



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Working Together To Reduce Harm

Substance Misuse Annual Report,
Treatment Data and Forward Look 2020



Introduction

In 2019 the Welsh Government published its three year **Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019–2022** (“the Delivery Plan”). The Welsh Government plan aims to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales.

Our priorities going forward for 2020-21 are:

- **Responding to co-occurring mental health problems to ensure the individual receives appropriate and timely support under the Substance Misuse Treatment Framework;**
- **Ensuring strong partnership working with housing and homelessness services to further develop a multi-disciplinary approach to support those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;**
- **Ensuring all prisons in Wales (and HMP Eastwood Park, women’s prison) have a coordinated, transparent and consistent service for those with substance misuse problems in prison, based on best practice;**
- **Providing further support for families and carers of people who misuse substances;**
- **Improving access to services and ensuring people get the support and treatment when they need it; and**
- **Strengthen multiagency working and care planning to ensure people’s needs are met.**

This Annual Report provides an overview of the key activity across Wales during the period April 2019 – March 2020, the end of this period was of course dominated by the emergence of COVID-19, the declaration of a global pandemic and the subsequent disruption to daily lives including lockdowns. COVID-19 has created unique challenges in the operation and oversight of substance misuse services and these challenges are particularly acute when they present themselves at a time of great uncertainty.

This report should be read in conjunction with the Public Health Wales document below; and the Welsh National Database for Substance Misuse (WNDSM) annual report, attached at Annex A

Data Mining Wales – The annual profile for substance misuse 2019–20¹.

It is accessible from the Public Health Wales site: www.publichealthwales.org/substancemisuse and the

Treatment Data – Substance Misuse in Wales 2019–20:

<https://gov.wales/drug-misuse-dependency> (Annex 1)

1. Both reports contain more detailed information in relation to the caveats surrounding the data presented in this report.

Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019–22

Key Themes in 2019–20 Education and Awareness

Preventing future substance misuse is as important as treating the established problem and we want everyone to be aware in Wales of the consequences of misusing drugs or alcohol, or about where they can seek help and support. Projects to educate and raise awareness include:



Dan 24/7

DAN 24/7 is a free bilingual helpline providing a single point of contact for anyone in Wales wanting further information or help relating to drugs or alcohol.

In 2019–20 there were **4,559 contacts made** to DAN 24/7, a **5% increase** on 2018–19. Traffic to the website has **decreased by 10%** during the same timeframe.

Welsh Government, in conjunction with our national helpline DAN 24/7 continues to support specific work to target hard to reach areas across Wales and respond to local issues. This initiative utilises a van with digital display enabling clear messages to be delivered prominently within local communities areas, allowing us to react quickly to any current trends, warnings in relation to drug use and provide both educational and harm reduction information. In addition, the campaign also promotes the national DAN 24/7 helpline. The van made 59 visits in 2019–20.

Social media continues to be important in both raising awareness of the national DAN 24/7 helpline and in getting harm reduction messages out to target groups. It has proved to be especially useful in providing drug alerts, links to drug information on the DAN 24/7 website when an area has a problem with a specific drug and also in engaging with other services across Wales.

In addition, the DAN 24/7 website has been upgraded to be digitally optimised for ease of accessibility and use.

The Dan 24/7 website can be accessed via the following link: www.dan247.org.uk



Support in Schools / Children and Young People

The Wales Police Schools Programme operates in all primary and secondary schools, delivering education on substance misuse and wider community and personal safety issues at all key stages of the curriculum.

SchoolBeat.org is a bilingual site from the Wales Police Schools Programme, providing information and resources for teachers, pupils and parents to follow up on the lessons provided to all school children by our School Community Police Officers.

www.schoolbeat.org

Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018

From the 2 March 2020, the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 Act introduced a minimum price for alcohol supplied in Wales and made it an offence for alcohol to be supplied below that price. A minimum price sets a floor price, meaning that alcohol cannot be sold or supplied below that price. It has not increased the price of every drink, only those which are currently sold or supplied at below any minimum price.

Under the Act, the applicable minimum price will be calculated by combining the minimum unit price, the strength of the alcohol and its volume. This formula specifically allows us to target those drinks currently sold at an unacceptably low price relative to their alcohol content. Trading Standards Wales are leading on enforcement of the minimum unit price. The Welsh Government is also undertaking ongoing evaluation following the implementation. This will help assess its impact ahead of making a decision about whether to continue to have a minimum price for alcohol, after a period of five years.

