

Strategic direction needs updating

We want an updated substance use delivery plan to help provide consistent standardisation of care across Wales and to equip the substance use field with the strategic foundations to mitigate growing concerns that are a threat to life.



What is the substance use delivery plan?

The substance use delivery plan sets out Welsh Government's key policy and operational priorities for the timeframe outlined. The most recent plan set out for 2019-2022, was published in October 2019 but has been revised in response to Covid-19, to reflect the work that has been and will be undertaken as a result of the pandemic. [1] While outlined in the plan that the 'original priority areas for the next three years remain relevant', there is a need to bring this plan up to date in line with new initiatives, new concerns and new threats within the substance use field in Wales.

Why now?

Since initial consultations were conducted in 2019 to formulate the key priorities outlined in the most recent delivery plan, much has changed within the substance use field. There is an ever-growing consensus that policies ought to adapt to reflect both current societal needs, and the current demands placed upon substance use treatment services.

There have been some notable developments within the substance use field in the last couple of years. New guidelines, frameworks and toolkits have been published recommending how services can implement trauma-informed approaches within existing practice. [2] Recent research has also evidenced how marginalised groups, including the LGBTQ+ community, are still faced with many barriers when accessing formal treatment services. [3] Since the publishing of the most recent substance use delivery plan, there have also been key reports with associated recommendations, published, including the Dame Carol Black's independent review of drugs [4], and the UK Government's 10-year drugs plan, 'From harm to hope'. [5] Additionally, Wales saw the highest number alcohol-specific fatalities recorded in 2022 [6] and we continue to see high rates of drug-related-deaths in Wales. [7] Within the last twelve months, we have also been faced with new threats, such as synthetic opioids, namely nitazenes, which have the potential to increase the risk of early mortality among people who use substances and shatter even more lives. [8] The current plan also uses terminology such as 'substance misuse', of which is deemed to be "regarded as stigmatising or derogatory to people with a substance problem, as it promotes the idea that that kind of use is wholly distinct from other people's use of the same substance, which is not always the case". [9]

While these are just a few examples of how the substance use field has changed and developed in the last couple of years, there are many more illustrations of how treatment services have and could adapt moving forward. Yet, the current substance use delivery plan in Wales makes either little or no reference to such examples. Therefore, we believe this needs to be updated to better echo current policy and practice, and lay the foundations to help achieve consistent standardisation of care across Wales, reflecting current need and developments.

What do we want?

- We call on the Welsh Government to update the substance use delivery plan in light of significant developments in the substance use field in Wales, to provide strategic foundations to enable the facilitation of consistent standards of care and mitigate against current and future threats.

References

1. Welsh Government (2021) [Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019-2022. Revised in response to COVID-19](#)
2. ACE Hub Wales. [Resources for professionals](#)
3. Murray, S. et al. (2023) [“It’s called homophobia baby” exploring LGBTQ + substance use and treatment experiences in the UK](#)
4. Black, C. (2021) [Independent review of drugs by Professor Dame Carol Black](#)
5. UK Government (2022) [From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives](#)
6. Office for National Statistics (2024) [Alcohol-specific deaths in the UK: registered in 2022](#)
7. Office for National Statistics (2023) [Deaths related to drug poisoning by selected substances, England and Wales](#)
8. BBC (2024) [Deadly opioids smuggled into UK in dog food, BBC learns](#)
9. Scottish Drugs Forum (2020) [Moving Beyond 'People-First' Language: A glossary of contested terms in substance use](#)