

*Our free monthly update with the latest comment, reports, resources, policy and parliamentary news on families, drugs and alcohol.*

## **POLICY BRIEFING**

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### **November 2015 – Carers Rights Day Edition**

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## Editorial

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Today is Carers Rights Day. This is an annually held event designed to highlight the needs, experiences and support provided by the seven million carers in the UK today. Carers provide vital and usually unpaid support to loved ones with issues that prevent them looking after themselves. These issues can include physical disability, learning difficulties or mental illness.

So how do drugs and alcohol fit in with this agenda - aren't the many parents, partners and kids doing their best around the country for those closest to them who are struggling with drugs or alcohol just doing the right thing for those that they love? Can they really be classed as carers? This is an issue Adfam, and many of the families we work with and fight for, has wrestled with for a while. Many family members tell us they feel uncomfortable describing themselves as carers. Some have been to support groups at local carers' centres and left feeling they 'didn't belong', or 'didn't qualify' as a 'real' carer in a group containing people looking after the terminally ill or seriously unwell.

This issue does not have an easy answer. The truth is that, though the level of identification families affected by substance use feel for the 'carer' label may vary, there may be a strategic advantage in using it to access services. Some of those carers' centres may run groups specifically for family members affected by substance use for instance. Additionally many families have to meet a comparable level of support needs, caused by sustained drug or alcohol use, to those experienced by other people who might access a carers' centre.

We in the Adfam policy and communications team use the term in our [consultation responses](#) since it allows us to highlight the often profoundly challenging experiences of families and put them on the same footing as those caring for loved ones with illness or disability.

The [Care Act 2014 can also do this](#). It allows for the recognition of drug and alcohol use as a criteria for considering someone a carer – which means that local authorities (or the organisations they contract) have a legislated duty to offer carer's assessments to many of the family members we work with. Though there are issues with this procedure, it's heartening, and useful, that substance use is recognised as grounds for considering a role to be a caring one. Read more about the [Care Act here](#) (pdf).

Our recent conference highlighted one specific caring issue we have focused on over the past few years – how children living with parents and carers receiving Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) medication such as methadone or buprenorphine can be better safeguarded from serious harm, and death. The tragedies aren't going away. Every few months a local or national newspaper carries a story of a child or adolescent who's ingested OST drugs prescribed to someone else. The Serious Case Reviews that follow some (and it is only some; an alarmingly small proportion) of these tragedies always find the same thing – services weren't working well enough in partnership, everybody thought it was somebody else's business. Our message – and the theme of our recent conference – is that safeguarding children is *everybody's* business.

You can check out a [Storify account of the presentations and tweets online](#). Thanks to everyone who spoke – and attended. Next Tuesday sees the launch of our second report on the issue, which contains new, and some quite shocking data. Please see DDN Magazine next month for an article exploring some of these findings.

Oliver Standing

**Director of Policy and Communications**

## Adfam 2015 Candlelit Carol Concert



Adfam's 2015 Carol Concert will take place on Thursday 3 December at St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street, London. This is a wonderful opportunity to come together with old friends and colleagues, hear some beautiful carols and remember some of the challenges and stresses that the families we support face due to the substance use of a loved one.

Guest readers include: Tamsin Greig, Gina McKee, Eddie Mair, Fi Glover and Richard Arnold!

We will also be presenting the winning entries from Adfam's [Family Voices](#) creative writing competition, and the Gary Seaman Award for an outstanding practitioner.

The concert is Adfam's only major fundraising event and allows us to continue our work improving support for families affected by drugs and alcohol.

[For more information and to book tickets, click here.](#)

We very much hope to see you there.

## Parliamentary roundup

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Fiona Bruce MP [spoke to the House of Commons](#) about the damaging effects of alcohol consumption on older people. She is seeking to highlight the need for more education and information so older people can make positive changes to live longer and healthier.

Andrew Selous MP [spoke to Westminster Hall](#) linking the use of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) to a major increase in serious assaults in prison. Prisons are responding to the problem with increased security and searching. Mandatory drug testing for NPS in all prisons when new contracts are agreed will come in force early next year.

On 24 November Adfam is launching its new research report *Medications in Drug Treatment: Tackling the risks to children - one year on* in the House of Lords. This report looks at all the latest data and trends around the risks to children from Opioid Substitution Therapy medications. If you would like to attend please [email Rachael Evans](#).

