



Substance misuse

Introduction

The illegal and/or often hidden nature of substance misuse makes it difficult to assess its extent in Wales and 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 publicationsⁱ indicate that, in 2007-08:

- There were **27,744 referrals for treatment** of alcohol or drug misuse notified to the Welsh National Databaseⁱⁱ, **69 per cent** of which were **male**
- **55 per cent** of referrals related to **alcohol**
- **Heroin** accounts for **53 per cent** of all referrals reporting problem drug use
- The median age of referrals was **37 years** where the main problem substance was **alcohol** and **29 years for drugs**
- The latest Home Office statistics on drug seizures cover the period **2006-07**ⁱⁱⁱ and indicate that:
 - There were **10,700 drug seizures** made by Welsh police forces, an increase of 4 per cent compared with 2005 and the **highest in 10 years**

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 launched its own strategy**, *Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales: A Partnership Approach*^{iv}, in **April 2000**. It reflected the strands of the UK strategy but took 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 four strands.

The Assembly Government launched *Working Together to Reduce Harm*^v, its new 10 year strategy to tackle and reduce the harm associated with substance misuse, on 1 October 2008. The Strategy has four key aims:

- **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

Substance misuse policy

The **context** in which substance misuse treatment services are **funded 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.

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 (**NOMS**), the **Welsh Assembly Government directly** and a broad range of **charitable bodies**.

The Assembly Government allocates a significant proportion of the funding it makes available to tackle substance misuse in Wales to Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to support the implementation of their local strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder and substance misuse. For 2009-10 the direct funding from the Assembly Government to Community Safety Partnerships via the Substance Misuse Action Fund (SMAF) stands at **£28,351 million**. The Assembly Government's Annual Substance Misuse Annual Report 2008 reports that this represents a **nine fold increase** since the SMAF was established in 2002-03^{vi}

The Assembly Government's new substance misuse strategy document explains that these resources are supplemented by monies ring-fenced in the budgets of the 22 **Local Health Boards (LHBs) in Wales of almost £9 million**^{vii}. 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 strategy document also estimates that Welsh Assembly Government funding accounts for 77% of substance misuse funding in Wales with 14% coming from the Home Office and 9% from the Ministry of Justice.

Legislative framework

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 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.

Useful links

- Assembly Government substance misuse [WebPages](#):
- Welsh Assembly Government (October 2008) [Working Together to Reduce Harm](#)
- Welsh Assembly Government (December 2008) [Substance Misuse Annual Progress Report - 2008](#)
- [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

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ⁱ Statistics taken from: Welsh Assembly Government Welsh National Substance Misuse Database 2007-08; Welsh Assembly Government Substance Misuse Annual Report 2008 (December 2008); Home Office Crime in England and Wales 2007-08, Wales Factsheet (July 2008)

ⁱⁱ The Welsh National Database for Substance Misuse provides data on people undergoing treatment for a substance misuse problem. The information covers services provided by the majority of organisations that are funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

ⁱⁱⁱ Home Office (October 2008) *Seizures of Drugs in England and Wales, 2006/07*

^{iv} Welsh Assembly Government (2000) *Tackling Substance Misuse in Wales: A Partnership Approach*

^v Welsh Assembly Government (October 2008) *Working Together to Reduce Harm*

^{vi} Welsh Assembly Government Substance Misuse Annual Report 2008 (December 2008) page 2.

^{vii} Welsh Assembly Government (September 2008) *Working Together to Reduce Harm: the Substance Misuse Strategy for Wales 2008-2018*, page 11