

Dame Carol Black Review – A response from the family support sector

This is a joint response to Part 2 of the Dame Carol Black Review from an alliance of organisations that support, advocate and champion families affected by substance use.

As a united voice, we welcome Dame Carol Black's Review which represents a key opportunity to improve drug treatment and recovery services across England. Drug misuse, in addition to harming individuals and communities, can pose considerable harm to children, families and friends. Many of the themes highlighted in the Review can be applied to families, but their specific needs are not focused on.

Providing support to families has been shown to improve the chances of their loved ones entering and remaining in treatment, maintaining recovery and engaging productively in society. But equally important is the right for families to receive support for themselves to improve their own health and wellbeing, enhance their participation in society and maintain positive relationships. Family support services can offer structured support – giving families the right tools to deal with their situation, as well as advocacy support to help families champion their own needs and others in a similar situation.

The purpose of this response is to highlight the opportunities which exist to ensure the needs of families can be included and endorsed within the Government's approach moving forward.

Complexity of challenges families face

Those affected by substance use include: parents, partners, grandparents, children, siblings, friends and many others, and the challenges they face are vast.

A member of our alliance listed the following experiences and issues that families come across, in addition to their loved one's substance use:

- marriage breakdown,
- mental health problems,
- post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),
- contact with the police and criminal justice system,
- domestic violence and abuse,
- complex palliative and end of life care,
- bereavement,
- suicidal thoughts/actions
- discovering a dead body,

infant death and miscarriage,
rape and sexual assault,
historical child abuse,
prostitution,
supporting a veteran,
adverse childhood experiences (ACEs),
taking on additional caring responsibilities, including through kinship care.

Family voices must be heard in order to recognise the seriousness and complexity of the problems they face. It is essential to provide properly funded family support and help families to overcome this suffering.

Funding

The Review outlines the impact of reductions in drug treatment services over the past decade, curtailing their ability to support people affected by drug misuse. Family support provision is often cut from local authority budgets and the austerity years have been particularly damaging for family support charities. Many have closed, increasing the difficulty in providing vital support for families.

We support the review's ambitious plans to invest £1.78 billion into drug treatment and recovery over five years, and call on the provision of family support services to be included within this package. This can be achieved through inclusion of families in Local Authority joint-commissioning tenders, alongside wider health, employment support, housing and criminal justice partners, as highlighted in the review. We believe that considerable savings are made through the provision of support services for families.

The Review also rightly highlights the marginalisation smaller locally-led grassroots charities face, including family services. These groups possess the expertise and local knowledge required to respond to local need and are well placed to engage minority populations and underserved groups. Financial support is needed to help groups carry out this important work and engage vulnerable and stigmatised families in their local community. Furthermore, those that do exist require better exposure. An improved awareness and understanding of what services are available for families is imperative so that those looking for support are signposted appropriately.

We welcome the focus on children of drug using parents, and the recommendation to expand the Children of Alcohol Dependent Parents (CADeP) programme to include drug misuse. However, it is important to recognise that adult family members are affected too, often over a long time with little hope of recovery. Family members of all ages deserve recognition and support in their own right.

The need for a whole system approach

The Review recognises the need for a whole-system approach in addressing the multiple challenges that surround drug misuse and the inclusion of other sectors within this approach, including mental health, criminal justice, housing and employment. This is demonstrated by the introduction of a new cross-departmental Drug Policy Unit. Inclusion of the family agenda is essential in any whole-system approach, and should be championed within the new unit.

Dame Carol also rightly emphasises workforce development, addressing the decline in quantity, quality and morale of the drug treatment workforce in recent years, with excessive caseloads, decreased training and lack of clinical supervision. Also welcome is the recommendation for DHSC to commission Health Education England (HEE) to devise a workforce strategy for substance misuse treatment with sufficient new funding to support training.

Support for professionals that come into contact with families and carers must be included. Family-focused training for staff in treatment services helps develop their skills and understanding of families' needs and the benefits of involving families in treatment where appropriate. This should also include wider health and community services that work with families, and professions such as social workers, health visitors and teachers.

Conclusion

Dame Carol Black's Review was written to bring hope and real change to the many individuals, families and communities whose lives are affected by drug misuse. As a society we have a responsibility to create an environment that promotes and supports individual recovery, challenges stigma and champions healthy and safe communities. However, we still have a long way to go in properly understanding the wider impacts drug misuse has on families, and making the necessary changes to give families the help they need. This is a social endeavour requiring collective action to ensure families across the country are given the opportunity to thrive.

This response is endorsed by the following organisations:

Adfam

Aquarius

Bridges Family and Carer Service

Collective Voice

Developing Health & Independence (DHI)

DrugFAM

ESCAPE Family Support

Family Support Link

Humankind Charity

Inclusion

Jo Huey - Supporting Daughters of Alcoholics

Manchester Metropolitan University

Mosaic (funded by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council)

NHS Addictions Provider Alliance

Phoenix Futures

PROPS North East*

Sanctuary Family Support

Turning Point

Vesta Approach

York Carers Centre



*PROPS, whilst endorsing this response, would also like to acknowledge the important financial support they have received through the Government-funded Project ADDER, and the benefits this is having to those affected by substance use and their families in Newcastle