<https://gov.wales/minimum-unit-pricing-alcohol>

Our approach to tackling substance misuse in Wales is based on the core principle of harm reduction, by enabling, encouraging and supporting substance users to reduce the harms they may be causing to themselves, their families and communities. There are a number of harm reduction initiatives in place including:

The Alcohol Liaison Project and Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service (GDAS).

The alcohol liaison worker strengthens the pathway from secondary care into GDAS.



In October 2018, Lisa relapsed after drinking, taken cocaine again and gambling one night. She struggled to come to terms with her setback and on top of this, lost her job. The following case study highlights the support Lisa received in her words:

"I just wanted to be permanently drunk and was drinking a lot every day. I then saw Jason, (the Gwent Drug & Alcohol Service (GDAS), Alcohol Liaison worker) again at the start of 2019 after a referral through to GDAS Alcohol Liaison following being seen by the Alcohol Care Team who arranged a detox whilst in Royal Gwent Hospital, Newport.

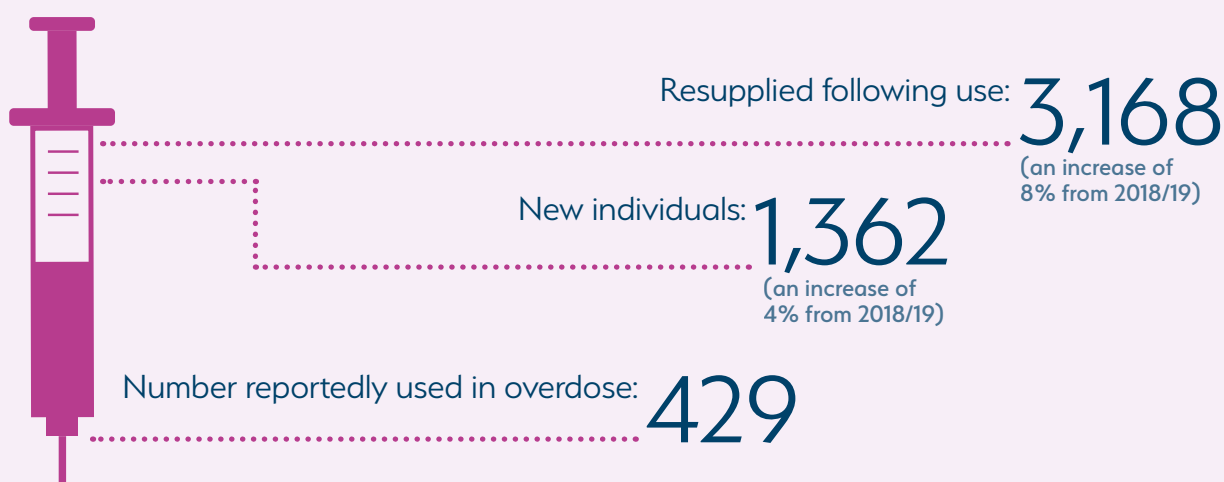
Again, I'd been attending hospital on a lot of occasions. I'd admitted myself over 20 times in December and January. I felt suicidal and I wanted to end my life, didn't feel life was worth living. I was covering it up with alcohol which was affecting me massively and led me to self-harm on two occasions.

I've had about 12 sessions with Jason and contact via phone following the referral from the Alcohol Care Team in hospital to GDAS Alcohol Liaison in the community. He's helped me remain sober again with guidance and advice on relapse prevention medication. He's also helped a lot with getting my life back on track, arranging mediation with my mum and focusing on my mental health too. I'd say his positivity has helped me and my family greatly in this time and for me to sober up for almost three months. I have not attended hospital since".

Take home Naloxone

Take Home Naloxone (THN) is an emergency antidote to opiate overdose. It blocks opioid receptors to counteract the effects of opioid drugs (such as heroin, methadone and morphine), reversing the life-threatening effects of an overdose such as depressed breathing. Since 2011, the Welsh Government has successfully rolled out a programme to distribute THN Kits, following a successful pilot project launched in 2009 and an independent evaluation. This programme will remain a key developmental priority. THN is available from 58 registered sites. The number of sites supplying THN has increased year on year from 11 'pilot' sites participating in 2009 to 58 in 2019-20. Since the 1st July 2009, a total of 10,395 individuals have been supplied with 27,760 THN Kits throughout Wales.

Take Home Naloxone Kits Issued in 2018-19:



However, the number of new individuals supplied is still lower than a peak recorded in 2017/18.


4,833 THN kits supplied, an increase of 14% from the previous year and the highest number of kits provided in a single financial year. The current reporting period represents the third consecutive year where the number of recorded uses of THN has declined, from 542 in 2017/18 to 429 in 2019/20.

