



INDUCTION PACK

Addictions & Substance Misuse Portfolio: Tackling Illegal Drugs

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The APCC provides support to all
Police and Crime Commissioners
and policing governance bodies in
England and Wales

Dame Carol Black Foreword

I am pleased to support this induction pack, which I hope will be of great use to PCCs in their work on tackling drugs and drug-related crime.

Drugs inflict serious harm on individuals and communities, tearing the fabric of our society by increasingly fuelling crime and disorder. As noted in my [independent review of drugs](#), people with serious drug addiction occupy 1 in 3 prison places, cycling in and out of our criminal justice system at great expense.

With 3 million users and a supply chain that is ruthlessly violent and exploitative, drugs ruin - and in some cases end - lives. Some 27,000 young people identify as gang members, many involved in drug dealing, and the rising threat of synthetic opioids is contributing to growing numbers of drug-related deaths. This is only a glimpse of the devastating impacts of drugs, which blight our most deprived areas and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.



However, this isn't inevitable. By collectively working together at a local and national level, we can be part of real change in people's lives and meet the needs of our communities.

We know that treatment works to reduce crime and help individuals turn their lives around, so we must continue to drive up the number of people coming into treatment. Record investment means that treatment services are ready and waiting for referrals from the police and wider criminal justice partners. This could be through a range of routes, including drug testing on arrest, healthcare in custody, liaison and diversion, or arrest referral drug treatment services.

For treatment to be truly accessible and effective, we need local partners across health, police, probation, prisons, housing, and the wider community, to come together and adopt a whole-system approach. This is also vital to ensure that people who need drug treatment continue to receive this in the community when they leave prison – which reduces their risk of re-offending and relapse. By virtue of PCCs' statutory responsibility to convene partners, they are in a leading position to drive local drugs work and promote collaboration with all key agencies. Many PCCs are also the Senior Responsible Owners of the Combating Drugs Partnerships in their areas, which is yet another opportunity to bring about change.

If we are to reduce harm in the long-term, treatment and recovery must be combined with prevention, early intervention, and the disruption of drugs supply. This is vital for cutting down crime and antisocial behaviour and restoring people's feeling of safety. Whether via innovative police diversion schemes, or targeting county lines and serious organised crime, PCCs play a crucial role in all these areas.

So far, good progress has been made in building the workforce and appropriate structures. There is now the opportunity to shape local plans that deliver measurable quality and results. Local action is vital to success, and I very much hope that going forward PCCs will maximise their work with all partners to achieve better outcomes.

I look forward to hearing more about how PCCs are addressing drug-related harm in the future.



Dame Carol Black,
Author of the independent review of drugs and drug policy

APCC Portfolio leads Foreword

Drugs drive crime and anti-social behaviour. With half of all homicides and acquisitive crimes believed to be drug-related, tackling drugs may be the single most effective way that Police and Crime Commissioners, Police Fire and Crime Commissioners, Deputy Mayors and other policing governance bodies (hereafter PCCs) can prevent crime and make their communities safer. While this briefing focuses mainly on illegal drugs, high volumes of offending are also driven by harmful drinking and problem gambling.



PCCs are already contributing to tackling illegal drugs through robust enforcement to cut supply; helping to get drug dependent offenders into treatment; and reducing demand by changing attitudes to drugs. For example, PCCs have played a key role in closing County Lines and expanding the availability of naloxone, a life-saving drug which counter-acts opioid overdose and is being carried by officers in most police forces.

It's not only delivering these three components of enforcement, treatment and prevention that's important, but joining them up. For example, where enforcement disrupts drug supply, it's key that treatment services are aware of enforcement initiatives and able to take advantage of the opportunities this presents to engage people in treatment. We also need to get more people who are receiving treatment in prisons linking up with services in the community on release, and more drug-dependent offenders into treatment using community sentences and out of court disposals

PCCs are uniquely placed to convene and drive local partnerships that join the dots – many lead their Combating Drugs Partnerships (CDPs) (or Area Planning Boards in Wales), most chair their Local Criminal

Justice Boards (LCJBs), and all have strong links with their Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), third sector organisations, and often those with lived experience too. With so much violence and exploitation involved, tackling drugs and drug markets is also key to delivering the serious violence duty and to the work of Violence Reduction Units, as well as for Regional Organise Crime Units (ROCU).

