



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Working Together to Reduce Harm

Substance Misuse Annual Report,
Treatment Data and Forward Look

2021



gov.wales

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Introduction

The reporting year '2020' will long be remembered by society as the novel coronavirus which fundamentally changed the world and life as we know it.

The coronavirus has touched all our lives and Welsh Government priorities have always been the well-being of the people and doing all we can to limit the impact of the virus on society. Therefore, it was paramount to maintain continuity and to ensure service users were still able to access the support and services necessary at a time of great uncertainty. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of the new situation we find ourselves in, we are very proud of what our front services have achieved.

In 2019 the Welsh Government published its three year Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019–2022 (“the Delivery Plan”). The Welsh Government plan aims to improve the quality and safety of services for the well-being of the people of Wales. The onset of COVID-19 has led to the Welsh Government reviewing the Plan to ensure that it reflects the work that has been, and will be, undertaken as a result of the pandemic. In January 2021 the Welsh Government published and updated Delivery Plan following consultation with stakeholders with additional priorities in response to the pandemic.

These are:

- Ensure the ongoing delivery of essential services highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, including improving access to services and reduced waiting times. Ensure a range of OST provision is available based on the needs of the individual and best practice as set out both by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and in the Orange Book (ongoing).
- Evaluate the impact of injectable buprenorphine (Buvidal) (January 2021).
- Revise the DAN 24/7 website and work closely with APBs and Service Providers on this. The site will be seen as a key element of the digital offering for individuals and will link closely to other forms of digital support offered by service providers (December 2020).
- Establish a Wales wide Recovery Plan to support services in ensuring preparedness for potential second COVID-19 peak. In particular, this will consider the use of digital and new service models (December 2020).
- Review the actions in the Plan to assess them against those groups where it is becoming clearer they have been most impacted by COVID-19 (e.g. Black Asian and Minority Ethnic/low income/unemployed/in debt/ children and young people (including those in the justice system)) (ongoing).

- Closely monitor the trends in Drug Related Deaths (DRDs) throughout COVID-19 and ensure that the National Implementation Board for Drug Poisoning Prevention (NIBDPP) can take the necessary actions. This will be informed by the recently re-established Case Review Co-ordinators (CRCs) Sub-Group which review all drug related deaths. Any specific actions from discussion with the NIBDPP will be incorporated into future updates of the Plan (ongoing).
- To provide additional support through the Out of Work Peer Mentoring Service for short-term unemployed people with mental health and/or substance misuses issues as a result of COVID-19 (ongoing).
- Ensure service user feedback is taken on board by taking into account the findings of the Peer Led – COVID-19 Impact Study and continue carrying out service user research in relation to treatment and support during COVID-19, which in turn will influence future practice in meeting needs (ongoing).

This report should be read in conjunction with the Public Health Wales document:

Data Mining Wales – The annual profile for substance misuse 2020–21¹. It is accessible from the Public Health Wales site:

www.publichealthwales.org/substancemisuse

1. Both reports contain more detailed information in relation to the caveats surrounding the data presented in this report.
© Crown copyright 2022 WGxxxx Digital ISBN xx-x-xx-xx-x Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.
This document is also available in Welsh.

Substance Misuse Delivery Plan 2019–22

Key Themes in 2020–2021 Education and Awareness

Preventing future substance misuse is as important as treating the established problem and we want everyone in Wales to be aware of the consequences of misusing drugs or alcohol, and importantly where they can seek help and support. Projects to educate and raise awareness include:

DAN 24/7

DAN 24/7 is a free bilingual helpline providing a single point of contact for anyone in Wales wanting further information or help relating to drugs or alcohol.

In 2020–2021 there were 4,865 contacts made to DAN 24/7, a 7% increase on 2019–2020.

Traffic to the website has decreased by 22% during the same timeframe.

Welsh Government, in conjunction with our national helpline DAN 24/7 continues to support specific work to target hard to reach areas across Wales and respond to local issues.

This initiative utilises a van with digital display enabling clear messages to be delivered prominently within local communities areas, allowing us to react quickly to any current trends, warnings in relation to drug use and provide both educational and harm reduction information. In addition, the campaign also promotes the national DAN 24/7 helpline. The van made 55 visits in 2020–2021.

