



Adfam



Combating Drugs Partnerships: Guidance to Senior Responsible Owner's (SROs) and organisers on involving families

JULY 2023

This guidance has been written by Adfam, in collaboration with an alliance of family support organisations in England.



FOREWORD

Substance misuse can have a devastating effect not only on the individuals using substances, but crucially those close to them—particularly their families and friends. But that closeness can also be an asset: families are often a key foundation of people’s recovery.



We know that no individual or organisation can address the issues around drugs in isolation. These are cross-cutting issues, and successful delivery of the ambitions in the Drug Strategy is dependent on effective, coordinated local delivery, bringing together the whole community.

This is why, in response to my Review, the Government has committed to unprecedented investment in drug treatment in the ten-year drugs strategy From Harm to Hope, alongside national and local system reform, and a set of ambitious outcomes and goals to which government and local partners will be held accountable for delivery.

A key part of this work has been the establishment of Combating Drugs Partnerships (CDPs) in every area of England. CDPs bring together a range of organisations, linking relevant elements to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of this work. This local partnership approach is essential to delivering the ambitions in the drugs strategy.

The government’s guidance is clear that families of people who use drugs are core partners in this local work as experts by experience, and so I’m encouraged to see this guide from Adfam and its alliance partners which reinforces that message and offers practical tips on how we can make this a reality. We will only succeed in improving lives and levelling up communities if we work together across organisations, bringing together people from a range of backgrounds, and families are an essential part of this.

Dame Carol Black
Independent Advisor to the Government on Drugs

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INTRODUCTION:

Combating Drugs Partnerships were established to ensure coordination across different local delivery partners, providing a setting for understanding and addressing shared challenges related to substance use and improving practice. These partnerships should be visible and accountable for their actions, both to local residents and central government. This guide outlines why the voice of families affected by substance use should be included within these multi-agency forums.



Importance of involving families affected by substance use:

Research by Adfam estimates that almost 1 in 10 adults across Great Britain are negatively affected by the drinking or drug use of a family member or friend. The challenges faced by these families are extensive and include fear, abuse, loneliness, stress, physical and mental health, financial difficulty and stigma. Despite the range of issues families are exposed to when their loved one has a substance use problem, and caring responsibilities they may have to take on, families can often be overlooked, with their needs unmet and attention focused on the person drinking or using other substances.

The presence of support for families and carers affected by substance use is important to improve their family member's

chances of engaging and maintaining treatment, but even more so for themselves in their own right, to help with the specific impact their loved one's substance use has on them.

The Government's Commissioning Quality Standard for drug and alcohol treatment has formally recognised those with lived experience to be 'people affected by their own or other people's drug or alcohol use, including children, families, carers, friends and communities'.

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Furthermore, the Government's Guidance on Combating Drugs Partnerships states that 'The voices and full involvement of people who have experience of drug-related harm are an essential part of this partnership, including people who use (or have used) drugs, their family members, family members of those who have died or been killed as a result of involvement in drugs and, more broadly, local residents or businesses affected by drug-related harm.'

Therefore, amongst stakeholders with lived experience, it's important that families are involved so that their voices are heard, their experiences are understood, and their specific needs are recognised and acted upon. Involving family members would be a vital step to ensure the direction of substance use support, substance use prevention, policing, criminal justice and other related services, benefits from the valuable first-hand input family members can offer.

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How you can involve families:

In order to reach families, it is important firstly to reach out to the services that are currently available for families in your area. This could include your local drug and alcohol treatment service or local carers' support service, or there may be a dedicated service for families affected by substance use.

Some family members affected by substance use won't be engaged in services at all. Whilst it may be difficult to represent this particular group within the Partnerships, working with family members that are engaged with services could be a key factor in understanding and improving pathways for those that are not.