Needle Syringe Programmes

One of the more serious outcomes of drug use, especially injecting drug use, is chronic infection with blood borne viruses like Hepatitis C and HIV.

Needle Syringe programme provide needles and other drug related paraphernalia to people who inject drugs, including image and performance enhancing drugs.

The main aim of needle and syringe programmes is to reduce the transmission of blood borne viruses and other infections caused by sharing injecting equipment, such as HIV, Hepatitis B and C.

During **2019/20** the total number of individuals accessing **Needle Syringe Programmes** was **24,196** 

13,091 (54%)

were considered regular users of NSP services (defined as two or more transactions in 2019–20 or for reported IPED use – at least 1 transaction in 2019–20 and in the previous year). This represented a reduction of **7.6%** from the previous year.

51.0%

accessing for primary
**Image and Performance
Enhancing Drugs**

53.5%

accessing for
primary
Opioid use

15.5%

accessing for primary **Stimulant** use including New
Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Welsh Emerging Drugs Identification of Novel Substances (WEDINOS)

WEDINOS is a project to provide a system for the collection and testing of new psychoactive substances and combinations of substances, providing rapid and accurate information to individuals and organisations to reduce harms and provide pragmatic harm reduction advice. Since 2013 a total of 15,847 samples have been received, from across all seven health board areas.



436 substances have been identified in combination and isolation.

- 4,880 samples were received representing an increase of 79 per cent from 2018–19
- 4,045 samples were analysed
- 170 substances were identified
- Median age of sample providers was 32
- As in 2018–19, benzodiazepines were the most commonly identified class of mind altering / psychoactive substances
- Consistent with previous years cocaine was the most commonly identified substance. In 2019–20, this was followed closely by MDMA and ketamine.

Blood-Borne Virus (BBV)

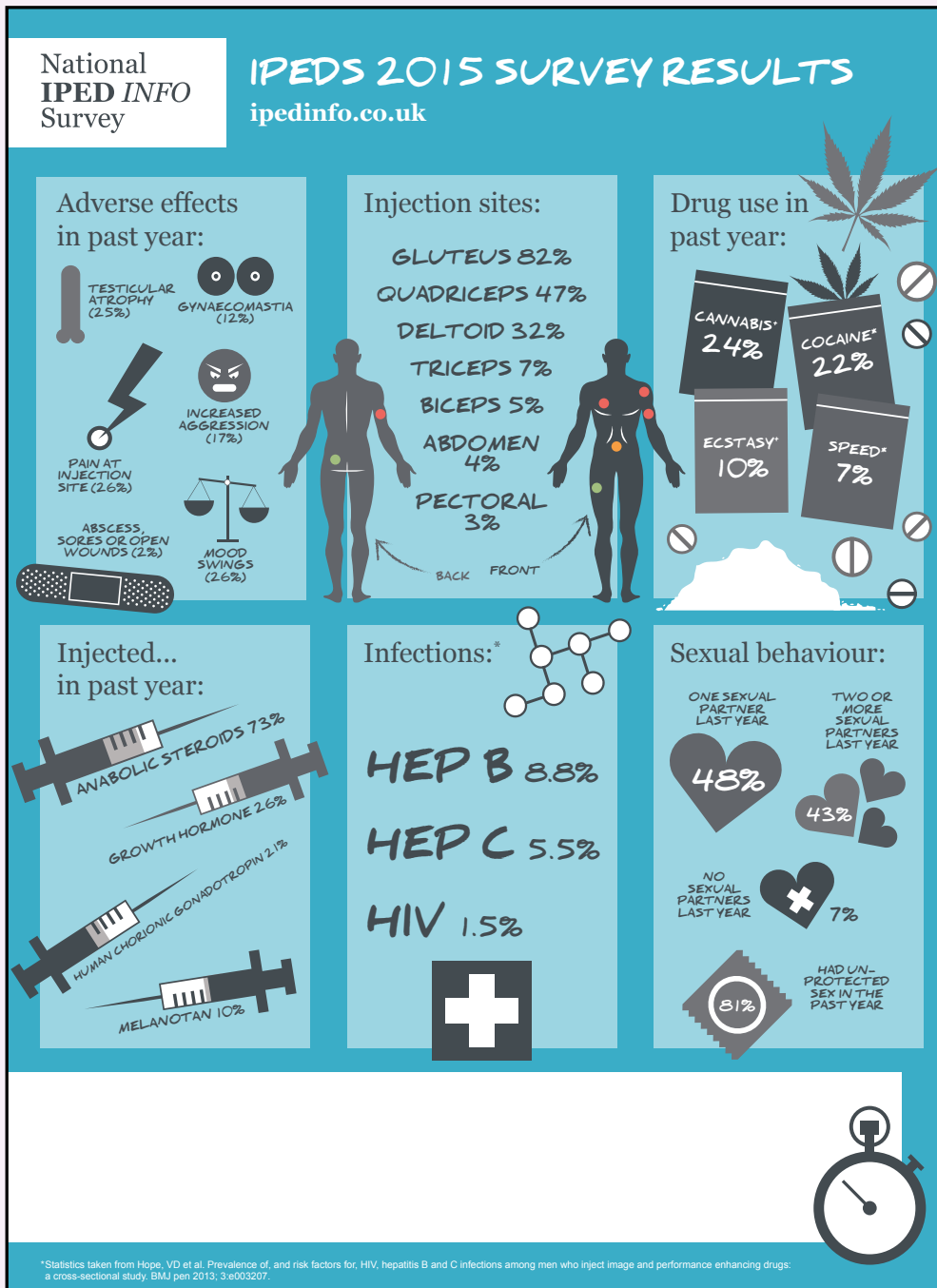
Blood-borne viruses (BBVs) are viruses that can be carried in the blood and can spread from one person to another through blood and other body fluids. The most common BBVs are Hepatitis C virus (HCV), Hepatitis B virus (HBV), and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