Social media continues to be important in both raising awareness of the national DAN 24/7 helpline and in getting harm reduction messages out to target groups. It has proved to be especially useful in providing drug alerts, links to drug information on the DAN 24/7 website when an area has a problem with a specific drug and also in engaging with other services across Wales.

In addition, the DAN 24/7 website has been upgraded to be digitally optimised for ease of accessibility and use.

During 2020–21, Welsh Government worked closely with the national DAN 24/7 helpline to ensure there was relevant information available with regards to COVID-19 and that services remained available during this time. This included a link on the DAN 24/7 website homepage providing updates on relevant guidance relating to COVID-19.

The DAN 24/7 website can be accessed via the following link: www.dan247.org.uk

Support in Schools/Children and Young People

The Wales Police Schools Programme operates in all primary and secondary schools in Wales, delivering education on substance misuse and wider community and personal safety issues at all key stages of the curriculum. The Police Schools Programme has been significantly impacted by the effects of COVID-19 during 2020–21.

Moving onwards we will be working in conjunction with the Police to get School Community Police Officers back into schools subject to COVID regulations. We will also work to continue making progress with the review of the Police Schools Programme which was undertaken by the Police.

www.schoolbeat.org

Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018

From the 2 March 2020, the Public Health (Minimum Price for Alcohol) (Wales) Act 2018 Act introduced a minimum price for alcohol supplied in Wales and made it an offence for alcohol to be supplied below that price. A minimum price sets a floor price, meaning that alcohol cannot be sold or supplied below that price. It has not increased the price of every drink, only those which are currently sold or supplied at below any minimum price. Under the Act, the applicable minimum price will be calculated by combining the minimum unit price, the strength of the alcohol and its volume. This formula specifically allows us to target those drinks currently sold at an unacceptably low price relative to their alcohol content. Trading Standards Wales are leading on enforcement of the minimum unit price. Minimum Unit Pricing has been in place throughout 2020–21 but has been impacted by the effects of COVID-19.

Inspections by Trading Standards (TS) Officers have been reduced due to the reallocation of officers to Covid related duties. Moving forward we will be working with TS Officers to increase inspection rates across Wales.

<https://gov.wales/minimum-unit-pricing-alcohol>

Our approach to tackling substance misuse in Wales is based on the core principle of harm reduction, by enabling, encouraging and supporting substance users to reduce the harms they may be causing to themselves, their families and communities. There are a range of harm reduction initiatives in place including:

The Alcohol Liaison Project and Gwent Drug and Alcohol Service (GDAS). The alcohol liaison worker strengthens the pathway from secondary care into GDAS.

Take Home Naloxone

Take Home Naloxone (THN) is an emergency antidote to opiate overdose. It blocks opioid receptors to counteract the effects of opioid drugs (such as heroin, methadone and morphine), reversing the life-threatening effects of an overdose such as depressed breathing. Since 2011, the Welsh Government has successfully rolled out a programme to distribute THN Kits, following a successful pilot project launched in 2009 and an independent evaluation. This programme will remain a key developmental priority.

Since THN has reportedly been used during 3,081 opioid drug poisoning events, each one a potential drug death.

THN is available from 58 registered sites. The number of sites supplying THN has increased year on year from 11 'pilot' sites participating in 2009 to 58 in 2020-21. 18,741 individuals have been supplied with 29,145 THN kits throughout Wales since THN started.

Take Home Naloxone Kits issued in 2020-21:

2,459 individuals supplied with THN (supply or re-supply), a decrease of **3%** from the previous year.

This represents the second and largest decrease of supply since the programme began (see Table 1).

923 

new individuals supplied with THN, a decrease of

33%

from the previous year.

4,063 

THN kits supplied, a decrease of

17%

from the previous year.

225 

reportedly used in overdose.

Developments

WG are currently working with police forces across Wales to allow officers to carry nasal naloxone. This work is being progressed and it is hoped that by the end of 2021 officers across all police forces in Wales will be carrying naloxone.

A peer to peer project for the delivery of naloxone has been established in Gwent and is currently being rolled out across Wales due to the success of this project. This project supports peers with lived experience to go out on the streets and provide naloxone along with harm reduction advice to people who may or may not be in treatment or contact with services.