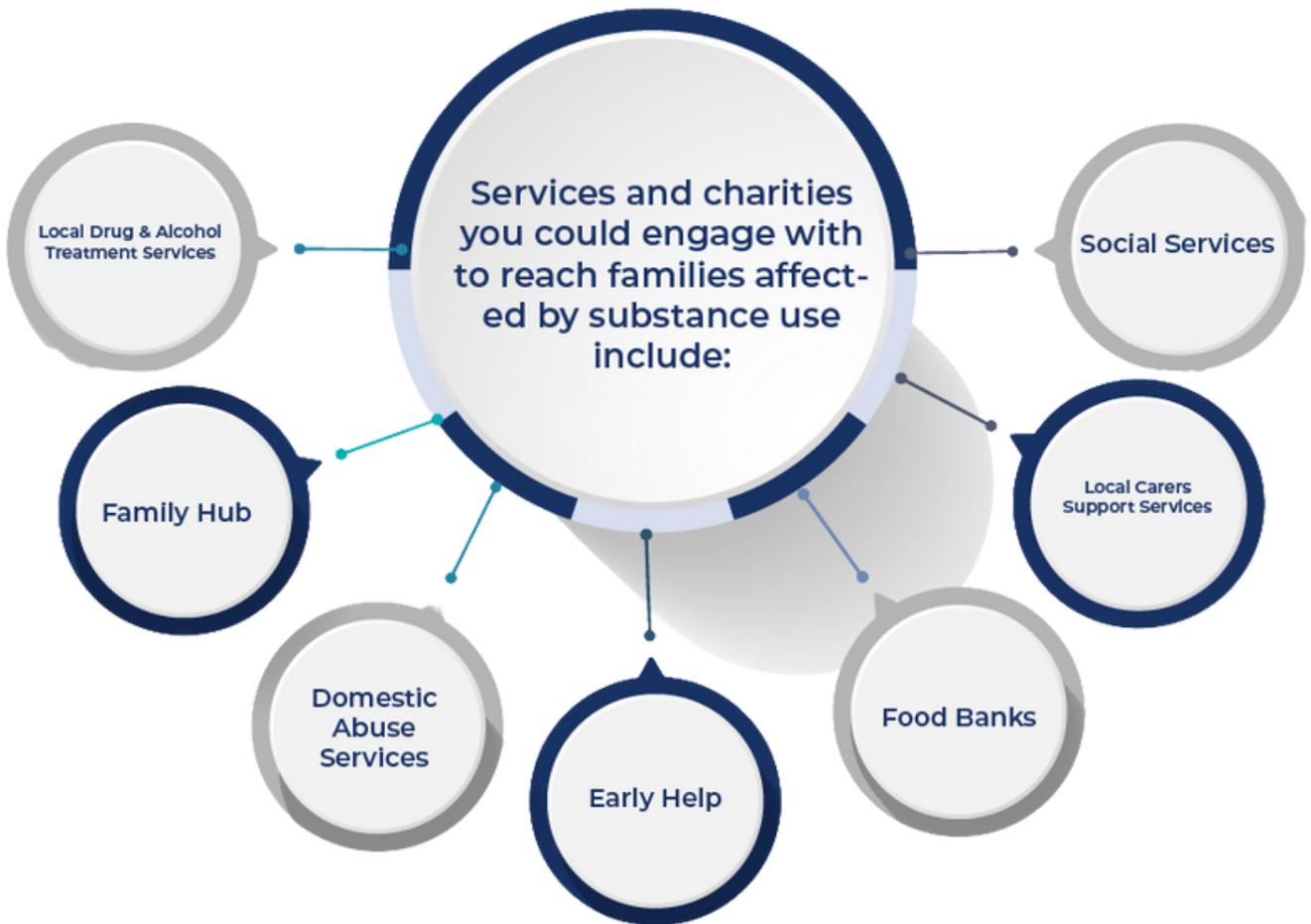
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Services and charities you could engage with to reach families affected by substance use include the following:



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Whilst services may play a useful role in reaching family members, family members should be treated as representatives on Combating Drugs Partnerships within their own right, rather than as representatives of a particular service.

Once you have identified families who may be interested in being part of your Combating Drugs Partnership, it is also important to consider how you will support them as stakeholders. It's important to ensure that they feel that their contribution is meaningful and impactful, with meetings facilitated in a way to accommodate this and ensuring they are properly informed and involved throughout the process. Furthermore, being involved in a Partnership could be a daunting prospect, as family members may not have experience of being involved in a body such as this, or knowledge of local structures and some of the local stakeholders that are involved. You may wish to consider offering training for families to be an effective member of a Partnership, to help them develop their skills around advocacy, public speaking and knowledge of local structures.

In terms of the structure of your Partnership, we would recommend involving more than one family member, to ensure a more supported environment and better representation. In addition to the central group within your Partnership, there are also opportunities to create sub-groups and working groups, focussing on issues relating to and affecting families, which could feed into the wider Partnership structure.

CHECKLIST

01 Have you determined the membership of your Combating Drugs Partnership (CDP), and does it include family members?

02 Have you considered the involvement of families within CDPs?

03 Have you considered the needs of families within your CDP's outcomes?

04 Have you considered ways you could support family members to be effective members of CDPs and advocates within the local community?

05 Have you listened to (directly or indirectly) and learnt about families affected by substance use and their experiences, taking into account diversity and inclusion?

06 Will there be sub-groups on issues affected families, that will feed into your CDP's structure?

07 Are there opportunities within the scope of the CDP for family members to contribute towards the design of services locally, and measures to tackle the supply and demand of drugs?

08 Does your local area have recognised pathways for families affected by substance use to receive support, and have you considered the role of family members within CDPs to review these?

09 Have you made contact with any dedicated services for families affected by substance use in your area?

10 Have you made contact with any family workers within your local substance use treatment service?

11 Have you made contact with your local carer's support service?

12 Have you considered engaging specialist and other services such as domestic abuse services, social services, early help, family hubs and foodbanks to reach family members?

13 Do you currently or have you made plans to record data on the number of families affected by substance use in your local area, to provide an accurate insight of the scale of the issue?

About Adfam

Adfam is a national charity tackling the negative effects of drugs and alcohol on family members and friends. We improve life for thousands of people. Our mission is to do this by:

- empowering families and friends affected by drugs, alcohol or gambling to get the support they need.
- building the confidence, capacity and capability of frontline practitioners to provide effective services.
- influencing decision-makers to understand the needs of thousands of people coping with the effects of a family member or friend misusing alcohol or drugs, or gambling.

We would like to thank the Joint Combating Drugs Unit, and our alliance partners from family support organisations working in England for their support, and input into this guidance.

Get in touch



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