A blood test can check for HIV, HBV or HCV infection. The blood test can confirm whether you have been exposed to any of the BBVs. A vaccine is available to protect anyone who is at increased risk of infection. There is currently no vaccine for HCV or HIV infection.

In 2019 we introduced a new KPI for BBV testing with a target to work towards ensuring 50% of service users offered and tested. In 2019-20 testing has already been offered to 38.9% (4,094 individuals) and 33% (3,475) individuals were tested.

Image and performance enhancing drugs (IPEDs)

Use of steroids and other IPEDs is widespread and increasing across the UK. Wales has been at the forefront in responding to this trend and the risks involved in using these types of drugs.



Treatment

High quality treatment and support is the most effective way of improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of problematic substance users. The provision of support ranges from basic harm minimisation and other advice; to detoxification, residential care and relapse prevention.

Referrals

There were

23,887

referrals into **substance misuse services** during **2019–20** and a further

2,186

referrals who did not attend prior to assessment.



In **2019–20** the number of clients assessed for problematic drug use was

8,792

compared with

9,310

assessed for problematic alcohol use.



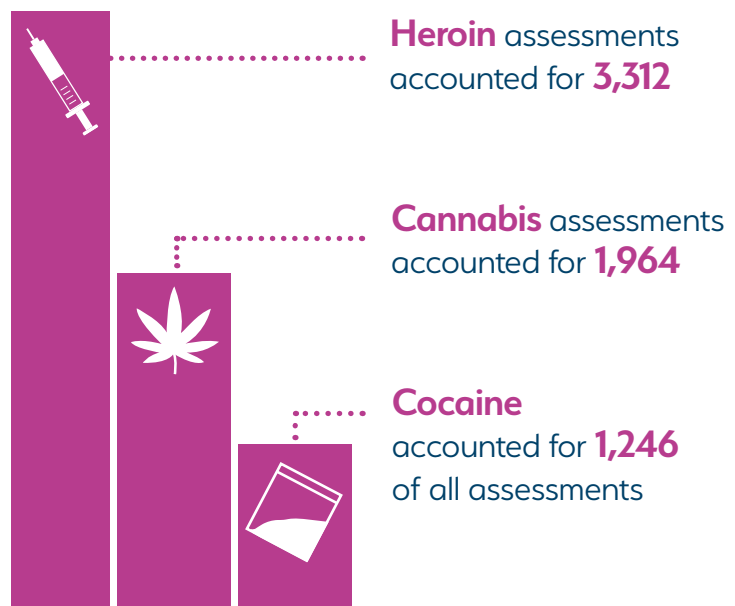
Assessments

The total number of **clients** assessed by specialist substance misuse providers in **2019–20** was



18,184

a decrease of **3.2%** in **2018–19**



Heroin assessments accounted for **3,312**

Cannabis assessments accounted for **1,964**

Cocaine accounted for **1,246** of all assessments



835

were under 20 years old



5,640

were between 20–59 years old



46

were 60 years old or over

Males accounted for

5,825



of alcohol assessments and

4,734



of drug assessments.



John led a very chaotic lifestyle involving homelessness, relationship breakdown, crime, bereavement and alcohol and drug misuse. Although John has now stopped using substances, he experiences very low mood. He has very low self-esteem and tendencies to isolate himself from others due to social anxiety, depression and lack of cognitive function.