Needle Syringe Programmes

One potential outcome of drug use, especially injecting drug use, is chronic infection with blood borne viruses like Hepatitis C and HIV.

Needle Syringe programme provide needles and other drug related paraphernalia to people who inject drugs, including image and performance enhancing drugs.

The main aim of needle and syringe programmes is to support a harm reduction approach to reduce the risk of transmission of blood borne viruses and other infections caused by sharing injecting equipment, such as HIV, Hepatitis B and C.

During 2020–21 the total number of individuals accessing Needle Syringe Programmes was

18,595

9,658 (52%)

were considered regular users of NSP services (defined as two or more transactions in 2020–21 or for reported IPED use – at least one transaction in 2020–21 and in the previous year).

This represented a reduction of

26.2%

from the previous year.

47.3%

accessing for primary Image and Performance Enhancing Drugs.

56.6%

accessing for primary opioid use.

17.7%

accessing for primary Stimulant use including New Psychoactive Substances (NPS)

Welsh Emerging Drugs Identification of Novel Substances (WEDINOS)

WEDINOS is a project to provide a system for the collection and testing of new psychoactive substances and combinations of substances, providing rapid and accurate information to individuals and organisations to reduce harms and provide pragmatic harm reduction advice. Since 2013 a total of 19,829 samples have been received, from across all seven health board areas. Substances have been identified in combination and isolation.

In 2020–21, 3,871 samples were received representing a decrease of 21% compared to 2019–20 due to zero submissions from night time economy venues as a consequence of COVID restrictions:

- 3,416 samples were analysed
- 158 substances were identified
- Median age of sample providers was 33.

As in 2019–20, benzodiazepines were the most commonly identified class of mind altering/psychoactive substances. In a change to previous years, diazepam was the most commonly identified substance. In 2020–21, this was followed by cocaine, flubromazolam and etizolam.

Blood-Borne Virus (BBV)

Blood-borne viruses (BBVs) are viruses that can be carried in the blood and can spread from one person to another through blood and other body fluids. The most common BBVs are Hepatitis C virus (HCV), Hepatitis B virus (HBV), and Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).

A blood test can check for HIV, HBV or HCV infection. The blood test can confirm whether you have been exposed to any of the BBVs. A vaccine is available to protect anyone who is at increased risk of infection. There is currently no vaccine for HCV or HIV infection.

In 2019 we introduced a new KPI for BBV testing with a target to work towards ensuring 50% of service users offered and tested. In 2019–20 testing has already been offered to 38.9% (4,094 individuals) and 33% (3,475) individuals were tested. Due to COVID pandemic restrictions and reprioritisation of laboratory capacity, the KPI for BBV testing was temporarily suspended for 2020–21.

Treatment

High quality treatment and support is the most effective way of improving the physical and mental health and wellbeing of problematic substance users. The provision of support ranges from basic harm minimisation and other advice; to detoxification, residential care and relapse prevention.

Referrals

During 2020-21 there were:

22,684 referrals into substance misuse services.

1,337 further referrals who did not attend prior to assessment.

Assessments, during 2020–21

The total number of clients assessed by specialist substance misuse providers was:

17,259 Down **6.6%** from 2019–20.

The number of clients assessed for problematic drug use was:

8,095  compared with **9,0751**  assessed for problematic alcohol use.

Within problematic drug use by clients assessed:

heroin accounted for

3,108 
of all assessments.

cannabis accounted for

1,868 
of all assessments.

cocaine accounted for

983 
of all assessments.

921 were under 20 years old.

3,320 were between 20–59 years old.

977 were 60 years old or over.

Males accounted for

5,465 
of alcohol assessments.

and

5,591
of drug assessments.

NB – Figures only include heroin, cannabis & cocaine for males.

Injectable Buprenorphine

Injectable Buprenorphine (commonly referred to as Buvidal®) is a prolonged release product which is administered as a subcutaneous injection either weekly or monthly. Treatment is intended for use in adults and adolescents aged 16 years or over. The slow release drug, Buvidal®, means people with problematic drug use will only have to attend treatment once or a week or once a month instead of the usual daily visits, helping to reduce risks for both service users and staff and relieving pressure on substance misuse services, pharmacies and the NHS.