As the portfolio leads, we have strong links into government – for example, we have sat on the cross-governmental ministerial forum, bringing together ministers from six key departments to ensure a coherent national approach across Whitehall, and support local partnerships to deliver. We actively support and represent all PCCs by facilitating forums, providing resources, sharing notable practice, voicing their concerns and creating opportunities for engagement with ministers, officials and partners. We hope this induction pack is a useful introduction to some key issues for the APCC and to our portfolio.



Joy Allen
Portfolio Lead, PCC for Durham



Dave Sidwick
Portfolio Lead, PCC for Dorset

Why Drugs should be a priority for PCCs?

Drugs should be a priority because they are linked to extremely high volumes of crime and anti-social behaviour:

- Around half of the increase in homicides between 2013-14 and 2017-18 was due to cases involving drug dealers, drug users or a drug related motive¹
- Nearly half of acquisitive crimes (excluding fraud) are estimated to be drug-related²
- Half of women entering prison, and over a quarter of men, have a drug problem³
- It is estimated that almost half of those supervised in the community by the probation service have a drug problem⁴
- The illicit drug market is worth an estimated 9.4 billion a year to criminals⁵
- Drug driving contributes to injury and death on our roads – over the Christmas period, officers carried out 6,846 drug tests, with nearly half testing positive (48.5%)⁶

¹ Dame Carol Black Review, Phase 1 report at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eafffed3bf7f65363e4fda/Review_of_Drugs_Evidence_Pack.pdf

² As above

³ For this and other data see [Winter-2024-factfile.pdf \(prisonreformtrust.org.uk\)](https://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Winter-2024-factfile.pdf)

⁴ [Probation services – ‘disappointing’ work with drug users ‘lacks focus and funding’ \(justiceinspectorates.gov.uk\)](https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/probation-services-disappointing-work-with-drug-users-lacks-focus-and-funding/)

⁵ Dame Carol Black Review, Phase 1 Report (see above)

⁶ <https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/over-56-000-tests-conducted-in-national-christmas-drink-and-drug-drive-operation>

- Drugs contribute to antisocial behaviour, including through public drug taking and dealing, and discarded paraphernalia, like needles or empty nitrous oxide canisters
- Half of people who say they don't feel safe alone in their local area cite drug taking and dealing.⁷

Drug trafficking and drug markets – for example, so-called “County Lines” – are associated with high levels of violence and operate through the exploitation of children and young people and other vulnerable people, including those experiencing drug addiction, mental ill health or learning disabilities. For instance, this happens through ‘cuckooing’ where criminals use exploitation and coercion to occupy someone’s property as a basis for storing and dealing drugs.

We are learning more about the links between drug misuse and crime all the time. For example, police forces carried out drug testing on individuals arrested for domestic abuse offences in 2023 in seven pilot areas. In one area, nearly 85% (127/150) of domestic abuse offenders who were tested for drugs were positive for cocaine and/or opiates; across all seven pilot forces, 59% of those tested were positive for these drugs⁸. The links between powdered cocaine misuse and domestic violence are particularly striking.

Drugs are responsible for a wide range of other harms – for example, there were nearly 5,000 registered drug poisoning deaths in 2022, with 3,127 (around two thirds) identified as drug misuse deaths, typically a result of overdose.⁹ Policing increasingly has a role in preventing deaths through administration of naloxone. Drugs and alcohol can be an issue for people who also have mental health problems, and therefore contribute to the demands this creates for policing and delivery of the Right Care Right Person¹⁰ approach. Research shows that mental health problems are experienced by the majority of drug users (70%) and alcohol users (86%) in community substance misuse treatment services.¹¹

Drug misuse is a key issue for the partners that PCCs work with, including in policing and criminal justice and in health, public health, local government, the voluntary and community sector, etc. Action by partners on drugs can have a huge impact on the delivery of Police and Crime Plan priorities, and all PCCs are encouraged to include a priority around drugs in their’ plans (as well as considering alcohol and gambling related harms). PCCs will have a particular interest in Public Health led treatment plans and commissioning, with research showing that treatment can reduce drug users offending by a quarter, with a reduction of nearly 40% in offending when opiate users complete treatment and with research using the linkage between treatment and CJS data systems indicating that treatment can reduce drug users offending for all crime types by 23%.¹² Conversely, policing and criminal justice has a vital role in getting

