

Press release: New drug strategy to safeguard vulnerable and stop substance misuse

Each year in the UK, drugs cost society £10.7 billion in policing, healthcare and crime, with drug-fuelled theft alone costing £6 billion a year. Research shows that for every £1 spent on treatment, an estimated £2.50 is saved.

In 2015/16, 2.7 million – over 8% – of 16-59-year-olds in England and Wales took illegal drugs. This is down from 10.5% a decade ago, but new threats are emerging including new psychoactive substances such as ‘spice’, image and performance enhancing drugs, ‘chemsex’ drugs and misuse of prescribed medicines.

The new strategy confronts these threats and sets out new action to protect the most vulnerable, including the homeless, victims of domestic abuse and those with mental health issues.

The comprehensive new approach brings the police, health and local partners together to support those most at risk. The strategy includes measures to:

- reduce demand: through deterrent work including an expansion of the Alcohol and Drugs Education and Prevention Information Service for young people
- restrict supply: by pursuing a strong law enforcement response and dismantling trafficking networks
- support recovery: a new National Recovery Champion will be appointed to make sure adequate housing, employment and mental health services are available to help people turn their lives around
- drive international action: an international strand is included for the first time, setting out action to strengthen controls at our borders, understand global trends and share intelligence

Home Secretary Amber Rudd said:

Since becoming Home Secretary I have seen first-hand how drugs can destroy lives. I am determined to confront the scale of this issue and prevent drug misuse devastating our families and communities.

This government has driven a tough law enforcement response in the UK and at our borders, but this must go hand in hand with prevention and recovery. This new strategy brings together police, health, community and global partners to clamp down on the illicit drug trade, safeguard the most vulnerable, and help those affected to turn their lives around.

We must follow through with our commitment to work together towards a common goal: a society free from the harms caused by drugs.

The Home Secretary will chair a new cross-government Drug Strategy Board, to drive action and ensure the strategy is delivered by all partners.

Under the strategy, police and law enforcement will continue to pursue a strong enforcement response to restrict the supply of drugs by adapting our approach to reflect changes in criminal activity and using innovative data and technology.

Just ten days ago Border Force and National Crime Agency officers helped intercept a boat carrying 1.5 tonnes of uncut South American cocaine, with a street value of about £200 million, preventing it from entering the UK.

In addition to a tough global and domestic law enforcement response, we will continue to promote the role of the police in referring drug-misusing offenders to appropriate services to maximise the significant benefits that investment in treatment can have on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

National Police Chiefs' Council Lead for Drugs, Commander Simon Bray said:

Illicit drugs feature in so many types of harm and crime; they are frequently used as a commodity by organised criminals and gangs, often linked to violence and exploitation of the vulnerable. Drugs are the root cause behind countless burglaries, thefts and robberies, and are often associated with anti-social behaviour and public concern.

The government has set out their new strategy for tackling the complex harms and issues associated with drugs and police will play our part in delivering it.

Additional new action in the strategy includes improved measures to test the long-term success of treatment. As part of the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS), health services will now carry out additional checks to track the progress of those in recovery at 12 months, as well as after 6, to ensure they remain drug-free.

Building on the successful impact of the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016, a new NPS intelligence system will ensure the treatment response stays one step ahead of the criminals pushing newly invented substances onto British streets.

The system, being developed by Public Health England, will reduce the length of time between drug-related health harms emerging and effective treatment responses being prepared.

A network of medical experts will analyse data from a new pilot system (RIDR – Report Illicit Drug Reactions) designed to gather information about adverse reactions and harms caused by NPS and other drug use, to identify patterns and agree the best clinical responses.

Paul Hayes, Chief Executive of the Collective Voice, said:

The government's recognition that evidence based treatment, recovery, and harm reduction services need to be at the heart of our collective response to drug misuse is very welcome.

Investment in treatment has reduced levels of drug use, cut drug related crime, enabled tens of thousands of individuals to overcome dependence, and is crucial in combating the recent increase in drug related deaths.

The Home Secretary's commitment to personally lead this cross-government effort, and the increased transparency of local performance provide the political energy and focus needed to turn the strategy's aspirations into outcomes.