Case Study: **Buvidal®**

After a childhood of trauma and abuse, Melanie self-medicated with alcohol and, latterly, benzodiazepines and heroin. She never had any significant periods of treatment for her mental health or addiction issues until recently. She was prescribed oral Buprenorphine and Diazepam to help her stay in work prior to transferring to the NHS service in Cardiff, Wales. She was still drinking heavily and struggling with mental health, though managing to remain in work, when first seen.

A discussion was held with Melanie to determine whether she would benefit from switching to a long-acting version of Buprenorphine (commonly known as Buvidal®), Melanie was keen to try this new approach and commenced the treatment.

Melanie later reported that she felt much better and her in own words:

It's liberating, taking tablets every day becomes part of a routine – like Heroin it is still every day – but with Buvidal it feels medical. It takes away the addictive part of it.

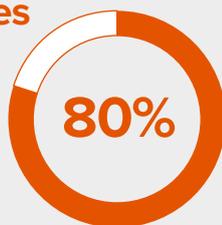
Taking Heroin in the morning and taking a tablet (of Buprenorphine) every morning with a coffee – it's still the same.

In addition, her drinking has reduced to social levels and she no longer sees work as a struggle. In addition, she is addressing her mental health issues and has started medication/engagement in treatment for other physical health conditions she has.

Melanie continues to have her long-acting buprenorphine injection and she is in effect, a normal middle-aged female, successfully managing her work and engaging with sorting out her health concerns. It is anticipated Melanie will be ready to consider detoxification options once her other physical and mental health issues have settled.

Waiting times

During 2020–21 there was a target for

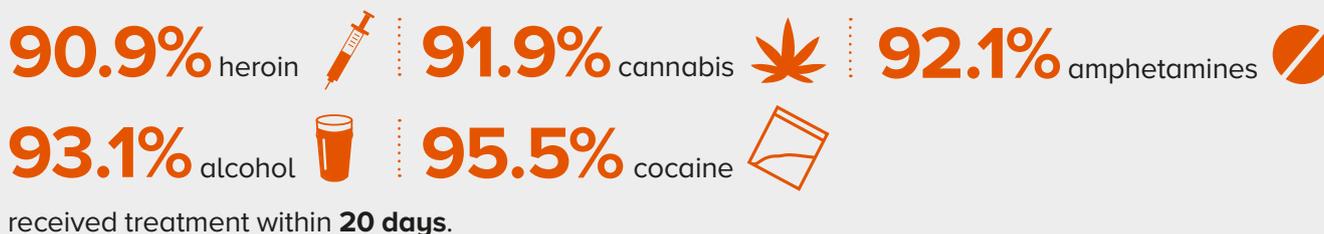


of people to access treatment within **20 working days** of referral.

Overall



of people to access services within **20 working days** of referrals.



Treatment



of clients Did Not Attend (DNA) treatment or the contact ended before treatment began following the assessment stage.

The total number of clients starting treatment in 2020–21 was

14,686 down by **8.8%** on 2019–20.

Treatment outcomes

86.2% of people reported a reduction, abstinent or no change in their substance misuse in 2020–21 compared to **85.9%** in 2016–17.

83.1% of people reported improved quality of life in 2020–21 compared to **82.1%** in 2016–17.

82.3% of people of people have completed treatment either problematic substance free or have reached their treatment goals in 2020–21 compared to **74.8%** in 2016–17.

Recovery

Recovery can be defined as “a process in which the difficulties associated with substance misuse are eliminated or significantly reduced and the resulting personal improvement becomes sustainable”. In Wales we fund and offer a wide range of evidence-based services and interventions in a range of settings throughout the substance misuse treatment system including:

667 alcohol clients  and **752** drug clients  have received specific **Health and Recovery Support Interventions**.

Case Study: **Housing**

In April 2020, when the pandemic hit, it was made compulsory for local authorities to provide accommodation for all those that were classified as street homeless within their county.

In Swansea the majority of homeless people were placed within a number of bed and breakfasts along Oystermouth Road. Subsequently Swansea Council reported that people living in B&B accommodation were unable to access the services required to support them with their substance misuse issues and that if they were able to access services this would address the anti-social behaviour problems that were occurring at the buildings on Oystermouth Road.

