Budget 2027 - Overcoming addiction, fighting homelessness, tackling stigma

A Pre-Budget Submission from Merchants Quay Ireland

July 2026

Merchants Quay Ireland
Homeless & Drugs Services

Introduction
About Merchants Quay Ireland

Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) is a leading Irish charity working with people experiencing homelessness, people who are in active addiction and people in recovery. Our organisation provides services ranging from crisis and case management, healthcare services, harm reduction and family support to residential and community detox and rehabilitation, aftercare, and prison-based addiction counselling.

Our clients are those who experience or are vulnerable to homelessness and/or who experience addiction, problematic drug use, mental health issues or mental illness.

It also provides an estimated cost of the necessary budget required for the respective areas.

Merchants Quay Ireland's impact in 2025

- **Overview:** During 2025, MQI recorded 183,763 client engagements and supported 11,974 people across our services. In our Riverbank low threshold homelessness drop-in centre in Dublin, there were 2,261 interventions by our contact team.
- **National figures:** We are a nationwide service and throughout the year we had 6,237 engagements with our MQI CRIS team in the east of the country, whilst there were 2,159 interventions by our Cavan and Monaghan Drug and Alcohol Service. There were 2.027 interventions by MQI Northeast, and 811 people were supported by MQI Midlands. 157 family members were supported by our North East Family Support Service
- **Women's support:** Our new women's service, Jane's Place, saw 255 women supported by our team with a total of 4,241 interventions.
- **Prisons, addiction services, and community support:** There were 15,480 in-prison counselling interventions, 1,470 people accessed our new Medically Supervised Injection Facility, and 787 patrols were carried out by our Community Engagement Team.
- **Hot meals and showers:** Vitally, we provided 83,667 meals and 2,273 showers to people who had nowhere else to turn.

We are proud to have delivered another year of essential services but we need help to continue to support the most vulnerable in our community.

Merchant Quay Ireland's four-point plan for Budget 2027 to protect Ireland's most vulnerable

Our pre-Budget submission outlines four key areas of an economic nature, which we are calling on Government to prioritise in Budget 2027, namely:

Action 1: Strengthen the programs we provide to support the most vulnerable in society

To support the running of our key recovery services like the residential rehabilitation at High Park in Dublin, and detox and rehab services at St. Francis Farm in Carlow.

COST - €800k per annum.

Action 2: Support the delivery of gender-specific services for women

To operate Jane's Place, a safe, warm and welcoming environment that provides holistic, trauma informed, gender specific services for women with complex needs of addiction, homelessness and mental health.

COST - €340k per annum

Action 3: Provide a sustainable foundation for those experiencing homelessness and addiction

In an uncertain donor environment, to put the funding of staff, premises, skills and the delivery of government policy including the new national drug strategy.

COST- €3.7m per annum

Action 4: Support an end to stigma

To support and implement a nationwide public awareness campaign to reduce stigma against people who are drug dependent, thus helping end the cycle of addiction.

COST- €100k next year

Our priorities for Budget 2027

Action 1: Strengthen the programs we provide to support we give to the most vulnerable in society

Support the running of our key recovery services like the residential rehabilitation at High Park, and detox and rehab services at St. Francis Farm.

Recommendation 12 from the report of the Citizens' Assembly on Drug Use states that "the Government should allocate additional resources to fund community-based and residential treatment and recovery services as an alternative to custodial sentences for people with problematic drugs use".

This has been backed by the report of the Oireachtas Committee on Drugs Use which, in June, stated;

> *The Committee recommends significantly improving funding for community-based services, sufficiently resourced residential treatment, and access to recovery at the level required. The Committee recommends that engagement with such services is not on a mandatory basis and that there will not be a limit placed on the number of times that the option to engage with such services will be offered.*

Budget 2027 provides an opportunity to end the chronic underfunding of these services.

MQI offers residential medical detox programmes in St Francis Farm in Carlow and High Park, Drumcondra, Dublin.