John is under the care of his GP for his medication, the Bridge Programme (residential treatment service for homeless people with substance misuse) and Community Addiction Unit for his substance misuse.

John came onto the programme to address his alcohol dependency and went on to complete an alcohol detox at a specialist inpatient treatment unit, managed by Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.

Unfortunately, John cross addicted by buying over the counter Codeine tablets, he was very honest in regards to how he was struggling with his Anxiety and felt the tablets were helping. John engaged really well with the Community Addiction Unit (CAU), and was prescribed injectable buprenorphine, a type of opioid medicine used to treat opioid dependence in patients who are also receiving medical, social and psychological support. Since being under this treatment he has managed to remain abstinent from all substances.

John and his support worker have put things in place to enable him to remain independent as much as possible; for instance, a dosette box for medication and putting alarms on John's phone to help remind him when to take medication or refill the dosette box. This appears to work and John and is able to manage with this.

John is currently residing in the aftercare stage of the treatment programme and continues to engage with the programme and continues to engage with the programme, probation and the community addiction unit. John has also started conversations with his key worker regarding community living, this is his next goal.

Treatment

11% of clients **Did Not Attend (DNA) treatment** or the contact ended before treatment began following the assessment stage.



The total number of clients starting treatment in **2019–20** was **15,796**, down by **3.8%** on **2018–19**.



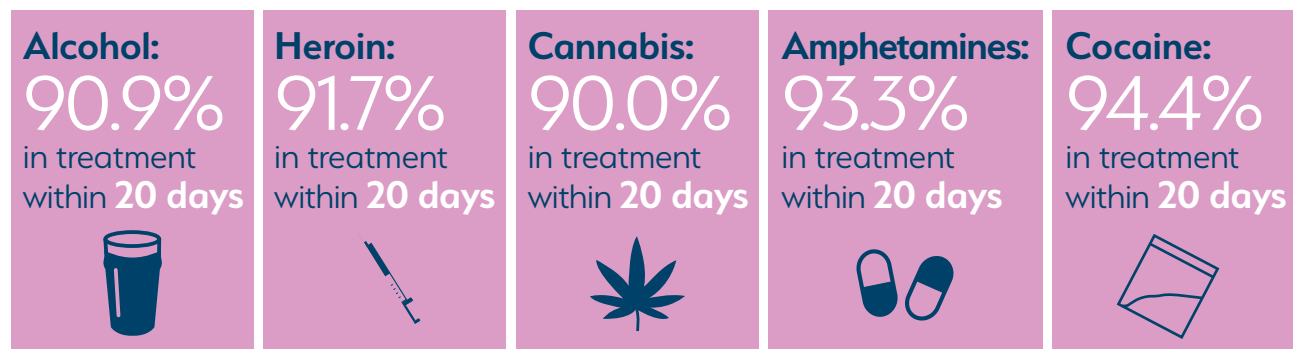
WAITING TIMES:

Target of **80%** of people to access Treatment within **20 working days** of referral.



During **2019/20** overall

91.5% of people accessed services within **20 working days** of referral.



Treatment Outcomes

↓ 86.6% of people reported a **reduction, abstinent or no change** in their substance misuses in **2019–20** compared to **85.6%** in **2015–16**.

84.1% of people reported improved quality of life in **2019–20** compared to **82%** in **2015–16**.



82.5% of people have completed treatment either **problematic substance free** or have reached their treatment goals in **2019–20** compared to **71.2%** in **2015–16**.



Recovery

Recovery can be defined as “a process in which the difficulties associated with substance misuse are eliminated or significantly reduced and the resulting personal improvement becomes sustainable”. In Wales we fund and offer a wide range of evidence-based services and interventions in a range of settings throughout the substance misuse treatment system including:

1185 

Alcohol clients have received specific **Health and Recovery Support Interventions**.

1063 

Drug clients have received specific **Health and Recovery Support Interventions**.

Case Study



Kelly's Story – Penryn House North Wales

Kelly has had a life dominated by addiction, in her own words:

“I come from a family where addiction has been an issue for three generations. I started using drugs at the age of fourteen when we moved from a small village in North Wales to a North Wales coastal town. I went from smoking cannabis to using amphetamine and ecstasy quickly.

I had an older brother and four younger brothers and I was the only girl. My older brother took me to rave scenes during my teens and we used drugs together. As we grew up my younger brothers also started using drugs.

A couple of years later I met a man that was using heroin and I started to use heroin. He quickly became controlling and violent.

I was made to sell drugs, shoplift, and do whatever was necessary to supply our out of control drug use.