In response a working group was convened with colleagues from housing and substance misuse services. The group identified those who were in service, or known to services from historic contact, as well as what, if any, substance they were known to have an issue with.

Services utilised several of their staff, along with the Homelessness Nurse for Swansea to deliver a targeted outreach service to try and engage with everyone on the list.

Some outreach workers reported service users were finding it increasingly hard and needed to access treatment. As a result a number of individuals were identified as needing prescribing services and the Community Drug and Alcohol Team (CDAT) developed a rapid access service whereby individuals could be fast tracked into this service.

After reviewing the cases the Group concluded that the risk in relation to substance misuse was manageable. There were only a very low number of people who had no current or historic engagement, who were then targeted by Outreach services. Harm reduction advice and equipment, such as naloxone) were actively given to reduced overdose risks.

Outreach services across Housing and Substance Misuse have developed closer joint working arrangements to ensure appropriate support is provided across the range of needs. The speed at which people are able to access a service once they have been referred and to make recommendations has also improved significantly.

Out of Work Peer Mentoring Service

It is widely recognised that people in recovery from substance misuse often face many barriers to employment – these can include prejudice and rejection, a lack of skills and confidence, and complex mental health issues. Finding the right job can make a huge difference to improving the prospects of long term recovery – improving self-esteem and confidence and reducing stress and anxiety.

Since the Out of Work Peer Mentoring Service (OoWS) commenced in August 2016, it has been supporting people recovering from substance misuse and/or mental ill-health back into education, training and employment. By October 2021, almost 17,000 people have been supported by the service.

This demand for support has continued since the country went into lockdown in March 2020, with existing participants requiring increased levels of support as anxiety levels grew, whilst many new participants sought support from the OoWS.

Participant Activity

Between April 2020 and March 2021, the OoWS supported over 2,800 people of which 43% were recovering from substance misuse only or from both mental ill-health and substance misuse. In this period, over 300 people were supported into employment, almost 1,200 were helped to gain a qualification or work-related certificate, 500 people helped to search for work and almost 500 completed volunteering and work placements.

Delivery

The OoWS which ends in August 2022 is delivered in Dyfed, Gwent, North Wales, Powys and Western Bay by Cyfle Cymru and by Platform in Cwm Taf and Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Evaluation of the OoWS

An evaluation of the service was published on 2 July 2020. A link is below:

<https://gov.wales/out-work-service-evaluation-final-report>.

A further evaluation assessing the quality of service received by participants and the impact of Covid is scheduled for 2022.

Client Feedback: Barod Cymru

I was abstinent for 2 years and 7 months prior to lockdown. I maintained my sobriety until roughly July which by that point I had been self – isolating since March/April, My coping mechanisms such as peer support groups, voluntary work, daily exercise, daily contact with my parents were all halted leaving me at a loss, bored, agitated and angry.

I drank approximately a bottle of vodka a day, decreasing to five bottles of wine a day, and became unwell as I suffer with withdrawal seizures and delirium tremens. I was hospitalised and detoxed for 3 days. On release my alcohol use instantly began again where I was drinking approximately 4/5 bottles of wine every day. I managed to decrease to 2 bottles and then detoxed at home with my partner over a weekend. In all I drank every day for roughly 2 months.

Case Study (North Wales): **Buvidal/Recovery Programme**

Tom is a young man who was brought to the attention of the Harm Reduction Team by the police due to concerns for his safety. The team undertook outreach on the day the concerns were made and managed to locate Tom and offer him some support.

Tom was known to several services however did not consistently engage with any, and was using illicit substance and had a chaotic life with a history of non-fatal accidental overdose.

He was homeless and there had been several reports of Tom finding himself in dangerous situations due to the level of intoxication. Tom agreed to a discussion with the outreach team who took him to a cafe and identified what he perceived of his main issues.

He identified his housing circumstances as one of his main problems. Tom was clearly neglecting himself and the BCUHB safeguarding team were approached and advised a Multi-Disciplinary Team could be organised under the North Wales Self Neglect Protocol to support the individual.

Following on from this and with input from various services including housing, police, community drug service and the Harm Reduction Team, Tom was placed in emergency temporary accommodation. Initially he was very reluctant to engage with Community Drug Services to try and stabilise him and refused on several occasions to attend an assessment.

