

# Substance Misuse

## Introduction

The illegal and/or often hidden nature of substance misuse makes it difficult to assess its extent in the UK. Official statistics tend to focus on the numbers of people who access treatment services or come into contact with the criminal justice system or on self-reported behaviours or concerns. The latest Assembly Government and Home Office publications indicate that, in 2006-07:

- Just under 70% of the 27,724 referrals made to substance misuse treatment services in Wales were male<sup>i</sup>
- The number of referrals for alcohol problems were 145 compared with 100 for 'other' drug problems
- Heroin accounted for almost half of all referrals for drugs other than alcohol
- Less than 3% of referrals with a drug problem are aged over 50 compared with almost 18% for those with an alcohol problem
- 8.4% of 16 – 24 year olds surveyed in Wales as part of the British Crime Survey reported using Class A drugs in 2006-07. 24.7% reported having used any illegal drug during that period<sup>ii</sup>
- 10,528 drug offences were recorded in Wales in 2006-07<sup>iii</sup>

## Substance Misuse Policy

The UK Drug Strategy, launched in 1998, focused on the following 4 strands: young people, treatment of problem drug users, supply of drugs and drug-related crime. The Assembly Government's strategy, *Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales: A Partnership Approach*<sup>iv</sup>, was published in April 2000. It reflects the strands of the UK strategy but takes a broader approach, covering alcohol, over the counter and prescription medication and volatile substances in addition to illegal drugs, and also by widening the scope of the 4 strands. The Assembly Government has recently issued a consultation document which is a draft strategy entitled, *Working Together to Reduce Harm: The Substance Misuse Strategy for Wales 2008-2018*<sup>v</sup>. The draft strategy's four key aims are:

- Reducing the harm to individuals (particularly young people), their families and wider communities from the misuse of drugs and alcohol;
- Improving the availability and quality of education, prevention and treatment services and related support, with a greater priority given to those related to alcohol;
- Making better use of resources – supporting evidenced based decision making; developing the skills base of partners and service providers and joining up agencies and services more effectively in line with *'Making the Connections'*; and,
- Embedding the core Welsh Assembly Government values of sustainability, equality and diversity, support for the Welsh language and developing citizen focused services in both the development and delivery of the strategy.

## Service Delivery

The context in which substance misuse treatment services are commissioned and provided is very complex. The medical consequences of drug and alcohol misuse are mainly treated within primary and secondary settings within the NHS, although they are not necessarily categorised as such, for example, when people are admitted in emergency circumstances with complex health problems. As well as being delivered by the NHS, specialist substance misuse treatment services are also delivered by local authority social service departments, prisons and probation services and by a range of voluntary sector providers. These services have a variety of funders and commissioners, including local health boards (LHBs), community safety partnerships (CSPs), social services departments, the National Offender Management Service, the Welsh Assembly Government and a broad range of charitable sources.

The Assembly Government allocates a significant proportion of the funding it makes available to tackle substance misuse in Wales to CSPs to support the implementation of their local strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder and substance misuse. The majority of the Assembly Government Substance Misuse Action Fund Revenue and Capital Budget Expenditure Lines, which were worth almost £23 million in 2007-8, were allocated to CSPs. These resources are supplemented by monies ring-fenced in the budgets of the 22 Local Health Boards (LHBs) in Wales of almost £9 million in 2007-

08. Other Welsh Assembly Government programmes also support action to tackle substance misuse, for example, the budgets available to Children and Young People's Partnerships, the Safer Communities Fund and Communities First and local authority social service budgets. The Assembly Government has indicated that the Home Office and Ministry of Justice are also now spending around £6.5 million a year in Wales on programmes primarily focused on problematic drug users within the criminal justice system<sup>vi</sup>.

The Welsh substance misuse strategy falls within the remit of the Minister for Social Justice and Local Government.

## The Legislative Framework

Under the *Government of Wales Act 2006*, the National Assembly for Wales can seek legislative competence through Acts of Parliament or Legislative Competence Orders (LCOs) to make a piece of law in the form of an 'Assembly Measure'. Measures can only be made in a specific policy area (or 'Matter') added to one of the 20 'Fields' (or broad subject areas) which are contained in Schedule 5 of the Act.

There is no "Substance Misuse" field under Schedule 5 of the Government of Wales Act 2006. However, Schedule 5 does include a number of fields under which related measure making powers could be sought, e.g., field 9 – health and health services, field 12 – local government and field 15 - social welfare.

The criminal justice elements of this policy area, e.g., the identification of some substances as illegal or controlled and the enforcement of drugs laws are not currently devolved. Neither are the certain harm reduction practices such as the prescribing of substitute medication or the provision of needle exchange facilities. There are other areas in which Welsh Ministers do have devolved powers, for example, in relation to the provision of health and social care services. Although CSPs were established under primary UK legislation<sup>vii</sup>, the Assembly Government can influence the work of CSPs through the guidance it issues and criteria attached to the funds it allocates.

## Useful links

- Assembly Government substance misuse webpages: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/substancemisuse/?lang=en>
- The Assembly Government's 5<sup>th</sup> *Annual Substance Misuse Report* issued in October 2007: <http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2007/substancemisusestrategy/?lang=en>
- National Treatment Agency – special health authority responsible for improving the availability, capacity and effectiveness of treatment for drug misuse in England: <http://www.nta.nhs.uk/about/default.aspx>
- Drug Misuse Information Scotland – Scottish Executive site providing information, statistics and research on drugs misuse in Scotland: <http://www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/>

## Further information

For further information about substance misuse please contact [Denise Rogers](#), Members' Research Service, 02920 898943.

<sup>i</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, *Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales Performance Management Framework: The Welsh National Database for Substance Misuse - Second Annual Report 2006-07*, November 2007:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/substancemisuse/stats?lang=en>

<sup>ii</sup> Home Office Statistical Bulletin. October 2007. *Drug Misuse Declared: Findings from the 2006/07 British Crime Survey*. 18/07:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/hosb1807.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Home Office Statistical Bulletin *Crime in England and Wales 2006/07*. July 2007: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/hosb1107.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Welsh Assembly Government (2000) *Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales: A Partnership Approach*

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/publications/substancemisusestrategy?lang=en>

<sup>v</sup> Welsh Assembly Government, *Working Together to Reduce Harm: The Substance Misuse Strategy for Wales 2008-2018*, January 2008:

<http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/currentconsultation/housandcomm/workingtogether/?lang=en>

<sup>vi</sup> Page 11, Welsh Assembly Government, *Working Together to Reduce Harm: The Substance Misuse Strategy for Wales 2008-2018*, January 2008.

<sup>vii</sup> *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1998/19980037.htm> and the *Police Reform Act 2002*:

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/20020030.htm>