

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

POLICY BRIEFING

August 2015

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Editorial

It might only be August, but like Selfridges, at Adfam we've already started planning for Christmas. Our annual Candlelit Carol Concert will take place in the evening of 3rd December at St Bride's Church in Fleet Street, central London - please save the date, tickets will be available soon. At the concert we will announce the winners of our two annual awards. The Gary Seaman Award is given each year to an outstanding practitioner who has made all the difference to a family affected by drug or alcohol use, with a prize of £150 for the winner. The Family Voices competition is an opportunity for families to tell their story in a creative way, as either a poem or a piece of writing, which will be read at the Carol Concert by a guest reader. The prize is £150 for the winner and £100 each for the two runners-up. Please see our website for information on how to [nominate a practitioner for the Gary Seaman Award](#) or [submit an entry for the Family Voices competition](#). Please do share this information with your clients and colleagues too!

You may have seen in the news this month a discussion around Government plans to restrict benefits for people who have a drug or alcohol problem, or are obese, and do not accept treatment for their condition, a proposal featured in the Conservative election manifesto. David Cameron announced the plans saying: "Too many people are stuck on sickness benefits because of issues that could be addressed but instead are not...It is not fair to ask hardworking taxpayers to fund the benefits of people who refuse to accept the support and treatment that could help them get back to a life of work."

The plans have been strongly criticised not just by [treatment agencies like Addaction](#), but also by the medical establishment including the [British Psychological Society](#), and the Conservative MP, GP and chair of the Health Select Committee, [Sarah Wollaston](#). If the plans do go ahead, families may find their drug or alcohol using loved one even more likely to ask them for financial support, but it's also possible the plans will have the desired effect of persuading them into treatment. Many families will know from experience how difficult that is – but for critics, the concerns are not just about the practicalities but also the ethics. It is enshrined in [the NHS Constitution](#) that any treatment must be entered into voluntarily and without coercion, and this could be violated if people know that refusing treatment will lead to financial penalties. The [British Medical Association](#) has previously called similar plans "draconian and silly". On the other hand is the argument that it is no help to people with drink or drugs problems, or their families, if they are enabled to continue a life of dependency without seeking treatment or employment. [Paul Hayes](#), former head of the NTA and current Collective Voice Project lead, argues that the treatment sector needs to use the review as an opportunity to build political momentum around improving access to employment for people in recovery.

Whether you agree that the plans are unethical, or think that any incentive to seek treatment is a good thing, there's no doubt that the plans could make a big difference to many families, so do answer the Department for Work and Pensions' [call for evidence](#) if you can. The consultation is open until 11 September. Whether or not you respond to the consultation, please do let us at Adfam know your thoughts on this important issue.

Finally, there have been two excellent articles published recently about families affected by addiction. [The first tells the experiences of growing up as the child of a mother addicted to drugs](#), and [the second discusses how a parent's drug-related death can affect their children](#), with reference to the family of Whitney Houston. I recommend reading both if you get a chance.

David Ader
Policy and Communications Coordinator

Parliamentary roundup

[Jim Shannon MP](#) asked the Home Secretary what steps the Home Office is taking to assess the mood-altering capacity of New Psychoactive Substances (NPS). Mike Penning MP, the Home Office minister, replied stating in preparation for future legislation, a new regime for testing new substances will be put in place that can respond quickly to new substances. A database of substances and their psychoactivity will be created, supported by the provision of chemical reference standards. The expansion of the Forensic Early Warning System (FEWS) will meet demands to evidentially assess psychoactivity.

[Lord Patel](#) asked, after the research published in *Addiction* about the results of the payment by results pilot, what advice the government plans to issue to public health directorates on the commissioning of drug treatment. Lord Prior replied to say that the Department of Health is currently drawing up conclusions, but will wait until the final independent evaluation has been published before issuing guidance - it is due in late August 2015. The article in *Addiction* is an early release from this evaluation.

[Lord Blair asked](#) whether the government plans to require the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) to provide guidance as to the circumstances where possession of a New Psychoactive Substance (NPS) amounts to a possible offence. Lord Bates, a Home Office minister, replied to note that it is the responsibility of the DPP to issue guidance for Crown Prosecutors. He stated that the Home Office have worked closely with the Crown Prosecution service in drafting the Psychoactive Substances Bill and will continue until the bill is implemented.

Consultations

[Local authority public health allocations 2015 to 2016](#) – Department of Health

This consultation seeks opinions on how the £200 million cuts being made to the public health budget might be spread across Local Authorities (LAs). The consultation covers preferred methods of saving, how to save without causing disruption and impacts of the savings on LAs.