When my son was fourteen and my daughter was four they were removed from my care, it was my daughter's first day of school and should have been my rock bottom, my reason to get clean but it wasn't as I didn't know how to get out.

Finally seven years later after being badly beaten I left my partner and my mum and dad picked me up. They took me to a Women's Aid who I had been involved with for a couple of years and they called an ambulance.

I moved into Penryhn house, a rehabilitation programme for people with addictions to drug and alcohol. I had no confidence, I was broken and couldn't look anyone in the eye.

During this period I found out that my youngest brother had passed away of a heroin overdose. People I had known and used with had kept his body in his flat while they spent his money on drugs.

Recovery has been difficult and emotional at times, the hardest thing I've ever done but it's definitely the best thing I've ever done.

I am a different person today, I have a great relationship with my son and with the help of Penrhyn I am working with social services to develop contact with my daughter.

I now facilitate groups in Penrhyn and currently chair Narcotics Anonymous meetings using my strength, hope and experience to help other addicts in recovery.

I have rebuilt my life in and around Penrhyn house we are family and I will always be grateful."

Out of Work Peer Mentoring Service

Supporting People into employment is a priority within the delivery plan which recognises both the strong link between unemployment and substance misuse and the importance of giving people in recovery the skills, resilience and opportunities they need to gain and maintain economic independence.

This includes investing in prevention based approaches such as Out of Work Service which is a key part of both this plan and Welsh Government's wider Employability Plan.

It is widely recognised that people in recovery from substance misuse often face many barriers to employment – these can include prejudice and rejection, a lack of skills and confidence, and complex mental health issues. Indeed around half of all people receiving unemployment benefits have mental health conditions.

At the same time, all the evidence suggests that finding the right job can make a huge difference to improving the prospects of long term recovery – improving self-esteem and confidence and reducing stress and anxiety.

Since its launch just over 3 years ago, the service has worked with nearly 10,500 people across Wales – with over half of these recovering from substance misuse or co-occurring substance misuse and mental ill-health conditions – helping some 1,600 people to gain a qualification, 700 people to find work and many more into volunteering and work placements.

The Out of Work Service was scheduled to close in August 2020 but there are discussions with Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) about extending the service to 2022.

Evaluation of the Service

An interim report on the evaluation of the Out of Work Service was published on 23 October 2019. A link is below:

<https://gov.wales/out-work-service-evaluation-interim-report>

The interim recommendations focus on measures to help the programme achieve its outcome targets and in particular meeting the service employment targets. These include actions to improve peer mentor training, develop links to potential employers and to work more closely with mainstream employability schemes such as Communities for Work.

Jointly funded by the European Social Fund and the Welsh Government with contributions from Area Planning Boards. It is delivered in Dyfed, Gwent, North Wales, Powys and Western Bay by Cyfle Cymru (a consortium led by CAIS including Hafal, Barod, WCADA and Kaleidoscope) and by Platform in partnership with Newlink Wales in Cwm Taf and Cardiff and the Vale.

Recovery Cymru – Client Feedback:

Recovery Cymru is a peer-led, mutual-aid, recovery community in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan that empowers people to achieve and maintain recovery while supporting others to do the same. Activities are community-led and aim to empower and support each other to enter and move forward in recovery; to develop skills and interests and to improve quality of life.

- “The fact that the facilitators are former members is useful. They find running through the sessions just as useful for them as individuals as professionals”.
- “Knowing I had somewhere to run to when I was in a crisis, to be able to talk without waiting, is the difference between me being able to say today that I’m over a year into my abstinence, rather than a week”.
- “I just wanted to say thank you from the bottom of my heart for Recovery Cymru believing in me, accepting me, having faith in me, just being there for us always, I honestly don’t think I would’ve made it without you all”.

Barod Cymru – Client Feedback:

Barod Cymru operate across most of South and West Wales, providing support to individuals affected by alcohol and drugs, and their friends and family. Barod Cymru specialises in substance misuse support for both adults and young people. The support and information is free, confidential and non-judgemental.

- “I want to say thank you [to CAMHS and Barod] for staying by my side and getting me through [my drug use]. I am so excited for the future and to see where life takes me. I’m not the boy who is ashamed of himself [anymore] I love myself”.
– Cwm Taf
- “I started taking drugs to help me stop thinking about the mistakes I had made. It felt like to me no one understood my feelings or cared about me. But I was wrong. But that’s all behind me now. I [just] wish I got the help sooner”.
– Cwm Taf

Case Study



Frank was originally on a Day Programme 2 years ago. He had been addicted to heroin for over 40 years but finally made the decision to get clean and was abstinent and on a methadone script.

