

Press release: Evidence review on drug misuse treatment published

Public Health England (PHE) has today, 26 January 2017, published a comprehensive review of the evidence on the drug misuse treatment system in England. In comparison with other countries and the international research, it shows the system is performing well but some areas need improvement. Some of the findings include:

- 60% of all opioid users are in treatment – among the highest reported internationally
- 97% of all users start treatment within three weeks, which compares favourably with other countries
- there is a very low rate of HIV infection among injecting drug users (1%) in England

The two areas where treatment in England is not doing so well are the number of drug-related deaths, which is estimated to continue to rise, and the numbers continuing to use opiates/heroin after starting treatment.

Although fewer people are using drugs than 10 to 15 years ago, an increase in hospital admissions and drug-related deaths indicate that drug-related harms are increasing. The evidence suggests this increase is largely among a small but growing number of vulnerable, older entrenched heroin users, with poor physical and mental health.

The evidence shows that drug treatment alone is often not enough. Social factors are important influences on treatment effectiveness. Those in decent housing, employment and with good social networks are more likely to recover and remain drug-free. Effective integrated services are important to success.

Professor Kevin Fenton, National Director of Health and Wellbeing at PHE said:

Our review highlights the many benefits of drug misuse treatment for individuals, families and communities. But there are challenges ahead.

Local areas increasingly have to meet the complex needs of older long-term heroin users, often in poor health, with other problems particularly housing, poor social-networks and unemployment, which are vital to successful recovery.

Services will also need to be flexible, ensuring appropriate treatment to those seeking help for the first time, particularly with emerging issues such as new psychoactive substances or the problematic use of medication.

With every £1 spent on treatment yielding a £2.50 saving on the

social costs of drug misuse, it makes sound sense for local authorities to continue to invest – helping people get their lives back on track and fully contributing to society.

PHE also published the first annual report on individuals receiving specialist treatment for drugs and alcohol misuse in prisons and other secure settings, following the successful implementation of the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) in these estates.

The data will improve our understanding of the way that treatment is delivered in secure settings and will be a valuable resource for policy makers, commissioners and service providers. This data will now act as a baseline against which future activity and performance will be measured.

Sarah Newton, Minister for Vulnerability, Safeguarding and Countering Extremism said:

Recovery remains a vital part of this government's approach to tackling drugs and reducing their devastating impact.

This review shows progress is being made and sets out the benefits to individuals, their families and the communities in which they live of high quality tailored drug treatment, which can help reduce crime.

The government will continue to act to reduce the harms caused by drugs, setting out our approach in our forthcoming drugs strategy.

- Read [Evidence review of the outcomes that can be expected of drug misuse treatment in England](#)
- Read [Secure setting statistics from the NDTMS 2015 to 2016](#)
- International comparisons found England to be performing well:
 - relatively low rate (0.25%) of all 15 to 64 year olds in the population are injecting
 - the rate of drop out from treatment before 3 and 6 months (18% and 34%) is comparable to the literature (28% on average)
 - The rate of Hepatitis C infection (50%) is lower than several other countries with available data
- Treatment in England is associated with a marked reduction in convictions (47%) among those retained in treatment for 2 years or who successfully completed treatment
- New Psychoactive Substance (NPS) misuse remains a threat, particularly in prisons. New patterns of drug use and health risk behaviour are also becoming established, including injecting NPS and 'chemsex', drugs used alongside high-risk sexual behaviour

Official statistics

Review reports

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