This consultation closes on the **28th August 2015**.

[Consultation on the proposed amendments to the data set collected for alcohol and drug treatment on the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System \(NDTMS\)](#) – Public Health England

Public Health England is consulting on including new questions in the NDTMS data set, including on Equality Act protected characteristics such as sexual orientation and disability, smoking prevalence, blood borne viruses, and dual diagnosis information.

This consultation closes on **1st September 2015**.

[Psychoactive substances inquiry](#) – Home Affairs Committee

This enquiry into the impact of the Psychoactive Substances Bill aims to review the ban, who will be affected, how the government can educate these groups, and what treatment is needed. The committee is welcoming written submissions on these and other relevant matters.

The enquiry closes at **12pm, 2nd September 2015**.

[Drug and alcohol addiction, and obesity: effects on employment outcomes \(independent review\)](#)
– Department for Work and Pensions

As discussed in the [Editorial](#) of this briefing, the Department for Work and Pensions has asked Professor Dame Carol Black to review into the effect on employment outcomes of drug or alcohol addiction, and obesity, and has issued a call for evidence.

This consultation closes on **11th September 2015**.

Resources

[Final Report: The Recovery Partnership Review of Alcohol Services](#) (pdf) – Alcohol Concern for the Recovery Partnership

This review on the current state of alcohol treatment in England found that alcohol services were generally improving, as combining alcohol and drug services has led to access to more resources and greater budgets. The report identifies key issues to be considered by commissioners and providers. These include meeting the needs of people with dual diagnosis or complex needs, carers receiving little help and difficulties securing places in residential rehabilitation.

[The West Midlands Kinship Care report: Supporting kinship families affected by drug or alcohol use](#) (pdf) – The West Midlands Families, Drugs and Alcohol Regional Forum

The West Midlands Regional Forum is for service managers, practitioners and volunteers who work with families affected by a loved one's drug or alcohol use. Following a presentation from the Kinship Carers Worcestershire support group, the forum embarked on a journey to discover more about the needs of kinship carers and how to support them. This report is the product of that work, and:

- provides a background to families of drug and alcohol users
- identifies the needs of kinship carers
- reports on how many kinship carers there are in the West Midlands
- discovers what support needs kinship carers may have and best practice for meeting these needs
- highlights the barriers services face to providing support
- makes recommendations for how these can be overcome.

[How CQC regulates specialist substance misuse services: provider handbook](#) (pdf) – The Care Quality Commission

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) have published a handbook for providers of specialist substance misuse services, detailing how they will regulate, inspect and rate services. The CQC's inspectors will be tasked with assessing whether services are safe, effective, caring, responsive to people's needs, and well-led. The CQC had previously held a consultation on their proposals for the handbook, and [the consultation response document](#) (pdf) has also been published. You can see Adfam's response on [the consultations page of our website](#).

[Drinkaware Monitor 2014: Young people's and their parents' drinking behaviour and attitudes in the UK](#) (pdf) – Ipsos MORI

This report examines young people's behaviour and attitudes towards drinking; and their parents' views. This research was conducted from November to December 2014, and asked 10-17 year olds, about their drinking patterns, including motivations for drinking, experiences of drunkenness and harmful drinking behaviour. The research into parental attitudes found that parents who are tolerant of young people drinking are more likely to encourage their children to drink, but also to speak to their children about alcohol.

[Character and moderation: encouraging the next generation of responsible drinkers \(pdf\)](#) –

Demos

This report looks at whether developing capabilities in young people can lead to more moderate and responsible drinking behaviour. Over the last decade problematic alcohol consumption has decreased, a trend the report authors hope to see continue. This report, supported by SAB Miller and the Portman Group, lays out approaches intended to contribute to further decreasing alcohol consumption among young people. These include investing in youth drinking research, targeting resources at the home environment and support for parents through increased investment in Family Nurse Partnerships, and engaging the alcohol industry with national campaigns to build character and encourage healthier life choices.

[Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2014](#) – Health & Social Care Information Centre

This report outlines data on smoking, drinking and drug use amongst young people aged 11-15. Drinking and smoking amongst young people has been declining since the survey began, in 2005. Drug use has also been declining but the decline has slowed since 2010. 46% of young people said they had tried smoking, drunk alcohol, or taken drugs at least once in their life, with cannabis remaining the most commonly used drug. Pupils also believed their schools gave them more information about smoking than drinking or drug use. One in five schools said they did not offer any drug education or advice outside the classroom.