He engaged well and his attendance and time keeping were exemplary. Frank has a love of nature and outdoor pursuits and is well-travelled so when he left services, he planned to spend more time doing the things he loves.

He continued to work on his recovery and twice completed another recovery project with an aim to co-facilitate on the programme. He spent time working as a volunteer in various roles and gained his National Trust membership, through time banking. Sadly, more and more of his time and energy was taken up caring for his elderly mother who had developed dementia. In addition, his long term relationship ended acrimoniously, but despite all these potential triggers, his commitment to his recovery remained strong.

Towards the end of 2019, Frank's mother passed away and he found this loss to be the hardest factor to deal with and maintain his sobriety. As a result, he contacted the Day Programme and asked if he could enrol again as it had helped so much in his early recovery. He is now a volunteer with a number of outdoor pursuit organisations and has learned new skills that suit his outdoor lifestyle, such as sailing.

In addition, he has been on holiday with 2 fellow recoverists, supporting each other. He is now feeling stronger and more able to cope without so much support. As a result, he is now planning his exit from the Day Programme and intends to travel abroad to broaden his interest in meditation. There will always be a place for Frank if his recovery is threatened in the future.

In work support project

The In Work Support Service promotes health and well-being in the workplace and breaks down barriers to employment for those with physical or mental health conditions.

The service provides free and rapid access to therapeutic support designed to help people with mental or physical health conditions to remain in employment.

To date, it has provided therapeutic interventions to

7,200 individuals

including some

**3,800 people with
musculoskeletal issues**

and nearly

**3,400 people with
mental health conditions**

This is helping some

4,700 people to remain in work

and a further

2,500 to return to work.

The service is jointly funded by the European Social Fund and the Welsh Government and is available in North and West Wales.

Population Outcomes

Alcohol consumption



In 2019–20,

18% of adults (or 1 in 5)

reported drinking **over the weekly guidelines.**

Down from 2016 – 20%. (source: National Survey for Wales 2019).

Problematic Drug Use

Estimates of problematic use of opioids, cocaine and crack, amphetamine and new psychoactive substances indicate that there are around 52,980 individuals in Wales, aged 15–64 years who are using these types of drugs, including those in contact with health and criminal justice services. Further work is being undertaken to validate these estimates in Wales.

Hospital admissions – alcohol

The number of **individuals admitted to hospital** for an **alcohol specific condition** has increased by **5.47%** over the last 5 years.

Hospital admissions – drugs

Hospital admissions related to use of **illicit drugs** decreased by **15.9%** compared with **2018-19**. Admissions data suggests that use of multiple drugs may be decreasing.

Hospital admissions for **alcohol specific conditions** involving young people (under 25) has fallen by **21%** compared with previous year.

The number of **older adults (50 and over)** admissions in 2019-20 decreased by **0.03 %** compared to the previous year.

The number of **hospital admissions** for alcohol specific conditions involving working age adults (aged 25- 49) has decreased by **6.9%**.

Amongst **young people (up to 25 years)** hospital admission related to **opioids** have fallen by **24%** between **2015–16** and **2019–20**.

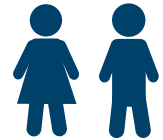


Cannabinoid related admissions have decreased by **6.4%** (all age groups) compared to the previous year.



Opioids continue to account for more admissions in working aged adults than any other substance, with

47.4% admissions in 2019–20, a decrease of 15.4% from 2018–19 and the lowest recorded in the last 10 years.



  Hospital admissions involving **illicit drugs** in older people decreased by **0.2%** in **2019–20** compared with the previous year.



During a one-to-one session with a keyworker, it became apparent that a number of young people accessing the service were not paying for their cannabis. It transpired that this was on occasion large amounts of the substance. The keyworker explored with the young people the risks around not paying for drugs and how they could become targets for exploitation of various kinds. It also became evident that, even though these young people lived in different towns, were different ages and attended different secondary schools they were connected, either as school mates, friendships or via social media.

Both the fact that they were connected and receiving free cannabis raised concerns for the worker and raised a number of questions:

- Were these young people being groomed in some way?
- Was there a possible link to county lines?
- What would be expected from young people in payment for the drugs?

Due to the concerns raised by this information a multi-agency referral form (MARF) to children's services was submitted for the group as a whole. The group consisted of 5 young males, however the key worker was aware that more young people could be affected by this due to friendship groups. The MARF resulted in a number of strategy meetings taking place. During these meetings it became apparent that other agencies had concerns about many of these young people's behaviour within school for example.

