

Produced by Adfam UK

# STATE OF THE FAMILY SUPPORT SECTOR



2023

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# FOREWORD - VIVIENNE EVANS OBE

Our last State of the Sector report looked at the period up until 2019. Since then we've had three Prime Ministers, a cost of living crisis and of course the most serious pandemic to hit Britain since 1918. To say this has been a tumultuous few years is obviously a huge understatement. The impact has clearly been immense but we are perhaps only beginning to understand the repercussions for those families additionally facing the challenges posed by a family member with an addiction to drugs or alcohol.

This 2023 state of the sector report comes in the wake of Dame Carol Black's review of drugs and the Government's From Harm to Hope drugs strategy. Adfam, along with many other organisations contributed to the Black review, and welcomed the additional funding provided by Government following the publication of her recommendations.

However the responses to our survey from family sector workers across the UK suggest that whilst additional funding is bringing more people to the attention of treatment services, family provision has not been given the additional funds that it needs to support the family and carers of those people. Indeed very little of the money the Government has pledged appears to be making its way through to the family sector. This despite the drugs

strategy acknowledging that drug use "shatters families".

So in spite of all of the change and upheaval over the last 4 years, a new drugs strategy and a significant injection of funds into the substance misuse sector, we find ourselves looking at a rather familiar picture. A family sector struggling to cope with current demand and unable to commit resources to meet the huge unmet need. We believe that this should be of concern to funders, policy makers and everyone interested in the welfare of children and families.

As one of the people who responded to our survey put it, "For every person with an addiction there is a whole family impacted."

**VIVIENNE EVANS OBE**  
CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ADFAM



# ABOUT ADFAM:

Adfam is the national charity tackling the negative effects of drugs and alcohol on family members and friends.

We do this by: **Empowering** families and friends to get the support they need. **Building** the confidence, capacity and capability of frontline workers to provide effective services.

**Influencing** decision-makers to understand the needs of hundreds of thousands of people coping with the effects of a family member's drinking or drug use.

Since 1984, Adfam have been supporting and working with family members, practitioners and strategic partners to bring about lasting positive change.

If you would like to know more about our work, please visit us at: [adfam.org.uk](http://adfam.org.uk).

## METHODOLOGY:

Between March and May 2023, Adfam conducted an online survey open to all those who work in or are associated with a service providing support to families affected by drugs or alcohol in the UK. It was advertised across Adfam's website, social media platforms and publications. The aim of the survey was to get a snapshot of current practice. It does not purport to be representative of the family support sector as a whole but given the large number and geographical spread of responses, and the fact that those responses chime with the stories relayed to Adfam by family members, practitioners and sector organisations, we are confident that the report represents the views of the many people who work in the sector across the UK. Alongside the survey Adfam held online discussion events for sector organisations, practitioners and family members which further investigated people's experiences of family support work over the last year. Adfam additionally 'sense checked' the survey findings with people who have extensive experience and knowledge of the drug and alcohol sector. We are most grateful for their input.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

We would like to thank the more than 100 practitioners, service managers and others who took the time to participate in our State of the Family Support Sector 2023 online survey, the Commissioners and provider leads who shared their thoughts and the family members who gave generously of their time to ensure that we captured their experiences.

**'Very little of the money the Government has pledged appears to be making its way through to the family sector.'**

*Vivienne Evans - Adfam CE*

# RESPONSES



The survey attracted responses from 108 family workers, service managers and others from across the UK, with every region represented. There was wide variation in the size of the services that people worked for (from under 5 staff to over 100) and in the number of staff employed specifically to provide family support (from 1 to more than 20). A third of people were working in services with only 1 or 2 specific family workers.

**63%** of respondents (66% in 2019) worked as part of an integrated drug and alcohol service.

**28%** (17% in 2019) described their service as stand alone family support.

**9%** (17% in 2019) worked for a generic carers service.



OVER  
**50%**

offering structured interventions such as M-Pact, SMART and Triple P

**1/3**

offering counselling

**80%**

offering practical advice

**45%**

offering a range of group activities to help people's wellbeing.

**87%**

continued to offer online services after lockdown

## WHAT DO FAMILY SERVICES OFFER?

The survey demonstrated the wide range of services provided by family workers. Responses were very similar to those in the 2019 survey. Typically services offered structured and unstructured peer support groups, and 1:1 support sessions with staff. Just over half reported offering structured interventions such as M-Pact, SMART and Triple P and a third reported offering counselling. Eighty per cent of respondents said their service offered practical advice and 45% offered a range of group activities to help people's wellbeing.

### OVER 90% OF RESPONDENTS REPORTED THAT THEIR SERVICE HAD PROVIDED SUPPORT ONLINE DURING COVID AND 87% HAD CONTINUED TO OFFER THAT SERVICE ONCE LOCKDOWN ENDED.

There was no corresponding question about the provision of online support in the 2019 survey but in Adfam's experience, prior to the pandemic the vast majority of family work was conducted face to face and many services had a very limited online offer, or none at all.