> Residential Rehabilitation – High Park:
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> This residential programme operates from High Park, Dublin and is delivered over a 14-week rehabilitation cycle. It provides clients with structured treatment in a drug and alcohol-free environment. The facility has capacity for 13 clients at any given time.
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> The programme is grounded in an ethos of openness and inclusion, supporting service users to build insight into the factors underpinning substance use and to develop practical relapse-prevention strategies. Supports include individual care planning, one-to-one key-working, group work, psychoeducational sessions, fitness and gym activities, outdoor pursuits and recreational activities. The service also facilitates weekly online Narcotics Anonymous meetings.
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> In 2025, the service received 217 referrals, completed 218 assessments, admitted 52 clients, and 41 (80%) successfully completed treatment.

Residential Detox Unit – St Francis Farm

This eight-bed unit supports clients detoxing from a range of substances including combined methadone and benzodiazepines, methadone only, benzodiazepines only, and suboxone, and is based on a combined psychosocial and medical delivery model. The service provides an agile response to emerging needs, and in 2025 admission criteria were broadened under the guidance of the Clinical Governance Committee.

Following improvements to the referral criteria, admissions remained stable in 2025 with 57 people admitted to the unit, consistent with the previous year.

89% of clients who accessed the programme successfully completed their detox in 2025.

Residential Rehabilitation Unit – St Francis Farm

The residential rehabilitation programme in St Francis Farm is a holistic model combining individual and group-based interventions to support participants to maintain a drug-free lifestyle. In 2025, the service received 108 referrals aligned to programme criteria. Overall, 45 people were admitted, with an 81% successful completion rate.

The unit achieved an average monthly bed occupancy rate of 79% during the year.

The importance of recovery services for those experiencing addiction cannot be overstated.

This year, running these vital services will cost around €2.4m, yet the State funding we receive for them will come to €1.6m. Extra state funding is vital to keep these services operating sustainably. That extra funding we are seeking will go some way towards meeting the complex needs of those who wish to avail of our services, transforming their lives.

COST - €800k per annum.

Action 2: Support the delivery of gender-specific services for women

To operate Jane's Place – a safe, warm and welcoming environment that provides holistic, trauma informed, gender specific services for women with complex needs of addiction, homelessness and mental health.

In considering services for women, it is worth noting the following:

- Women now account for 40% of the adult homeless population
- The average age of death for women who are homeless in Ireland is 46 years
- In 2022 there were 109 female drug related deaths.

- Women who experience extensive physical or sexual violence are eight times more likely to be drug dependent.

The Programme for Government recognises that women can face barriers to accessing and sustaining addiction treatment, arising from an absence of childcare or the presence of gender-based violence, and the need to develop targeted interventions aimed at responding to their needs.

For our part, all MQI's services welcome women. But we know that trust is a key issue for women with complex needs as they have often been on the receiving end of so much hurt. Further, immediacy is key for the successful pathway through addiction, homelessness, residential and support services. Overall, the pathway through services needs to be flexible, with speedy access and with integration of services that are fully inclusive and accessible to women with complex needs, women with or without children, migrant women, LGBTQI women etc.

Jane's Place is a women-only service supporting individuals experiencing homelessness and addiction. It provides a safe, warm and welcoming environment, offering holistic, trauma-informed supports including one-to-one case management, psycho-educational health and wellbeing groups, and holistic therapies.

Jane's Place provides a trauma-informed setting that promotes safety and support. Facilities include a fully equipped doctor's surgery, nursing room, counselling rooms, group room, kitchen, beauty room, and shower facilities.

The service also delivers programmes focused on recovery and healing from trauma, including art therapy, mindfulness, maintaining physical and mental wellbeing, and developing an understanding of trauma. In 2025, the service was accessed by 255 women, with a total of 4,241 interventions, alongside 146 group sessions with 84 clients.

During 2025, 39% of clients in Jane's Place did not access any other MQI service, highlighting the service's role in engaging women who are often excluded from wider supports.

The cost of running the service this year is €437k. We received state funding of €97k. To make this service sustainable, that gap should be bridged in Budget 2027.

COST - €340k per annum.