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/impacts-of-anti-social-behaviour-on-individuals-and-communities>

⁸ [Pilots find high levels of drug use in domestic abuse offenders \(npcc.police.uk\)](https://www.npcc.police.uk/pilots-find-high-levels-of-drug-use-in-domestic-abuse-offenders)

⁹ [Deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/deaths-related-to-drug-poisoning-in-england-and-wales)

¹⁰ [National Partnership Agreement: Right Care, Right Person - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/national-partnership-agreement-right-care-right-person)

¹¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a75b781ed915d6faf2b5276/Co-occurring_mental_health_and_alcohol_drug_use_conditions.pdf

¹² Cited in <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-drugs-phase-one-report>

drug users into treatment – for example, through Drug Testing on Arrest and court orders like Drug Rehabilitation Requirements.

Similarly with enforcement, the role of policing in closing County Lines needs to be supported with safeguarding interventions for vulnerable people drawn into trafficking, as well as by treatment and other services.

The total cost of drugs to society was estimated to be over **£19 billion** a year in 2017-18¹³, with drug-related crime accounting for nearly half of those costs (£9.3 billion) of which:

- Criminal justice services costs were estimated at £733 million a year
- Drug related enforcement costs amounted to £680 million a year.
- By comparison, the cost of drug treatment and prevention in 2017-18 was £553 million.

How can PCCs tackle drugs?

PCCs have a key role in:

- contributing to tackling illegal drugs through supporting robust enforcement to cut supply
- helping to get drug dependent offenders into treatment and off drugs
- reducing demand by changing attitudes to drug use
- strategic planning and delivery through local Combating Drugs Partnerships (CDPs)
- commissioning and co-commissioning services
- scrutinising out of court disposal (OCD) decisions in their local area, with some having drug and alcohol interventions attached
- developing innovative projects and programmes to prevent and tackle drug misuse and grants to fund local projects¹⁴
- working with partners to tackle drugs through Combating Drugs Partnerships, Community Safety Partnerships, Local Criminal Justice Boards, Health and Wellbeing Boards and other local forums.
- scrutinising local strategies and plans (e.g., treatment and recovery plans).

An APCC Deep Dive¹⁵ on the role of PCCs in local CDPs highlighted the important leadership, convening and delivery role that PCCs play locally given:

¹³ [Review of drugs: summary \(accessible version\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/684842/Review_of_drugs_summary_accessible_version.pdf)

¹⁴ apccs.police.uk/media/9255/pccs-in-england-wales-an-introduction-for-charitable-foundations-2023-2024.pdf

¹⁵ [APCC Finds Report: Deep Dive on Combating Drugs Partnerships \(apccs.police.uk\)](https://apccs.police.uk/media/9255/apcc-finds-report-deep-dive-on-combating-drugs-partnerships.pdf)

- Their statutory powers and responsibilities – e.g., holding police to account, convening partners and commissioning services
- Their footprints across Police Force Areas
- Their ability to promote a whole-system approach
- Their role as independent and publicly elected officials
- Their leadership and national influence.

PCCs have a key national role on Addictions and Substance Misuse too working through the APCC portfolio, led by Joy Allen (PCC, Durham) and David Sidwick (PCC, Dorset). Portfolio work has included:

- ensuring PCCs role in local implementation - e.g., as Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) of CDPs
- ensuring PCC voice is influencing national policy - e.g., sitting on the Inter-Ministerial Drug Group
- regularly meeting with ministers and senior officials on behalf of PCCs
- leading calls resulting in the banning of nitrous oxide
- leading role in expanding the availability of the counter-overdose drug, naloxone
- ensuring PCCs and OPCCs can access the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System, which shows activity and performance data for all substance misuse treatment provided across England
- Showcasing PCCs work - e.g., through an In Focus report and a parliamentary reception
- Enabling PCCs to work together and learn from each other - e.g., through a quarterly forum for SROs of CDPs and other interested PCCs.