For those people who preferred online services, convenience was considered the major attraction. Family members didn't have to travel to a treatment service, they could access support from different locations and they could arrange times to fit around work and childcare. Along with the convenience, workers noted that for some people the anonymity proved attractive. For those people who didn't like the online offer the most often cited reason was uncertainty around using the technology. Additionally, some people either didn't have access to equipment or lacked a decent Wi-Fi connection. Other reasons given for preferring face to face meetings included the difficulty of accessing the service from home when the person with the addiction might be there or return unexpectedly and a preference for 'physical' connection with a worker or with other families.

# FUNDING

Most drug and alcohol treatment work taking place in England is funded via Local Authority Public Health grants. Organisations are commissioned, usually through a competitive tender process to provide a range of services to people struggling with drug and alcohol issues.

**Despite deep cuts in funding in the decade up until 2022 most areas maintained some specific services for the families and carers of people with substance use issues. This is in no small part due to the campaigning work of organisations within the family sector, spearheaded by Adfam.**

In 2021 alongside the new Government drugs strategy 'From harm to hope', the Government committed over 400 million pounds in additional funding to the drug treatment sector to cover the period through till April 2025.

The Adfam 2023 survey has found that the majority of funding in the family sector comes from Local Authority Public Health grants and via sub-contracts with drug and alcohol services (which are themselves largely funded from those same grants). This was the same for the 2016 and 2019 state of the sector surveys.

A number of respondents reported that their organisations additionally raised money from Trust and Foundation grants, private donations and corporate partnerships.

This need to find top up funding, over and above any Local Government support, is something that Adfam hears time and again from family support organisations across England. Many smaller organisations have to fundraise to survive and many contracts deliver far more than Local Government funding alone would allow.

It might be hoped that the significant additional money that the Government is putting into the drug and alcohol sector would go some way to easing the financial headaches faced by family services. However, from responses to the survey it appears that little of the additional hundreds of millions of pounds that the Government is putting into combatting and treating substance misuse is making its way through to family support. Just 8% of respondents were aware of their organisation receiving any additional money to use for family and carer work and many respondents pointed to cuts or an ongoing shortfall in funding.

As in previous years it appears that for many family services, the money they receive from Local Authorities is insufficient even to maintain the level of service they currently provide let alone expand to try to meet unmet need. It is disappointing that so little of the over £400 million being put into drug and alcohol services appears to be making its way through to family support. This is something that Adfam wants to understand in greater detail.

One respondent listed Local Authority grant funding totalling £116k for a service that cost £330k to run. The shortfall was made up of grants from charitable sources including the National Lottery.



8%

of respondents were aware  
that their organisation had  
received any additional  
money to use for family and  
carer work.

The following responses provide a useful insight into the funding struggles faced by family services:

**“There is far too little investment by commissioners into family and friends support.”**

**“No extra funding has gone into the Family and Carer element of our service.”**

**“There is simply not enough funding given to family support.”**

**“It seems to be getting worse, not better. I have worked in this role for 11 years and have seen that funding has been cut, services have closed and referrals have increased.”**

**“We aren't funded to provide this support but we see the need in the local community and try to help.”**

**“[we've had] no increase in funding over the last 5 years.”**



**“There has always been a lack of funding but in recent years this is getting very difficult”**

**“...the SSMTR [supplemental substance misuse treatment and recovery] grant has not been allocated to our family service.”**

**“We are unable to plan or expand as the funding for this area is getting smaller.”**

**“Family funding has been slashed”**

# WORKLOAD

**“We have had a huge increase in the number of family members seeking support.”**

When asked how workloads had changed over the preceding 12 months, the response was the highest figure we have recorded in our surveys.

**90%**

90% of respondents reported an increase in their workload in Adfam's latest survey

**80%**

reported an increase in Adfam's 2019 survey

**74%**

reported an increase in Adfam's 2016 survey

**“We currently have our longest waiting list in our history. Indications are that this will continue to be an issue.”**

In some cases, the increased workload is clearly unsustainable. Some responses linked increased workloads to the additional funding that has been made available to other parts of the treatment system. Many responses pointed to funding shortfalls that have led to staffing cuts. At the same time many organisations are experiencing an increased demand for their services.

**"I have not been able to cope with the personal workload..."**

**"There has been an increase in referrals from social services."**

**"There are more mothers coming forward and contacting me."**

**"We have lost staff to new initiatives with the new money."**



The impact of covid is cited by a number of people as a reason for additional referrals.

**"Covid has seen more patients into treatment more people affected by alcohol use and increased impact on families."**

**"Referrals are increasing now that covid lockdowns and restrictions have been lifted."**

**"...an increase in family members seeking support as loved one has gone off the rails during covid."**



The cost of living crisis was also referenced in a number of responses.

**“The debt these families experience is astronomical and causes other issues such as...the risk of homelessness.”**

**“More austerity related problems. Housing poverty, delays accessing health, it feels overwhelming at times.”**

**“We feel that covid has proven more difficult for families and [along with] the cost of living, the pressure has become too much and people are turning to alcohol or prescribed drugs to cope.”**

It's not just the number of referrals that's leading to an increase in workload. It's also the complexity of those cases.