Action 3: Provide a sustainable foundation for those experiencing homelessness and addiction

In an uncertain donor environment, to put towards the funding of staff, premises, skills and the delivery of government policy including the new national drug strategy.

A crucial priority for any charity is to remain operational and sustainable. The unfunded cost of running our services is significant and leaves Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) and our service users in a vulnerable position.

MQI receives just over half its funding (54%) from the State. Whilst we are hugely grateful for this, Budget 2027 offers the opportunity to put our life saving services on a sustainable footing. MQI plays a crucial role in supporting people experiencing homelessness and addiction across the country and requires a stable foundation in order to continue providing accessible, low threshold services for the most vulnerable in society.

MQI sits at delicate junction, balancing essential services across rehabilitation, detox, open access homeless services and health led addiction support. In 2025, a total of 83,667 meals were provided at our Riverbank Service in Dublin, a 22% increase from the previous year driven by rising homelessness rates and expanded outreach efforts to support people in need. 2,723 showers were provided in Riverbank while 2,421 people accessed a Sunday meal.

In addition to this, Ireland's first medically supervised injecting facility (MSIF) has been in operation for over 18 months now and recently saw an extension of its operational licence by one year. The facility, which is supported by the HSE and Department of Health is located at Merchant Quay Ireland's, Riverbank centre in Dublin city centre.

The MSIF offers a clean, supervised space where individuals can inject pre-obtained drugs, under the care of trained medical professionals. This facility is designed to reduce the health risks associated with intravenous drug use, including overdose and the transmission of infectious diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis C.

It also serves as an important point of contact for those seeking help, by offering referrals to addiction treatment, mental health support, primary healthcare and social services.

A pathway to progress on drug policy has been provided by the report of the Oireachtas Committee on Drugs and the forthcoming new National Drugs Strategy, which has been published in draft form. This submission builds on that pathway by outlining the key issues underlying these areas of funding, makes specific proposals to Government and a strong rationale to prioritise investment to support our work to provide essential services.

The MSIF saves the lives of those who use the service and has -rightly- garnered much attention since it opened. But it only one of the lives saving services that we offer.

Across daycare, residential, addiction, rehabilitation and detox services, our teams are under pressure. A lack of resources and the constant need to find funding from private donors impacts on planning.

The additional asks in this submission need to be supported by a secure and firm foundation. A contributing to our essential delivery costs will allow us to focus on the development of our innovative and lifesaving services while supporting Government to implement a successful new National Drug Strategy and support those in need while addressing the national housing crisis.

COST - €3.7m per annum.

Action 4: Support an end to stigma

To support and implement a nationwide public awareness campaign to reduce stigma against people who are drug dependent, thus helping end the cycle of addiction.

Our research shows that the levels of stigma in Irish society toward people who use drugs and are in addiction is falling. The Government's health-led approach to dealing with addiction is working.

People have a better understanding of the causes of addiction – and the solutions.

However, the research shows that stigma remains a potent and negative force in our clients' lives and much more needs to be done to tackle stigma.

66% of people would tend to avoid people who are drug dependent while 50% say people who are drug dependent really scare them.

Stigma has a serious impact on the health and wellbeing of those in addiction, and leads to social exclusion, thus exacerbating the problems caused by addiction.

While the trend of public opinion is going in the right direction, more needs to be done and we can never give up on combatting the stigma that those in addiction face every day.

With support in Budget 2027, we are proposing to roll out a special *Lived Experience* campaign, a nationwide public awareness campaign including client stories to reduce stigma around homelessness and addiction in a meaningful way.

COST - €100k in 2027

Conclusion

The total cost of the main proposals in this document come to almost €5m.

This is not a small sum, though it pales into insignificance when compared to other Budget lines. What is incomparable, however, is the impact this funding will have on those who rely so desperately on MQI's vital services.

Homelessness, addiction and stigma blight the lives of individuals and families throughout Ireland. A comprehensive approach to treatment, prevention and support means the right level of funding to provide the services that are needed most.

We remain in the midst of an addiction and homelessness crisis, and we need to protect those who need our care most.

Budget 2027 can do just that.