

One in Three: Adfam's Manifesto for 2020 and beyond

What the next government can do for families affected by drugs or alcohol

Almost one in three of us in Great Britain have been negatively affected by the substance use of someone we know.ⁱ That's a staggering figure, especially when we consider the huge range of harms that can result: mental ill-health, violence and abuse, relationship difficulties, financial strain, isolation, and stigma.ⁱⁱ

At Adfam, we are dedicated to improving the lives of anyone affected by someone else's substance use, and we are calling on the next government to recognise this problem and make the necessary changes.

Our five asks, laid out below, are ambitious, and rightly so. These families are currently sorely neglected in policy and provision: a significant proportion of the population who are hidden in plain sight and often suffer in silence.

1. Make funding available for every Local Authority to provide dedicated support services for those affected by a loved one's substance misuse.

15.7 million adults in Great Britain have been negatively affected by someone else's substance use at some point in their life – that's almost one in three people – and 5.2 million are currently affected.ⁱⁱⁱ Substance misuse can affect families in a vast number of ways including isolation, mental health problems, physical health problems, financial impacts, strained family relationships and being victim of abusive behaviour.

These families and affected others should be supported in their own right, and the availability of effective support will enable them to improve their health and wellbeing, enhance productivity at work and participation in society and build and maintain positive relationships.

Being part of a well-supported family can also improve outcomes for the drug or alcohol user themselves, increasing their chances of entering and remaining in treatment, maintaining recovery and engaging productively in society.^{iv} There are currently no national protocols for the support of families affected by substance misuse. Support for families is therefore inconsistent, and there is extreme diversity across local authorities in the level and quality of services in place.

Family support should be a statutory obligation for local authorities, commissioned either within existing third sector or NHS treatment services or through independent providers. The services should be delivered to a national minimum standard and provide one-to-one practitioner support, information, and peer support. They must also be flexible to respond to individual circumstances and local needs, and ensure that families are at the heart of the design and delivery of these services.

Staff at drug and alcohol treatment services should be provided with the training they need to recognise the needs of families and support the involvement of families in treatment where appropriate.

In situations where families aren't able or don't feel comfortable engaging with services, free information should be available and easily accessible. This should include:

- Information available online and through leaflets provided across the country in public spaces such as libraries, GP surgeries and community settings.
- A free and confidential telephone/online helpline, run by professionals or by trained and supervised peer supporters, to provide information and guidance to family members.

2. Ensure financial and practical support for family members who care for children affected by substance misuse

Over 50% of children living in kinship care are doing so as a result of parental substance misuse,^v with kinship carers (usually grandparents) picking up the pieces by stepping in to support these children where the parents aren't able to. This places a considerable financial burden upon them along with high levels of stress and many other issues.^{vi} Children in kinship care are often suffering from significant long term emotional impacts, having in many cases experienced domestic violence, abuse or neglect from their parents.^{vii}

If kinship carers aren't able to fulfil this role, affected children may end up in the care system - where outcomes are significantly less positive.^{viii} It is imperative that kinship carers are given appropriate support to allow them to maintain continued care to the children.

Kinship families should receive rights, support and benefits similar to those afforded to foster families and adoptive families. This should include:

- Priority school admissions, Pupil Premium Plus, free childcare for two years, and a designated member of school staff to promote educational attainment for all children in kinship care for more than 28 days.
- Unpaid adjustment leave and paid employment leave for kinship carers.
- A national financial allowance for kinship carers raising children who would otherwise be in the care system.
- An entitlement to free legal advice for kinship carers.

- An exemption from spare room subsidy, benefits cap, changes to pension credit, and the limiting of child tax credit to two children for kinship carers.

3. Ring-fence money for children's social care services to identify children affected by parental substance misuse, and to provide support to ensure they are given the opportunities to recover and thrive.

Children of parents with substance misuse problems can experience neglect, and physical and emotional abuse, and it is common for them to develop mental health substance misuse issues as a result of their experiences, which increases the likelihood of negative outcomes as they grow older.^{ix} Children's social care services are best placed to engage with these children but don't always have the capacity to identify them due to decreasing staffing levels and increasing and growingly complex workloads.^x Increased funding would enable these services to give these children the support they need.

An innovation fund should be introduced to support children of parents affected by substance misuse as a whole, building on the positive action government has taken to improve support and recognition for children of alcohol dependent parents.

4. Provide funding to start a national conversation to improve public understanding of the impact of substance misuse on others and to tackle stigmatising attitudes.

Two million adults in Great Britain have experienced stigma or judgement as a result of the substance misuse of someone they know – this can include derisory societal attitudes towards substance misuse, inappropriate language on social media, and insensitive remarks from friends or colleagues.^{xi}

The Government should start a national conversation about the impact of drugs and alcohol on families, working with expert organisations to raise awareness, challenge stigma, and change the public's understanding of substance misuse.

Often family members are silenced by stigma, avoiding sharing their loved one's substance misuse problem with others due to fear of judgement. By addressing stigma, families and affected others will feel less isolated and more comfortable accessing support.

Supporting a loved one with a substance misuse problem can affect people's productivity at work and in some cases families have had to give up their employment as a result. Employers should be better informed about the impact of substance misuse on families, and how to be flexible and support employees affected by this issue, to prevent family members needing to give up employment as a result of their situation.

Basic training or information should be provided to employers so they can identify the kind of issues that families affected by substance misuse face, and how they can be a supportive employer towards them.

Family members can sometimes be reluctant to engage with emergency and frontline services through fear of judgement. Frontline and emergency services should be delivered on the basis of dignity and respect and encouraged to communicate in a sensitive and non-judgmental way with families affected by substance misuse.

5. The Health and Social Care Select Committee should launch an inquiry into the relationship between substance misuse, mental ill-health, and poverty in families, and should produce recommendations to prevent these negative impacts of substance use on families.

The first report from the House of Commons Health and Social Care Select Committee's Inquiry into drug policy^{xii} made welcome mention of the multiple and profound effects that drug use has on families and carers, including mental ill-health and financial impacts, as is consistent with Adfam's research.

5.7 million adults in Great Britain have experienced a mental health problem such as stress, anxiety, or depression as a result of a loved one's substance use, and 2.8 million adults have experienced financial impacts such as debt.^{xiii}

This should be considered an issue of major public concern, particularly in light of existing evidence on the wider link between substance use, poverty, and mental ill-health,^{xiv} and a further inquiry is urgently needed to understand the negative impacts of substance use on families and to make recommendations as to how to prevent them.

ⁱ Adfam/YouGov 2019

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ⁱⁱⁱ Adfam/YouGov 2019

^{iv} Carers Trust 2013

^v Grandparents Plus 2019

^{vi} Hunt & Waterhouse 2012, University of Oxford & Family Rights Group

^{vii} Grandparents Plus 2017

^{viii} Grandparents Plus 2017

^{ix} Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs 2011

^x Adfam, forthcoming

^{xi} Adfam/YouGov 2019

^{xii} House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee 2019

^{xiii} Adfam/YouGov 2019

^{xiv} See, for example, Scottish Drugs Forum 2007; Chief Medical Officer 2013; The Mental Health Foundation 2016