The context

Combating Drugs Partnerships (CDPs)

In 2022, a 10-year drugs strategy 'From Harm to Hope' was published. This saw the introduction of 106 Combating Drugs Partnerships (CDPs). They are responsible for bringing together local partners – like health, local government, criminal justice agencies, and the voluntary and community sector – and for weaving the three strands of the drug strategy into a comprehensive local plan to address local needs. PCCs play a critical role in these partnerships, often as SROs, leads and facilitators.









The APCC conducted a deep dive on the experiences of PCCs and Police representatives of CDPs (see [APCC Findings Report: Deep Dive on Combating Drugs Partnerships \(apccs.police.uk\)](#)).

You can join the APCC's National Forum for SROs of CDPs and other interested PCCs, which provides a key link for PCCs with government ministers, senior officials and national partners. To find out more contact elliott.fitzsimmons@apccs.police.uk

National Combating Drugs Outcomes Framework¹⁶

The National Combating Drugs Outcomes Framework was published under the 2022 drugs strategy and all partners were required to contribute to outcomes.

The framework set out three strategic outcomes: reducing drug use, reducing drug-related crime, and reducing drug-related deaths and harm. The Government aimed to deliver these through the intermediate outcomes of reducing drug supply, increasing engagement in treatment and improving recovery outcomes. Local areas were asked to monitor against the metrics and develop further performance and data monitoring tailored to the local needs and available data, with locally set targets where possible.

National Combating Drugs Outcomes Framework Our ambition: a safer, healthier and more productive society by combating illicit drugs	
What we will deliver for citizens (strategic outcomes)	Measured by:
 Reducing drug use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the proportion of the population reporting drug use in the last year (reported by age) prevalence of opiate and/or crack cocaine use
 Reducing drug-related crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the number of drug-related homicides the number of neighbourhood crimes
 Reducing drug-related deaths and harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> deaths related to drug misuse hospital admissions for drug poisoning and drug-related mental health and behavioural disorders (primary diagnosis of selected drugs)
What will help us deliver this (intermediate outcomes)	Measured by:
 Reducing drug supply	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the number of county lines closed the number of moderate and major disruptions against organised criminals
 Increasing engagement in drug treatment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the numbers in treatment (both adults and young people, reported by opiate and crack users, other drugs, and alcohol) continuity of care – engagement with treatment within three weeks of leaving prison
 Improving drug recovery outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the proportion who are in stable accommodation and who have completed treatment, are drug-free in treatment, or have sustained reduction in drug use <p>Key additional components integral to recovery include housing, mental health, and employment</p>

¹⁶ [National Combating Drugs Outcomes Framework: supporting metrics and technical guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS)

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities at the DHSC collects data on alcohol and drug misuse, treatment and recovery which is available through the NDTMS. This is a rich and comprehensive data source and enables data to be accessed and compared for individual local authority areas.

PCCs and OPCCs can use these resources to understand:

- the availability and effectiveness of alcohol and drug treatment for adults in England
- trends in drug and alcohol use among adults receiving treatment, as well as information and data on young people's treatment
- the profile of patients accessing alcohol and drug treatment services.

Using this information, will enable you to understand national and local issues and trends, track progress, highlight any emerging issues of concern, influence partners and hold them to account.

You can access publicly available NDTMS data here: [NDTMS - Home](#). The APCC has also worked with OHID to enable PCCs to access further data that is not openly available on the site. If you and/or your office do not already have this access, then contact elliott.fitzsimmons@apccs.police.uk to arrange to set this up.

Up-to-date information about local patterns of use and need should be incorporated into your force's needs assessment. This should draw on a range of local data including police force drugs market profiles; CDP local drug information system (LDIS) and the Digital Crime Performance Pack.

