

## PSI comments - draft World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative assessment report: Ireland 2023

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PSI welcomes this opportunity to support the development of Ireland's first World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative assessment report and the work of the Core Group for WBTi Ireland. We consider the draft report to be a valuable contribution to the overall improvement of Ireland's national breastfeeding rates, which as the report identifies, are amongst the lowest in the world.

PSI – the Pharmacy regulator is a public body established in law to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of patients and the public by regulating pharmacists and pharmacies in Ireland. Among our statutory responsibilities are the setting of standards for pharmacy education and training and ensuring all registered pharmacists are undertaking appropriate continuing professional development (CPD).

As medicines experts, pharmacists play a key role in the appropriate use of medicines during breastfeeding. Pharmacists who work in community settings are among the most accessible healthcare professionals in Ireland and are therefore ideally placed to promote and support public health initiatives by signposting patients and the public to key information and resources, including those related to breastfeeding.

Our comments on the draft assessment report focus on Indicator 5.

### **Core Competency Framework (CCF) for Pharmacists**

We note that express reference is made in the report to the Core Competency Framework (CCF) for Pharmacists and would like to clarify the purpose of the CCF. It sets out the competencies expected of pharmacists in the early stages of their career i.e., 0-3 years. The Core Competency Framework has several purposes, namely:

- to underpin the education and training of pharmacy students,
- to help pharmacists identify their Continuing Professional Development (CPD) needs,
- to inform the Professional Registration Exam (PRE),
- to inform the Accreditation Standards for CPD Programmes and Courses for Pharmacists,
- to provide a platform for the development of advanced practice, and

- to provide a public statement for patients, other healthcare professionals, policymakers and others of the key skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours associated with and expected of pharmacists.

The CCF includes five domains which are broad areas of responsibility or professional endeavour, and a number of associated corresponding competencies. A competency describes activities or processes in relation to the overall expectation of the domain. Each competency has a number of indicative behaviour statements which describe how the competency may be demonstrated. In general, the framework is not intended to be prescriptive on specific clinical areas or public health priority areas.

The CCF should be used by the Schools of Pharmacy in Ireland to inform the development of the curricula for the 5-year integrated Master of Pharmacy (MPharm) programmes they deliver. While we acknowledge that the CCF does not specifically mention infant feeding or breastfeeding, we consider that the content of the framework is sufficiently broad to enable the Schools of Pharmacy to incorporate this into their curricula.

Indeed, from recent engagement with pharmacy students undertaking MPharm programmes in Ireland, we understand that breastfeeding is currently being taught by all three Schools of Pharmacy in Ireland and covers aspects such as the benefits of breastfeeding, the role of the pharmacist in promoting breastfeeding and knowledge on medicines use in breastfeeding.

### **Continuing Professional Development (CPD) System for Pharmacists**

All pharmacists are required to undertake continuing professional development (CPD). The [PSI \(Continuing Professional Development\) Rules 2015](#) set out the CPD obligations for pharmacists, including that they must maintain a record of their CPD and demonstrate evidence of this on request. The Irish Institute of Pharmacy (IIOp) was established by the PSI to oversee the development and management of the CPD system for pharmacists in Ireland.

As part of the contract that oversees the operation of the IIOp, an Annual Work Plan must be developed in anticipation of the activities to be delivered by the IIOp in the impending year. As part of the development of the work plan we hold engagement meetings with the Department of Health and representatives from different areas within the HSE to identify expected training needs for pharmacists for the next year and include these as priority areas for CPD courses and training for pharmacists.

Women's Health has been included as a priority area for the delivery of CPD activities by the IIOp for the last number of years including 2021 - 2023, and we expect it to also be identified as a priority area for the 2024 work plan, in line with Department of Health priorities in this area. CPD activities delivered by the IIOp in respect of identified priority areas include online and blended training programmes, workshops, and webinars for pharmacists. PSI would be pleased to include breastfeeding as part of the consideration of the development of the IIOp work plan for 2024.

### **HSeLanD training specific to breastfeeding**

The draft report refers to HSeLanD training, which pharmacists, as healthcare professionals, have access to. We believe there is an opportunity to improve knowledge and awareness among registered pharmacists on the HSeLanD breastfeeding resources and in this regard, we would be pleased to signpost pharmacists to these resources, for example in our PSI newsletter. The PSI newsletter is a regular email communication that contains information and events of interest to the pharmacy profession, pharmacy owners and wider stakeholders, and is issued to all PSI registrants as well as other interested stakeholders.

In summary, PSI supports greater knowledge of breastfeeding among healthcare professionals and is supportive of initiatives to facilitate the education and training of pharmacists in this area as part of coordinated measures aimed at improving Ireland's national breastfeeding rates.

We hope that this feedback is useful to the Core Group for WBTi Ireland in developing the draft assessment report. If you require any further clarification or information from PSI, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

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**November 2023**