**“The number of cases has risen but more worryingly the weight of these cases are heavier. Lots of complex need and contextual safeguarding.”**

**“[we're experiencing] increasing complexity across the team.”**

**“we are seeing an increasing amount of very complicated cases.”**

All our respondents worked in services that handled caseloads where there were children living at home. For most services this made up more than 50% of their caseload. Parental conflict was very common with the people they worked with, a quarter of respondents saw it in over 90% of their cases and for nearly three quarters of respondents it was a feature of the majority of their cases. Everyone reported working with some cases that involved domestic abuse. For over 40% of respondents it was something they saw in the majority of their caseloads.

It is a notable feature of the 2023 State of the sector survey that so many people had seen an increase in their workload and an increasingly complex caseload.

One respondent seemed to crystallise many of the comments we received:

**“We have seen an increase in referrals, an increase in complex cases and experienced difficulties with recruitment.”**



## UNMET NEED

There is a huge push to get more people into treatment and there is an expectation that the additional funds provided to the drug and alcohol sector will achieve this. Targets are based on estimates of the number of drug users who are in the community but not in treatment. Many of these are believed to be people who have never been known to treatment and work is under way to try and provide services and outreach that will draw them into treatment. This is admirable.

However, within family support services it is clear that there is a 'known' unmet need. On average, respondents to Adfam's survey estimate that only 21% of the people in treatment in their area have a family member receiving any support. This leaves a huge, 'known' and reachable population of carers and family members who are currently getting by with no help or support.

**"...forgotten families do not get help until they are in crisis."**

**"Family support still feels like an afterthought."**

**"...the harm done to family members seems to be invisible."**

**21%**

of the people in treatment in their area have a family member receiving any support.

One respondent noted a very positive development in their service -

**“We have just obtained funding from Public Health (new Drug Strategy funds) for a new Family Support Work post to in-reach into the treatment system to raise awareness, promote our service, deliver some support to families within the treatment system buildings and encourage them into further accessing our services.”**

This is very encouraging and shows what can be done if there is some investment in family support.

## **PARTNERSHIP WORK**

Government is promoting Combating Drug Partnerships (CDPs) as the way to drive performance locally. These structures, which were introduced as part of the 2021 Drug Strategy, are expected to have a range of partners around the table, including people with ‘lived experience’ which includes family members. At the time of our survey only 6% of respondents were aware of family members in their area being invited to attend CDPs.

If the new partnership structures want to understand the impact of drug and alcohol, the wide-ranging benefits that come from treatment and prevention, and the innovative ways in which families can move the sector forward, then family members need to be part of the discussion. Adfam has been working to understand and address the barriers preventing the participation of family members in CDPs, and has recently published guidance for the Senior Responsible Owners of CDPs and services on involving families.

# **“Partnership work is key to supporting everyone involved in Substance Misuse services.”**

By contrast most respondents said they worked with ‘Supporting Families’ / ‘Early Help’ / ‘Family Hubs’, had a positive relationship with those services and were involved in instigating and receiving referrals.

Despite this there must still be a question mark over the maturity and effectiveness of partnerships between the drug and alcohol sector and other services working with children and families.

The Government’s annual adult substance misuse treatment statistics for 2021 - 2022 showed that of the nearly 50,000 children whose parents (or other adults living with them) had entered substance misuse treatment during 21/22, 65% were receiving no early help.

If the substance misuse sector and the children and families sector were working effectively together then it should be expected that all children impacted by serious drug or alcohol use in the home would at the very least have access to the basic level of support provided by early help services.

# CONCLUSION

Our 2023 survey demonstrates yet again the amazing work being undertaken by our colleagues across the family support sector. They are providing expert advice, counselling and friendship to people who, now more than ever, are in desperate need of help. The impact of the cost of living crisis, coming as it does on the back of the covid pandemic, has resulted in more referrals and an increasingly complex set of problems. If our survey reflects the broader picture, and we believe it does, then 90% of the workforce are facing an increased workload.

The Government has put substantial additional funding into the drug and alcohol sector and understandably expects to see that money produce results. However, the responses to our survey suggest the funding is not filtering through to family support services. This is a missed opportunity. Families, who need support in their own right, also benefit the whole substance misuse sector. They encourage family members to seek help, support them along their treatment journey and help them sustain their recovery.

Our survey suggests that only 21% of the families of people in treatment are getting any help, so there is clearly a lot more work to do and, at the moment, insufficient funds with which to do it. This needs to change if the ambitions of the drug strategy and the targets for the additional Government funding are to be realised.

If the money is there, then we are convinced that the family support sector will rise to the challenge. It seems fitting that the last word should go to one of the family workers who responded to our survey:

**“I've seen many, many positive outcomes from working with clients who are almost at breaking point whilst supporting their loved ones. There are so many more people who could be helped!”**