[Underage drinking campaign resources](#) – DrinkAware

DrinkAware have two new resources to help address underage drinking - both resources are designed to help parents have the conversation with their child about alcohol:

- An updated version of the 'Your Kids and Alcohol' leaflet, with medically evidenced facts and figures as well as advice on talking to children about alcohol.
- An interactive quiz, targeted at children aged 9-13 to help them to learn about the risks associated with underage drinking.

[The resources can be ordered online.](#)

[The 5 Minute Policy Manager](#) – NCVO

Here the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) provide a roundup of recent policy affecting the voluntary sector, covering issues including fundraising regulation, [their review into the financial sustainability of the voluntary sector](#) (pdf), the Charities (Protection and Social Investment) Bill, Gift Aid Donor Benefit rules, updated Charity Commission guidance for trustees, the Cage judicial review, and charity legacies.

Featured issue

[What's love got to do with it?](#) (pdf) – Relate

This report is a collection of 14 essays about the many ways good quality relationships are key to public policy. The collection promotes healthy relationships as the basis of our society. The varying perspectives are intended to spark new thinking and discussion among all those interested in policy, with the ultimate goal of changing government policy and creating better services for those in need. All the essays are about issues that affect families, and many will have relevance to families affected by drugs and alcohol. Here we briefly summarise three of the essays.

Ending domestic violence and abuse Polly Neate, Chief Executive, Women's Aid

On average, in England and Wales, two women a week are killed by their current or former intimate partner. Women who experience domestic violence are up to 15 times more likely to misuse alcohol than women generally. The current systems put in place to protect women is frequently failing them. Relationships are the foundation of society, so more must be done to ensure that the support is in place for women who need help leaving them.

There are three stages which need improvement: identification and disclosure; gateways to and provision of services; and the response of other agencies and institutions. Not all women want to go to the police, but for those who do there must be a clear referral path, as the police are not a specialist service. Both commissioners and specialist services need to move away from a culture of just trying to manage risk, and instead focus on providing all the support that's needed. Women's Aid describe an example of a woman whose abusive husband has been imprisoned – but the woman is still suffering from related mental health and alcohol problems, and her children may as a result be taken into care. Simply because the domestic violence risk has been addressed due to the husband's imprisonment, it does not mean that the right support has been provided. Other agencies such as social work and family courts have not grasped the severity of domestic violence. We must change perceptions of domestic violence and abuse if we are to truly challenge it.

Couple relationships and mental health Susanna Abse, Chief Executive, and Richard Meier, Policy Manager, Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships

Research has found the quality of a person's relationship with their partner predicts the likelihood of a future depressive episode. Low quality relationships, especially with an unsupportive partner, leave an individual prone to depressive episodes. The Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships created Mentalization-Based Therapy for Couples (MBT-C) to help partners manage their emotional states within a relationship.

Relationship problems and distress are not seen as a priority policy area. Service providers may deal with mental health as though it is an issue which has arisen in isolation, but it's not. Poor parenting dynamics have a negative impact on children, children from families with parental conflict underperform in school. Research into the impacts of poor couple relationships on children has not been translated into service delivery or treatments targeting dysfunctional families.

The relationship between relationship problems and mental health, up until now, has mostly been ignored at the policy level. The Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships is calling for the government to commit to a cross-departmental relationships strategy.

Relationships and poverty - Dr Emma Stone, Director of Research, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

According to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, by 2020/21 there will be 3.3 million children and 7.5 million working age adults living in poverty. This essay is focused around the question, where and how should relationships feature in an anti-poverty strategy?

Poverty is highly associated with cohabitation, even though cohabiting is no more susceptible to breakdown than marriage. Lone parent families are most likely to be in and spend long durations in poverty. This can contribute to relationship breakdown, which itself can lead to poverty. Challenges will arise with sharing financial resources after separation.

Educational attainment is the strongest predictor of adult poverty in the UK. Parents who are able to invest in resources and services that further their child's development and improve educational outcomes. Financial resources also affect adult outcomes including happiness, physical and mental health.

Other consequences of poverty are that people stop participating in wider society through reduced access and self-exclusion arising from the stigma of poverty. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation detail a number of implications for policy, including:

- Families come in a variety of shapes and sizes, policies should recognise this and find ways to support family relationships; it is the quality of functioning rather than the structure of the family that matters most.
- Good quality relationship support and children and family services can make a major difference to parenting, parental relationships and children's outcomes and prospects for adulthood.
- Policies to increase men's involvement in childcare and women's ability to carry out decently paid work, including shared parental leave and reducing costs of childcare.