Since this MARF was submitted the young people are being discussed on a regular basis within the multi-agency strategy meetings and many of the young people are now open to children's services.

A mapping exercise looked at the links between these young people within their friendship groups or local area. Information sessions were completed by CAIS workers in order to raise awareness of the risks around county lines and the potential for young people to be vulnerable to exploitation. A number of the young people continue to receive a service from CAIS and their access to free cannabis appears to have stopped.

Drug Related Deaths

In 2019, there were

240    

drug poisoning deaths

(involving both legal and illegal drugs) in Wales.

Of these,

165 were **drug misuse deaths**

(involving illegal drugs).



↓ This represented a **20%** reduction in drug misuse deaths compared with 2018.

Figures for Wales for the most recent 6 years are given in the following table:

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Drug poisoning	208	168	238	271	260	327	240
Drug misuse	135	113	168	192	185	208	165

Alcohol Related Deaths

Alcohol related deaths have remained relatively stable over the past 5 years. (ONS, 2019)

In 2019 there were 495 alcohol related deaths and 368 alcohol specific deaths registered in Wales. This represents a decrease of 7 and 9 percent respectively compared to the previous year.

Impact on Children and Young People

Hospital admissions for foetuses and new-borns affected by maternal use, or withdrawal from, of alcohol or other drugs of addiction have remained very stable over recent years.

There have been

82 admissions

for **foetuses and new-borns**



affected by maternal use, or withdrawal from, **alcohol or other drugs of addiction** in **2019–20**, **74% increase** from the previous year, however over the last decade there has been no clear trend.

In **2019**, there were

16,370 cases

of **children in need**

receiving care and support in which the child's substance misuse was identified as an issue.



Of these, there were **4,585** cases of **children in need** receiving care and support due to **parental substance misuse**.

Forward Look and Key challenges for the next 12 months

Tackling substance misuse continues to be a priority for the Welsh Government and a significant area to focus upon if we are to meet our ambitions in “A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care”. Substance misuse is a major health issue which affects individuals, families and communities and this plan sets out the priority areas we will focus on with our partners to achieve our ambition of reducing the harms associated with substance misuse.

We increased our funding to support Area Planning Boards by over 10% in 2019–20 to help them undertake this work. This additional funding has also been preserved for 2020–21. In 2020–21, we are investing almost £54 million annually to deliver our commitments on this agenda.

Given some of the key work undertaken during the pandemic, we have reviewed the Delivery Plan to consider where it needs to be updated in light of COVID-19 – particularly to meet the new challenges ahead. Having undertaken this review and considered the evidence highlighted by APBs and wider partners it is suggested that the original priority areas for next three years remain relevant, and have been reinforced during the pandemic.

However, given the impact of COVID-19, it is recommended that there are new actions which need to be included in the Delivery Plan, some actions where a greater emphasis needs to be placed. There are also certain actions where timescales have needed to be delayed given the need to prioritise the response to the pandemic.

New actions

- Ensure the ongoing delivery of essential services highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, including improving access to services and reduced waiting times. Ensure a range of OST provision is available based on the needs of the individual and best practice as set out both by NICE and in the Orange Book
- Evaluate the impact of injectable buprenorphine (Bupival)
- Revise the DAN 24/7 web-site and work closely with APBs and Service Providers on this. The site will be seen as a key element of the digital offering for individuals and will link closely to other forms of digital support offered by service providers
- Establish a Wales wide Recovery Plan to support services in ensuring preparedness for potential second COVID-19 peak. In particular, this will consider the use of digital and new service models
- Review the actions in the Plan to assess them against those groups where it is becoming clearer have been most impacted by COVID-19(e.g. BAME/low income/ unemployed/in debt/ children and young people (including those in the justice system))
- Closely monitor the trends in Drug Related Deaths throughout COVID-19 and ensure that the National Implementation Board for Drug Poisoning Prevention (NIBDPP) can take the necessary actions. This will be informed by the recently re-established Case Review Co-ordinators Sub-Group which review all drug related deaths. Any specific actions from discussion with the NIBDPP will be incorporated into future updates of the Plan
- To provide additional support through the Out of Work Peer Mentoring Service for short-term unemployed with mental health and/or substance misuses issues as a result of COVID-19
- Ensure service user feedback is taken on board by taking into account the findings of the Peer Led – COVID Impact survey and continuing to carrying out service user research in relation to treatment and support during COVID-19, which in turn will influence future practice in meeting needs.

A copy of updated Delivery Plan, published on 28 January 2021 can be found here:

<https://gov.wales/substance-misuse-delivery-plan-2019-2022-0>