## Consultations

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[Expert Link Survey](#) – Expert Link

Expert Link is designing an umbrella organisation that represents those affected by homelessness, mental illness, substance and alcohol misuse, abuse victims and the criminal justice system. They are seeking views on what the organisation should do and stand for.

[Global Drug Survey 2016](#)

This annual survey produces the largest global data-set on patterns of drug use - the 2015 survey had over 100,000 respondents. It offers an anonymous survey which can be completed by anyone aged 16 or over who has used any drug in the last year.

## Resources

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### Drugs, alcohol and families

[Alcohol Concern and Adfam announce new project to support family members to respond to change resistant drinkers](#) – Alcohol Concern and Adfam

Alcohol Concern has partnered with Adfam on a new project to provide the families and carers of change resistant drinkers with the skills and confidence to support their loved ones. This new project will be co-funded by Local Authorities from across the country and work with families and treatment services locally to develop a toolkit of approaches and training based on a supportive, harm-reduction and risk-management approach. Co-funding the project will entitle Local Authorities to: a report on what is happening with this client group in their local area and action plan; involvement in the development of the guidance; and local training on the use of guidance and joined up services.

[Focus on the families](#) – Drug and Alcohol Findings

This 'Hot Topic' article explores interventions for family members affected by substance use. There is growing evidence which shows that involving relatives in treatment benefits the whole family. In drug and alcohol policy this is only just being recognised, with most prior interventions focused primarily on child welfare. The Scottish approach, Getting Our Priorities Right, the piece notes, adopted a whole family approach. The Welsh Assembly founded a crisis intervention service lasting between four to six weeks, families liked the service and it reduced the need for young people to go into care. Conflict is common in families, but parents may resist engaging voluntarily with treatment programmes, fearful of social services. Family drug and alcohol courts help parents address their substance use needs with the goal of creating a safe environment for children.

[Help me understand: A booklet to help children, young people and workers talk about an adult's alcohol and drug treatment](#) – Stars Initiative (The Children's Society)

This free resource from The Children Society's Stars Initiative aims to help young people and children affected by substance use talk to support workers about what the treatment undertaken by a parent or carer means, and how they might be feeling and experiencing it. The booklet includes exercises and simple information for children and young people and an information section for workers to help guide children and young people through the topic and signpost to other resources where needed.

[Health Behaviour in School-aged Children - England National Report](#) (pdf) – World Health Organisation

This report presents findings from the 2014 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) collaborative study. Marked decreases in drinking, smoking and cannabis usage, which have been falling for over ten years, continued. Weekly alcohol consumption decreased across all ages from 2002 to 2014, with reported rates in 2014 being less than a quarter of those in 2002 among 15 year olds. Reported cannabis use fell from roughly 40% of both boys and girls in 2002 by around half to roughly 20%. The majority of young people felt well supported emotionally by their families.

[Psychoactive substances - first report of session 2015-16](#) (pdf) – House of Commons Home Affairs Committee

This Home Affairs Committee report discusses the implications of introducing the Psychoactive Substances Bill. The bill proposes all New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) be automatically banned unless they have specifically been made exempt. The committee focused on issues surrounding the legislation; displacement of sales, the role of enforcement agencies, education, and the impact they would have on the distribution of NPS. Although the committee agreed with the government's right to legislate on NPS, they were concerned with the speed it had been announced, reducing the opportunity for weaknesses to be identified and allowing improvements to be carried out.

[The Map Goes Live!](#) - Holes in the Wall

A map has been launched which includes details of all services offering support to families experiencing child to parent violence. It is designed both for families to access services and for practitioners who may wish to network and share expertise.

[The hidden harm: Alcohol's impact on children and families](#) (pdf) – Foundation for Alcohol Research & Education (Australia)

This report is based on the findings from the 2008 Harm to Others (HTO) survey which found that the majority of Australians had been affected by someone else's drinking. In a 2011 follow-up survey the Centre for Alcohol Policy Research (CAPR) found that many Australians were still affected. The report focuses on the findings relevant to children and families, which include the fact that over a million children are affected in some way by the drinking of others and that children experience a range of harms, most commonly witnessing verbal or physical abuse. Physical abuse and neglect of children was not found to be common. Some recommendations were made to the government, for instance child protection service initiatives, improved communications between services and screening for alcohol and drug problems.

