

“Our Geels” All Ireland Traveller Health Study launched in Cork

The All-Ireland Traveller Health Study (AITHS) was launched today. Conducted by University College Dublin (UCD) the study has been designed to monitor the health and healthcare needs of Travellers across the island of Ireland.

Funded by the Department of Health and Children in the Republic of Ireland, and by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland, fieldwork on the study will last for a period of 6 weeks. The major element of the study affecting Travellers directly is the *Traveller Census* and will examine health status, assess the level of health service provision and identify the wide range of factors influencing health status and mortality among the Traveller community.

Travellers themselves will carry out the fieldwork for this study. Brigid Carmody Chair of the Cork Traveller Women’s Network. Said "The Cork Traveller Women’s Network are delighted to be involved in this study. We hope that the findings of this research will influence government policy and lead to better access to services and better overall health for the Traveller community"

It is well recognised that travellers experience discrimination and difficulties accessing healthcare, and suffer significant levels of discrimination and ill-health much more frequently than the settled population, with seven in 10 travellers dying before reaching the age of 59.

Speaking about the Study, Ms. Jeanne Hendrick (The HSE’s General Manager for the Wexford Community Services area) said:

“Traveller health is a priority area. Considerable work has been undertaken, in consultation with the interest groups, in commissioning this Study. The purpose of the study is to examine the health status of Travellers, to assess the impact of the health services currently being provided, and to identify the factors which influence health status. It will provide a framework for policy development and practice in relation to Traveller health. Following the results of a previous study in 1987, a wide range of specific Traveller dedicated health services such as Traveller Health Units and Primary Health Care Projects were developed by the HSE. It is envisaged that the results of this study will stimulate further development of these services.”

“The Health Research Board Study in 1987 highlighted a number of issues of concern in relation to the overall health status of the Traveller population. Of particular concern is the Study’s finding that

Travellers of all ages have much higher mortality rates than people in the general population, with Traveller men living on average 10 years less than men in the general population and Traveller women living on average 12 years less than their peers. We look forward to further focus on these issues, when this present process is completed”.

Designed to be culturally appropriate, the study will be undertaken by Travellers trained as Peer Researchers visiting Traveller family homes across the region for a period of 6 weeks from October 14th.

While this study is being carried out on the ground, other pieces of research will be simultaneously completed by UCD. There will be a study of life expectancy and the age at which people die and there will also be a survey of births and the health of babies.

The entire study will be completed by November 25th 2008 and will be used to plan Traveller healthcare appropriately into the future

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