



Sobering up – how Dorset is tackling drug and alcohol harm

Alcohol and drug use is changing - and we're working with partners to tackle it across Dorset. Health programme advisor Will Haydock tells the story of changing habits and future plans for reducing alcohol and drug-related harm.

By [Will Haydock](#)

Whether it's a newspaper reporting about [binge drinking](#), [drink driving at Christmas](#) or the debate around [legalising cannabis](#), drug and alcohol use is an issue that never seems to be far from the headlines.

Even in the last few weeks there have been a number of drug and alcohol-related stories: Eton College funding research into ['legal highs'](#), and MP Liam Byrne raising awareness of the damage parental drinking can do to children. The sheer volume of these stories can make it seem like nothing changes.

There is no doubt that using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs can cause some serious problems. They can increase your risk of a range of health conditions, but also contribute to social problems, such as antisocial behaviour or litter associated with nights on the town. They can also put a strain on personal relationships and affect your ability to work and provide for yourself and your family.

It's not all bad, though. In fact, things can change, and they are changing. Young people are smoking and drinking less, and are less likely to take other substances than 10 or 20 years ago, and the number of people that are injecting heroin has fallen.

Public Health England has recently released [statistics](#) that show how people are using drug and alcohol services across the country. Although they don't show figures for Dorset specifically, we know we're seeing the same sorts of changes locally.

We know that people using these services look different to how they might have done 10 years ago. What's different is their age, background, and the substance they're struggling with.

The picture painted by Public Health England is one of fewer young people coming into treatment, and the adults that come in are more likely to be aged 40 or over. There is an ageing group of heroin users, with wide-ranging health and social problems in addition to their issues with substances. Adults accessing alcohol treatment are even older and often suffering from alcohol-related illness, though they are more likely to be employed and in decent housing, which supports their recovery.



Sobering up – how Dorset is tackling drug and alcohol harm

This change in the profile of people accessing support is a good thing – we know different people are facing different issues, so it's encouraging that support services are attracting new groups of people. But the support services we provide need to change to take this into account. They should be tailored to the people who need them.

Public Health Dorset funds a [range of services](#) to support people affected by these problems, whether through their own use or that of someone close to them. That can take a range of forms, from a short medical detox to group therapy similar to that made popular by the likes of Alcoholics Anonymous.

These services are still largely the same as they were six or seven years ago, and have yet to respond to the challenges of dealing with the new types of users and the increase in use of legal highs and the effects of binge drinking.

As a response to this, over the next year, we will be reviewing our drug and alcohol support services. This isn't just something Public Health Dorset will do in isolation, we'll be involving a whole range of organisations locally, including Dorset Police, the South West Ambulance Service, the Clinical Commissioning Group, hospitals and local authorities, to name just a few.

We're all working together to make sure that we're delivering the most effective services we can, coordinating to make sure we're all pulling in the same direction and working as efficiently possible.

In the spring next year, we'll be launching a new strategy for alcohol and other drugs that will guide the activity of all these different organisations across Bournemouth, Poole and Dorset. We'll have plenty of challenges ahead, but we hope that we can keep delivering support that helps people live happier, healthier lives across our beautiful county.

Will Haydock is a health programme advisor for Public Health Dorset.