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Regional Strategy Team  
Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety  
Room C4.22  
Castle Buildings  
Belfast  
BT4 3SJ

Dear Regional Strategy Team

**“A Healthier Future” A Twenty Year Vision for Health & Wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2005 – 2025**

Enclosed please find the ICTU Response to the Consultation Document on “A Healthier Future”.

Having been concerned that the public consultation on “SMOKING” is buried within the large Consultative Document ICTU is responding separately on this matter directly to the Minister.

Yours faithfully

**Peter Bunting**  
**Assistant General Secretary**

# **A Healthier Future: A Twenty Year Vision for Health & Wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2005-2025**

## **Response by Irish Congress of Trade Unions**

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) welcomes the opportunity to comment on this most significant document which will have a major impact on the health and wellbeing of the population over coming generations. Before making specific responses to some of the Consultation Questions there are a number of general comments which need to be made.

### **General Comments**

#### **1. Timing of the C.D.**

That notice of the Consultative Document was issued within the Xmas Holiday Week with access via the internet did not instil the sense of the importance that would be expected of such a consultation.

#### **2. Is a 20 year Strategy Realistic?**

Whilst it is useful to have long term targets these must be achievable. A 20 year span can be suitable in deciding a vision or an aspiration. Given that in health terms 20 years is a generation span it would be more practical to have 5-10 year targets. This would provide a sense of contributing to the achievement for those involved in their delivery.

#### **3. Investing for Health Strategic Theme**

Policy Direction 2 outlines the commitment to the IfH Strategy as the “over-arching cross governmental policy for promoting population health and wellbeing”. An opportunity was lost here in not including something on the achievements to date through the four regional IfH Partnerships and the Workplace Health Strategy. This would have provided encouragement to those involved as well as being a pointer to what can be achieved.

#### **4. Smoke Free Workplaces and Enclosed Public Places**

Specific comment will be made on this later but ICTU is concerned that this most significant and important issue was buried within a large document and was not even referred to in the Executive Summary. Without the campaigning and sterling work by those concerned voluntary organisations very little would have been known on this aspect of the consultation.

#### **Consultation Questions**

##### **1. Vision**

After much searching the strategy vision was found on page 37. It would have made more sense had the vision statement come first with the subsequent points indicating how the strategy can be achieved.

The vision will require much in the way of new resources to ensure that adequate staff has the skills and the tools to make it a reality.

##### **2. Major Themes**

ICTU welcomes the five major themes as identified. It is encouraging that Investing for Health and Wellbeing is listed as the first of these, given the need to develop the concept of a "prevention" approach to health.

The Strategy would read much better if the major themes, policy direction and key outcomes were to follow the vision statement at the outset. This could also act as a summary of the strategy.

##### **3. Key Population Health Outcomes**

Given the ongoing work of the Investing for Health Strategy in meeting a number of high level key targets it would be helpful if the key actions and outcomes in "A Healthier Future" were in a similar format and allowed for complementary development. This would also provide an opportunity for some *joined-up government* in respect of health.

#### **4. Reducing Smoking**

Having considered carefully the three options presented to reduce smoking in “A Healthier Future”, ICTU supports Option 5© - the introduction of legislation to ban smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces.

Given that ICTU has amongst its affiliated organisations, a number which represent members employed in the tobacco industry and associated services; it was encouraging to find that the deciding factor, in a difficult decision, was in respect of the health of all the members.

ICTU has memories of the long campaign required to convince Government of the need to ban the use of ASBESTOS as an industrial material. This campaign was based on the awful reality of the numbers of deaths and debilitating illnesses suffered by working people through asbestos fibres. Indeed the deaths continue as a result of contracting asbestos related illnesses in the past.

Figures are available for the deaths arising from passive smoking and ICTU will expect Government action on this.

Option 5(a) does nothing to resolve the problem.

Option 5(b) will offer nothing only confusion and legal arguments as to when a workplace might be deemed to be serving food/not serving food. This option also discriminates against certain workers on the grounds that their workplace is outside the remit of the law.

Any vision for the health and wellbeing of the people of Northern Ireland must include the expectation of a total ban on smoking in enclosed public places and workplaces.

#### **5. Taking the Strategy Forward**

As stated previously in the second of the General Comments such a long term strategy will require to be broken down into manageable, measurable and achievable portions. Taking “A Healthier Future” forward will require careful and skilful management along with adequate resources.

ICTU welcomes the opportunity to comment on this draft strategy, looks forward to receiving a copy of the final document and to playing a part, through its nominees on the IfH Partnerships, the Workplace Health Strategy and the other relevant public bodies in its implementation.