[How can opioid substitution therapy \(and drug treatment and recovery systems\) be optimised to maximise recovery outcomes for service users?](#) – Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

The Recovery Committee of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has published its second report in response to a commission from the Inter-Ministerial Group on Drugs, to answer the question of how continuing opioid substitution therapy can be optimised in order to maximise outcomes for service users. The report examines the evidence, and makes a series of conclusions, giving specific detailed recommendations to government, local authority commissioners and drug treatment services and staff.

## **Your organisation**

[The Chancellor's Choice: Preparing The Charity Sector For The Autumn Spending Review](#) – New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)

This NPC resource explores the impacts on the charity sector of the Autumn Spending Review. It identifies three chief themes: that the changes to the delivery of public services will be radical enough to impact on the third sector; changes to the way the third sector arranges contracts and secures funding will alter how

it interacts with both the state in general and local authorities in particular; and that the needs of beneficiaries will evolve as they interact with the new structures of third and public sectors. The report then looks in details at education and health, housing and homelessness and welfare.

## Carers Rights Day Special Feature

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For Carers Rights Day, we have brought together some of the best resources on the Care Act 2014 and the wider growing awareness of the importance of rights for carers. You may also find it helpful to read the Department of Health's [guidance factsheets on the Care Act 2014](#) and Adfam's own [briefing document](#) (pdf) on what the act means for carers of drug and alcohol users.

[Assessments and the Care Act: Getting help in England from April 2015](#) (pdf) – Carers UK

This factsheet covers the new system of care and support, as influenced by the Care Act 2014 and the Children and Families Act 2014. The report states that both carers and those cared for (those with disabilities, who are ill or elderly, including those with mental conditions such as substance misuse) are entitled to have their needs assessed, regardless of income and finances or their level of need. For carers, Stage 1 of the factsheet provides information on how to get and prepare for a carer's assessment, and how they are assessed. Stage 2 covers eligibility, and Stage 3 discusses what happens after the needs assessment and what help or advice may be given. Information is included on the 'Family Approach', for young carers and those transitioning in adulthood.

[State of caring 2015](#) (pdf) - Carers UK

Carers UK's annual survey collected evidence from over 4,500 respondents on issues affecting carers' lives. This report discusses the findings, and gives an overview of the context of care in the UK. Though the report does not specifically mention drug or alcohol use, it discusses issues relevant to all those who care for a loved one in need of support.

[The Care Act \(2014\) and the voluntary sector working in criminal justice](#) (pdf) – Clinks

This briefing provides background to the act, the changes that staff and strategic leads in voluntary sector organisations the Criminal Justice System will be affected by. The Care Act 2014 introduced major reform to adult social care with the aim of: encouraging clear and fair support for all; ensuring the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of the carer and the one being cared for; preventing (or delaying) the need for care and support for carers. One key change in the new act is the aim of developing the involvement in the individual's assessment and care of either a relative, friend or an advocate through a new requirement for an 'independent advocate'. This is necessary, the report suggests, because the prevalence of learning disabilities in the criminal justice system is high, with 25% of the prison population having an IQ of 70-79.

[The Triangle of Care for Young Carers and Young Adult Carers: A Guide for Mental Health Professionals](#) (pdf) – Carers Trust

This report was created through consultations with practitioners and young carers. Many common themes emerged which are believed to be creating difficulties for both young carers and health workers. Some of the themes which emerged were difficulty identifying young and young adult carers - more than 90% of young carers said they stayed hidden for the first year, low numbers of carers receiving support, and low levels of engagement with professionals. The report calls for age appropriate literature, increased

carer engagement and making it a requirement for staff to engage with all carers.

[A Charge on Caring?](#) (pdf) – Carers Trust

In this report the Carers Trust investigates local authorities charging unpaid carers for the support they provide to help them in their caring role. While the Care Act 2014 does allow for local authorities to charge, the Care Act Statutory Guidance discourages them from doing so. The report found eight out of 132 councils are charging unpaid carers, meaning 5% of carers face the possibility of being charged. 23 councils are thinking of implementing charges, but councils are not collecting information about the effects these charges have on carers.

[The importance of carer's allowance – recognising and supporting family care](#) – Carers UK

This report looks at who receives Carer's Allowance, and is written in response to the Care Act 2014 and proposed government welfare cuts. Topics covered include the importance of financial support and recognition for those caring for loved ones and the likely implications of any reductions in the eligibility for benefits. The report notes the huge contribution to society made by carers and that the Carer's Allowance is the lowest benefit of its kind.