Staff from Harm Reduction Team and the Drug service met with Tom to identify what the barrier was to his engaging in with treatment services to see if this could be overcome. It transpired he did not want to be on a prescription for methadone so he was reassured other treatments were available and following an assessment and a further appointment with the Doctor at the drug service supported by the Harm Reduction Team, Tom was prescribed an alternative treatment option with a view to being prescribed Buprenorphine, commonly known as Buvidal®.

Following several weeks of engagement Tom reported that he had not been in “such a good place in my head since I can remember. I’m not using Crack anymore or gear, I feel really good, I feel happy”.

Tom also commenced on treatment for Hepatitis C through the community outreach Blood Borne Virus specialist screening and treatment programme in which the Harm Reduction Service offer in collaboration with BCUHB Pharmacist.

Tom has since moved on to supported accommodation and is engaged with wrap round services.

Population Outcomes

Alcohol consumption

In 2019–20, 19% of adults (or 1 in 5) reported drinking over the weekly guidelines.

(source: National Survey for Wales 2020)

Problematic Drug Use

Estimates of problematic use of opioids, cocaine and crack, amphetamine and new psychoactive substances indicate that there are estimated to be around 44,620 individuals in Wales, aged 15–64 years who are using these types of drugs, including those in contact with health and criminal justice services. Further work is being undertaken to validate these estimates in Wales.

Hospital admissions – alcohol

The number of individuals admitted to hospital for an alcohol specific condition has decreased by 16.6% over the last 5 years.

Hospital admissions – drugs

Hospital admissions related to use of illicit drugs decreased by 11.8% compared with 2019–20. Admissions data suggests that use of multiple drugs remains relatively stable.

Hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions involving young people (under 25) has fallen by 21% compared with previous year.

The number of older adults (50 and over) hospital admissions for poisonings with illicit drugs in 2020–21 decreased by 10.6% compared to the previous year.

The number of hospital admissions for alcohol specific conditions involving working age adults (aged 25–49) has decreased by 12.8% compared to 2019–20.

Amongst young people (up to 25 years) hospital admission related to opioids have fallen by 27% in the last five years.

Cannabinoid related admissions have decreased by 23% (all age groups) compared to the previous year.

Opioids continue to account for more admissions in working aged adults than any other substance, with 44.3% admissions in 2020–21. However, admissions for opioids in this age group declined by 15.8% compared to 2019–20.

Hospital admissions involving illicit drugs in older people decreased by 7.5% in 2019–20 compared to the previous year.

Case Study: **Young People Activities/Engagement March 2020 [GWENT CYP]**

Sarah is a young person who was referred over to the activities and engagement team for additional support during lockdown. Whilst Sarah was apprehensive on being referred into the activities team at the time, she engaged with online activities in March, April, May and June of 2020 to handle her increasing anxiety and potential relapse. She engaged with the activities team whilst receiving support from the specialist case workers within N-gage.

During this time, Sarah participated in a number of activities online with other young people who were part of the N-gage service and contributed to facilitated discussions around keeping safe and managing triggers due to increased anxiety as a result of the pandemic. She shared with the group how much she was struggling to manage her education via online platforms due to additional needs related to her physical and emotional health.

In each of the sessions, the young people were encouraged to plan the focus of the next session and share anything that they were experiencing that they would like their peers to help them resolve. By doing so, the group of young people developed a support network (albeit it online) to help them get through the tough initial shutdown that the pandemic brought.

Sarah brought to the online group issues around self-image and how social media has massive but negative impact on the way that young people see themselves. She then went on to share with us a piece of written work that she had put together to reflect how she felt social media influences young people self-image.

Without engaging with the project and working with N-Gage online, the young person would never have been able to share her anxieties with the group.

The written piece of work that was produced by Sarah was eventually submitted for a competition (the Mike Parry awards) for which, there was a young person's category for the very first time. Sarah's work was considered by the judges as an outstanding contribution to the contest and she won the young person's category of the competition.

Drug Related Deaths

In 2020, there were 224 drug poisoning deaths (involving both legal and illegal drugs) in Wales.

Of these:

- 149 were drug misuse deaths (involving illegal drugs).
- This represented a 10% reduction in drug misuse deaths compared with 2019.