Making connections

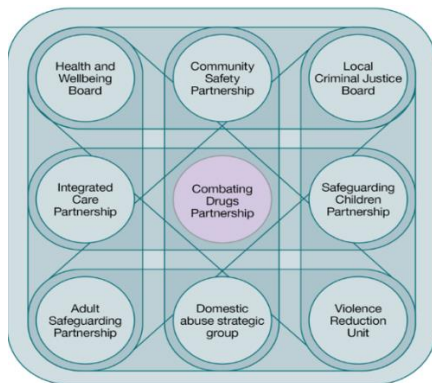
There are a range of overlapping policy areas and priorities where tackling drugs is critical. These include:

- Tackling serious violence – e.g., the Serious Violence Duty and the work of Violence Reduction Units
- Tackling organised crime – e.g., ROCUs and the “Clear, Hold, Build” approach locally
- Tackling retail crime – e.g., Business Crime Reduction Partnerships and Safer Business Partnerships
- Antisocial behaviour – e.g., through the impact of hot spot policing initiatives and ‘Grip’ serious violence funding

You can find numerous examples of PCC led initiatives in the APCC's Addictions and Substance Misuse in Focus report (2023), which you can find here: [Tackling Addictions In Focus \(apccs.police.uk\)](#)

Key issues and topics

A sample of key topics that have been a recent focus for the work of the APCC's Addictions and Substance Misuse portfolio is provided below.



County Lines

'County lines' is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons, as well as taking over vulnerable people's homes to deal drugs, known as 'cuckooing'.¹⁷

County Lines Programme

The County Lines Programme, launched in 2019, has included: expanding the National County Lines Co-ordination Centre; increased disruption on the rail networks by the British Transport Police's County Lines Taskforce; targeted operational activity in the four largest exporting force areas (Metropolitan Police Service, Merseyside Police, West Midlands Police, and Greater Manchester Police); dedicated funding for local police forces to tackle county lines; investment in new technology including Automatic Number Plate Recognition; and increased support for victims.

Since launching in 2019, law enforcement activity funded through the Programme has resulted in over 5,600 lines closed, 16,500 arrests and 8,800 safeguarding referrals.

Project ADDER

Project ADDER (addiction, disruption, diversion, enforcement and recovery) has piloted a whole-system response to combating drug misuse and related crime in 13 of the hardest hit local authorities in England and Wales. The ADDER approach aims to drive down drug related deaths, crime and prevalence by mobilising more coordinated local activity across policing, diversion and treatment services. Against the backdrop of drug use and drug dealing polling as a top public concern for crime nationally, stakeholders have reported that community perceptions of safety have increased in ADDER areas since mobilisation.

¹⁷ [County Lines Programme overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/county-lines-programme-overview)

Through Project ADDER, forces have worked to deploy levers and tools to help break cycles of drug use and drug-related offending, with benefits to policing and better outcomes for people who use drugs. Stronger multi-agency join-up and information sharing has helped forces to develop a fuller intelligence picture through which to target enforcement operations, with police partners reporting an increased focus on higher-harm individuals who control supply. Referrals into drug treatment (including through community resolutions) have increased, contributing towards reductions in drug use and dependency. Between Jan 2021 and Dec 2023 ADDER supported c. 13,500 out of court disposals (community resolutions for drug possession offences), 5,263 OCG disruptions, over £12.8m of cash seized and over 35,724 arrests.

Drug-related deaths

Synthetic Opioids

Each year over 4,000 people in the UK die from drug misuse, with opiates and opioids involved in around three quarters of these deaths. There are particular concerns about the impact of synthetic opioids on drug deaths and other harms.

Synthetic Opioids are produced in laboratories, mostly in China, and work in a similar way to natural opiates like heroin. However, they are much stronger: fentanyl is up to 50 times more potent than heroin and nitazenes from 2 to 1000 times more potent¹⁸. These drugs are often trafficked in smaller quantities through fast parcels and post due to ease of concealment, making detection by law enforcement challenging. Opiate users may not be aware if synthetic opioids are cut into heroin and other illicit drugs on the market, increasing the risk of overdose. Synthetic opioids are present in the UK drugs market, although supply and use are not yet thought to be widespread. However, there are concerns use could grow in the next 12 to 18 months, partly due to reduced Afghan opium harvests.

In 2017, there was a spike of overdose deaths linked with fentanyl in the UK, and in 2021 deaths linked with isotonitazene, but these spikes were not sustained. The National Crime Agency reported in May that there has been 176 deaths in the UK linked to nitazenes (noting that 47 of there were in Scotland).¹⁹

The National Crime Agency (NCA) has established a multi-agency operational response to these deaths - including the DHSC, Border Force, policing and local partners - to intensify and coordinate efforts to ensure all lines of enquiry are prioritised and vigorously pursued to stem the supply of nitazenes to and within the UK, and to prevent further deaths.

