

This briefing is a fortnightly update on important policy developments relevant to family support and the drug and alcohol sector. It includes comment, data, reports, parliamentary news, policy directions and debate.

POLICY BRIEFING

23 August – 3 September 2010

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Editorial

After several weeks of settling in and some uncertainty over which Government department would 'own' drug policy, the drug and alcohol sector has finally seen what has long been expected: a consultation on a [new strategy](#). Though the last strategy, [Protecting families and communities](#), is only a couple of years old, the new Government thinks differently from the old and is understandably keen to make a clean break with the past.

The four main tenets of the new strategy are preventing drug use (Department for Education); strengthening enforcement, criminal justice and the legal framework (Home Office and Ministry of Justice); rebalancing treatment to support drug-free outcomes (Department of Health); and supporting recovery to break the cycle of addiction (Department for Work and Pensions). That each theme will be led by a different department recognises the inherent nature of addiction as a complex problem which is influenced by, and has impact on, various other areas; however, there could be concerns that existing silos will be reinforced and cross-department cooperation will be crucial to effective implementation.

Government consultations often tread a fine line between rubber-stamping pre-ordained decisions – for example the long-expected move towards a more abstinence-based approach – and true consultation whereby expert opinion has the opportunity to really enact change and influence the agenda. After all, the Government is not obliged to take all opinions into account; arguably it has been elected precisely to make these strong decisions without help from the public. Nevertheless, the drug strategy consultation is [more wide-ranging than many expected](#) and offers ample opportunity to respond on a variety of issues, from 'when does drug use become problematic?' all the way through to 'is enough done to harness the recovery capital of families?'

As ever is the case, the devil will be in the detail. It is tempting that think that this strategy will be a step back for families since the last one had 'families' in the title; however, the consultation document does show the Government's desire to harness the recovery capital of families and, as well as demonstrating the effectiveness of family support across the board, Adfam will be making this point strongly in our submission. Adfam's recent [response to the Spending Review](#) emphasised the financial savings that family support can provide; overall, we will be making every effort to ensure families and family support are properly recognised in all policy areas, and across all relevant Government departments.



Joss Smith

Head of Policy and Regional Development

Parliamentary roundup

Parliament is still in recess as the moment. Normal proceedings will resume on 6th September, so the next briefing (17th September) will contain all the latest updates.

Consultations

[2010 Drug strategy consultation paper](#) – Home Office

This is the first concrete and detailed announcement relating to the new Government's plans for drug policy. It is based around four themes: preventing drug use, led by the Department for Education; strengthening enforcement, led by the Home Office and Ministry of Justice; rebalancing treatment to support drug-free outcomes, led by the Department of Health; and supporting recovery to break the cycle of drug addiction, led by the Department of Work and Pensions.

Adfam would strongly encourage all those with an interest in this area to submit a response. Adfam will be making a submission and a joint submission with other organisations.

The consultation closes on the **30th September**.

[Refreshing the National Carers Strategy](#) – Adfam

The coalition government is currently [running a consultation](#) aimed at refreshing the previous government's strategy 'Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities'. It wishes to produce a plan of work for 2011-15 which outlines priorities of work for the government in partnership with carers, local authorities, the NHS and others. [Adfam](#) is going to make a submission to the [Department of Health](#) explaining the priorities of families affected by drug and alcohol use and would value your input. If you would like to give your views on improving support for carers please [submit to our consultation](#). This will be open until September 6th.

Reports and announcements

Click on the report titles to access the documents.

[Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales, 2009](#) (pdf) – Office for National Statistics

This data set shows trends in drug poisoning deaths over time: they increased steadily each year from 1993 to a peak in 1999, then gradually declined until 2006, when numbers increased but have since stabilised. It is reported that the number of deaths involving methadone increased 8% from 2008-2009 as well as a 6% increase in deaths involving antidepressants. The report highlights that in 2009, for the first time since 2000, deaths involving cocaine fell (with a 14% drop compared to 2008). It is also shown that there are twice as many drug-related deaths among males than females, and also shows comparative rates taking into account age and substance.

[Alcohol-related social norm perceptions in university students: a review of effective interventions for change](#) - Alcohol Education and Research Council (AERC)

This report explores attitudes of university students to alcohol and drinking. It suggests that previous studies have underestimated the levels of drinking and that heavy drinking patterns established at university are often likely to continue into later life. It also claims that most students overestimate both the alcohol consumption levels and approval levels of others, creating an atmosphere of 'elevated norms' which in turn leads to more drinking.

[Sinned and Sinned Against: The Stigmatisation of Problem Drug Users](#) (pdf)

– UK Drug Policy Commission

This study examines attitudes towards problem drug users across the population and in the media – the report states, for example, that the media's use of the term 'junkie' is pejorative and damages the prospects of drug users reintegrating into society. It was also found that the acute stigmatisation of drug users is partly due to the assumption that 'it's their own fault'. The report recommends various measures to combat this stigma, including better education for pharmacy staff of the nature of addiction, more focus on an individual's personality outside their use of drugs from treatment staff, and public campaigns such as the 'recovery month' held in California.

[Trustee Guide to Campaigning and influencing](#) – National Council for Voluntary Organisations

This guide seeks to give trustees an understanding of what is required by law and the latest advice and best practice relating to campaigning. The guide highlights emerging issues and sets out

examples relating to policy and research in support for campaigns, ensuring that the central aspect to a good campaign is a clear, measurable goal.

[Trends in UK deaths associated with abuse of volatile substances, 1971-2008](#) (pdf)

– St George's, University of London

This report explores death levels amongst users of volatile substances (which include solvents, glue, gas and petrol), outlining current trends and problems whilst identifying factors associated with deaths from abuse of volatile substances. The report highlights 2,343 deaths since 1971 in the UK, with 36 of these deaths occurring in 2008. As well as showing an overall decline in volatile substance-related deaths since 1992, the report also provides possible changes to these patterns with newly-emerging issues arising.

Featured issue

[Developing Inclusive and Sensitive Practice](#) (pdf) - Adfam

This toolkit, part of Adfam's [Including Diverse Families project](#), is based on the belief that *everyone* affected by someone else's drug or alcohol misuse should be able to access the support and help they need - regardless of gender, race, background, sexuality or location. The purpose of this guide is to help service providers develop inclusive and sensitive practice and better engage with underrepresented groups, including:

- People from minority ethnic groups (BME)
- Rural communities
- Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people
- Men.

Developing inclusive and sensitive practice involves gaining awareness and understanding of the issues faced by families from a diverse range of backgrounds, recognising diversity, respecting the differing needs of families whilst understanding a need to provide support accordingly.

The policy context

Equality of opportunity and protection from discrimination in recent years have become central to Government and local policy, helping to reduce discrimination and improve equality of opportunity and access to services across the community. This document highlights key developments within policy, for example the Race Relations (Amendment) Act (2004) and the Equality Act (2006).

Monitoring and improving services

It is evident that these groups and family members face barriers when trying to access support services - for example a lack of understanding about other cultures and religions, a sense of isolation and uncertainty over confidentiality procedures.

The toolkit therefore contains extensive practical tips and recommendations for developing inclusive and sensitive practice, for example through promotional material, confidentiality policies, training and community engagement. The guide also supplies useful checklists and sample auditing forms to help services monitor and improve their responses and attitudes to issues of diversity and inclusivity, as well as exploring why, when and how to use monitoring sensitively (for example relating to sexuality).

These good practice guidelines are offered as a free resource as part of Adfam's Including Diverse Families work. The toolkit can be downloaded from the [Adfam website](#), along with other resources from the project including [Journeys booklets](#) and posters.