

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

POLICY BRIEFING

February 2016

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Editorial

Many people in the drug and alcohol sector have an ambivalent attitude towards the media. There's an impression that the media can spread negativity, misinformation and stigma about people who use drugs and alcohol and their families. This impression is often deserved – newspapers that have long since stopped using loaded, prejudiced terms in describing black or Asian people or those with disabilities still far too often contain lurid, sensationalist and simply untrue headlines regarding 'junkies' or 'alkies'.

This isn't just unpleasant, it has a serious impact. All of us get our information from the media – including people who know little about problem drug or alcohol use – and attitudes influence behaviour. [We know](#) that as well as causing distress, stigma is a barrier to accessing support and achieving recovery.

In this climate, we believe it's crucial to do everything we can to break down stigma, to show families facing drug or alcohol problems that they're not alone, and to encourage them to access support. And the media is still the best way of getting the real stories out to an audience of millions and getting that message across.

It's valuable, but not enough to have that message relayed by academics and professionals – the public also needs to hear it directly from the people affected.

That's why Adfam works with the media when we can to give a face and a voice to the families we work to support. In the last month, we were proud that media coverage of our [Relationship Realities](#) project with [OnePlusOne](#) gave the opportunity for several families affected by drugs and alcohol to get on TV and the radio and tell their story in their own words – and the media coverage was compassionate and fair. If you missed it, you can [listen here to over 30 minutes](#) of national BBC radio airtime devoted to breaking down stigma (from 10:30 onwards). Former Government minister Liam Byrne MP has also been doing his bit to fight stigma, [speaking about his father's alcohol problem](#). With enough voices, the tide will turn.

[Decision makers also need to listen to the people who their decisions affect](#), and this month's [Featured Issue](#) is the invaluable Voices from the Frontline Policy Influencing Guide, which tells you how to involve 'experts by experience' in policy-making.

Adfam will be running a families session with [Red Rose Recovery](#) in Birmingham next week for [Get The Picture!](#), DDN's annual service user conference – if you're going, come and say hello.

David Ader

Policy and Communications Officer

Parliamentary roundup

[House of Lords Debate on Drugs](#) - Lord Patel of Bradford

Lord Patel asked the Government what its response would be to the latest drug-related death statistics in England and Wales in 2014 - leading to a detailed debate on the issue.

Consultations

[The Blue Light Family Project](#) - Adfam and Alcohol Concern

The Blue Light family project is now well under way. We have 18 partners working with us to develop an approach that supports and empowers families and carers to be a major resource in tackling change resistant drinkers. To accurately map the current experiences of this group of people we are running an important national online survey to gather your views on how best to support families and carers to tackle change resistant drinkers. This survey can be answered by anyone with a stake in the issue, including the family and drinkers themselves, wherever you are in the country. We will publish both national results and results for the local partner agencies.

Resources

[United Kingdom Drug Situation 2015 Edition](#) - UK Focal Point on Drugs

The UK Focal Point on Drugs, based at Public Health England, produces this annual report to the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction, giving comprehensive information on new developments and trends on drugs for all four countries of the UK. It provides statistics, evidence and updates on areas including drug policy, law, prevalence, harms, treatment and markets.

[Four Nations: How evidence-based are alcohol policies and programmes across the UK?](#) - Alliance for Useful Evidence

This report examines differences in the use of evidence in alcohol policy in the four countries of the UK and at national level. It finds significant difference in the extent to which policy is evidence-based or evaluated, and that political ideology rather than evidence is the primary driver for alcohol policy.

[Drug health harms – national intelligence](#) - Public Health England

The latest update from the National Intelligence Network reveals trends on drug health harms, including an increase in the number of drug-related deaths and an acceleration of the rate of increase, mainly driven by opioid – in particular heroin – poisonings. It gives information on regional variation and the response of local services.

[Health Matters: Harmful drinking and alcohol dependence](#) - Public Health England

This resource gives the latest data and evidence on alcohol harm and dependence, to help professionals make the case for effective public health interventions. It includes several impactful infographics which clearly illustrate the extent and cost of alcohol harm.

[Impact of funding reductions on Public Health: ADPH Survey Results](#) - Association of Directors of Public Health

The Association of Directors of Public Health have published the results of their survey, responded to by 66% of Directors of Public Health in England, following the announcement of significant reductions in the ring-fenced public health grant. It found directors expect the cuts to have a detrimental impact on health, and on health inequalities, as well as leading to the reduction and/or decommissioning of many public health services.

[VCSE Strength Checker](#) - Cabinet Office, Big Lottery Fund

This diagnostic tool is aimed at small and medium sized organisations in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. It helps organisations to self-assess their strength in areas including sustainability, marketing, strategy, planning, quality and impact. The tool gives feedback which can be used to develop and improve your organisation.

Featured issue

[Voices from the Frontline policy influencing guide](#) – Making Every Adult Matter

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM), a coalition between Clinks, Homeless Link and Mind, has published a guide to help people with multiple needs and those who work with them to influence policy.

Part one: Influencing local policy

Part one details several different techniques to influence policy. Firstly, the authors suggest working closely with experts by experience; which in the substance use sector refers to people who have experience of services and drug or alcohol addiction. Next, they explain how to gather all the necessary information, then how to come up with an influencing strategy which includes an action plan. Also detailed is how to 'get a place at the table', and partner with other organisations to achieve strength in numbers. It should be clear what you are asking for, and policy asks should be short and concise. Meanwhile developing a communications strategy and keeping your commissioner in the loop will minimise conflict with other work which they may be funding.

The guide continues by focusing on who to influence locally, with one example being to write to or request a meeting with your local MP. If successful, an expert by experience could be invited along to share their stories. As well as giving advice to their constituents, MPs can raise issues in parliament and push for national policy changes.

Part two: Involving experts by experience

Part two lays out how to involve experts by experience efficiently and ethically. Experts by experience may accompany policy makers to conferences and forums, or a decision maker could be invited to attend a group meeting to meet experts and hear their views. Putting views into videos is a good way of getting people's stories and experiences across, especially for those who are not confident speaking in public.

The guide then emphasises what organisations should be clear about and gives tips on how to achieve good practice. It notes that if organisations have multiple ways of working experts by experience are less likely to feel pressured to be involved in one particular way. Experts should also be informed of any progress and developments on anything they have been involved with – and if they have invested their time supporting your work, you should make the effort to be flexible about how and when you keep them informed. Finally it is essential that experts by experience do not feel pressured to help an organisation.