Alcohol Related Deaths

Alcohol related deaths have remained relatively stable over the past 5 years.

In 2020 there were 570 alcohol related deaths and 438 alcohol specific deaths registered in Wales. This represents an increase of 15 and 19% respectively compared to the previous year.

| | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Drug poisoning | 208 | 168 | 238 | 271 | 260 | 327 | 240 | 224 |
| Drug misuse | 135 | 113 | 168 | 192 | 185 | 208 | 165 | 149 |

Impact on Children and Young People

Hospital admissions for foetuses and new-borns affected by maternal use, or withdrawal from, of alcohol or other drugs of addiction have remained very stable over recent years.

There have been 72 admissions for foetuses and new-borns affected by maternal use, or withdrawal from, alcohol or other drugs of addiction in 2020–21, a 17% decrease from the previous year, however over the last decade there has been no clear trend.

In 2020, there were 16,235 cases of children in need receiving care and support in which the child's substance misuse was identified as an issue.

Of these, there were 4,405 cases of children in need receiving care and support due to parental substance misuse.

Forward Look and Key Challenges for the next 12 months

Tackling substance misuse continues to be a priority for the Welsh Government and a significant area to focus upon if we are to meet our ambitions in “A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care”. Substance misuse is a major health issue which affects individuals, families and communities and this plan sets out the priority areas we will focus on with our partners to achieve our ambition of reducing the harms associated with substance misuse.

The pandemic has impacted on everyone in Wales and this includes some of the most vulnerable including those who experience substance misuse issues. Our services have continued to support people throughout, and have in particular been working to support the homeless over this period. We will further develop our support for those with complex needs including our priority of improving co-occurring mental health and substance misuse treatment and support. In addition, we will publish a national framework for prevention, diagnosis, treatment and support for alcohol-related brain damage (ARBD). Given some of the key work undertaken during the pandemic, we have reviewed the Delivery Plan to consider where it needs to be updated in light of COVID-19 – particularly to meet the new challenges ahead. Having undertaken this review and considered the evidence highlighted by APBs and wider partners, it is suggested that the original priority areas for the next three years remain relevant, and have been reinforced during the pandemic.

However, given the impact of COVID-19, it is recommended that there are new actions which need to be included in the Delivery Plan, some actions where a greater emphasis needs to be placed. There are also certain actions where timescales have needed to be delayed given the need to prioritise the response to the pandemic.

New Actions

- Ensure the ongoing delivery of essential services highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic, including improving access to services and reduced waiting times. Ensure a range of OST provision is available based on the needs of the individual and best practice as set out both by NICE and in the Orange Book.
- Evaluate the impact of injectable buprenorphine (Buvidal).
- Revise the DAN 24/7 web-site and work closely with APBs and Service Providers on this. The site will be seen as a key element of the digital offering for individuals and will link closely to other forms of digital support offered by service providers.
- Establish a Wales wide Recovery Plan to support services in ensuring preparedness for potential second COVID-19 peak. In particular, this will consider the use of digital and new service models.
- Review the actions in the Plan to assess them against those groups where it is becoming clearer have been most impacted by COVID-19 (e.g. BAME/low income/unemployed/in debt/children and young people (including those in the justice system)).
- Closely monitor the trends in Drug Related Deaths throughout COVID-19 and ensure that the National Implementation Board for Drug Poisoning Prevention (NIBDPP) can take the necessary actions. This will be informed by the recently re-established Case Review Co-ordinators Sub-Group which review all drug related deaths. Any specific actions from discussion with the NIBDPP will be incorporated into future updates of the Plan.
- To provide additional support through the Out of Work Peer Mentoring Service for short-term unemployed with mental health and/or substance misuses issues as a result of COVID-19.
- Ensure service user feedback is taken on board by taking into account the findings of the Peer Led – COVID Impact survey and continuing to carrying out service user research in relation to treatment and support during COVID-19, which in turn will influence future practice in meeting needs.

A copy of updated Delivery Plan, published on 28 January 2021 can be found here:

English: <https://gov.wales/substance-misuse-delivery-plan-2019-2022-0>

Welsh National Database for Substance Misuse (WNDSM) annual report1:

<https://gov.wales/drug-misuse-dependency>