and the Club of Rome EU Chapter –Money and Sustainability, the Missing Link 2012).
- 4) Utilise technology and social media to support crowd accelerated innovation of the Wellness concept e.g. mobile apps, community health networks/support groups, new tools/products, decision supports. The continued spread of electronic health records (EHRs) that can interoperate with other EHRs (open source and open standards), citizens’ electronic personal health records (PHRs), and other systems (for example, pharmacy systems), is one key to a successful transformation of care delivery. In this way we can begin to activate citizens from “fix me” to personal health management.

An early concrete area for work is to investigate the alignment of the various initiatives to support healthy behaviours in primary schools (ref work of Professor Niall Moyna and Senator Eamonn Coghlan-Fitness for Kids/Points for Life). Put together the effect of these initiatives might greatly exceed their separate effects.

Design ideas are not enough. To initiate the process of change, we require leadership and an integrated programme of actions across and within many sectors that contribute to our health ecosystem.

Ireland’s Presidency of the EU in 2013 offers the potential for Ireland to lead the development of an international movement for Wellness beginning with the

establishment of an Irish Wellness Alliance to develop and implement a Wellness Footprint and Wellness initiatives which are visionary, collegiate, transformational and achievable.