To support the operational response, a Synthetic Opioids Taskforce has been convened to improve understanding, preparedness and activity against the evolving threat of synthetic opioids. The Taskforce has overseen a number of mitigations and activities including:

- controlling 15 synthetic opioids (14 of which are nitazenes) under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971

¹⁸ [Nitazenes-Emerging-Drug-Briefing.pdf \(nccred.org.au\)](#)

¹⁹ [Dangerous nitazene drugs linked to rise in deaths - BBC News](#)

- ensuring the Sentencing Council considers the seriousness of synthetic opioids and their potency within their sentencing guidelines
- intensifications at the UK border to develop our intelligence on how these drugs reach the UK
- working to improve our drug harms surveillance and establishing an enhanced early warning system that will provide information on the presence and impact of synthetic opioids or other drug threats to inform decisions and response
- supporting the NPCC, working with the APCC, to encourage expanded carriage of naloxone across police forces in England and Wales
- supporting closer working with the Chief Coroner for England and Wales to encourage better and faster access to post-mortem toxicology results
- engaging with Devolved Administrations to monitor the threat and share information
- learning from experts, including the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs / international partners.

Naloxone

The risk from synthetic opioids is a further reason for expanding the availability of the counter-overdose drug naloxone, which saves lives; reduces stress and trauma to officers who would otherwise witness and report and investigate deaths; and reduces the administrative burden on the system.

The APCC portfolio has played a leading role in advocating for and supporting the roll out of this life saving drug, working closely with NPCC colleagues, and PCCs locally. For example, the four forces in Wales have equipped hundreds of officers with naloxone, with PCCs playing a lead role. Naloxone is carried on a voluntary basis by police officers in around 40 forces (34 where this is established and a further six where it is being piloted), a development which has been greatly facilitated by the introduction of a naloxone nasal spray. (Note: the decision on whether to adopt naloxone is at the discretion of Chief Constables.) In May 2024, the Department for Health and Social Care consulted on changes to allow more professionals such as nurses, paramedics and probation officers to supply naloxone to vulnerable people without a prescription,¹² a move that the APCC had advocated for in its response to the consultation.

The APCC and NPCC jointly hosted a Webinar for policing partners on 14 February 2024: “Police partners and Naloxone: Responding to current and emerging threats”. A recording of the webinar slides is available here: [APCC-NPCC Naloxone Webinar Recording 1.mp4 \(sharepoint.com\)](#).

Buvidal

The APCC portfolio has also pushed for consideration of the options for expanding the availability of Buvidal to treat opiate dependency, and particularly to ensure it is available following release from prison for those who have been prescribed it during their sentence.

Buvidal is used to treat dependence on heroin and other opiates. The active ingredient is buprenorphine, which reduces the negative effects of withdrawal; in the form of Buvidal it is administered as a prolonged release injection, normally on a weekly or monthly basis. A Lancet Study in 2023 found that Buvidal was clinically superior to standard methadone (which is widely prescribed as an opiate 'substitute') and buprenorphine treatment, resulted in greater abstinence, and was more cost effective and less costly for those with more severe opiate problems and those in treatment for more than 28 days.²⁰ It is a real concern if people who have been stabilised by Buvidal in prison and are on the road to recovery are not then able to access it on release, increasing the risk that they will relapse into addiction and re-offending.

Drug Testing on Arrest (DToA)

DToA is a powerful tool for identifying drug misusing offenders and engaging them with treatment and other support. To date, DToA powers have allowed police to test for the presence of Class A drugs for 'trigger offences' (typically acquisitive crimes), as well as non-trigger offences where there are reasonable grounds to suspect a Class A drug has contributed to or caused the offence and an inspector or more senior officer has granted approval.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan that was published in 2023²¹ proposed introducing greater use of DToA, so more drugs could be tested for with an expanded list of trigger offences. These changes were to have been introduced by the Criminal Justice Bill, which would have expanded DToA to Class B and specified Class C drugs; however, the Bill fell when parliament was prorogued for the 2024 General Election.

The APCC had strongly supported the expansion of DToA to other drugs and offence types, but expressed concern that funding for DToA was reduced from £5 million to £1 million in 2024/25, which it was felt could inhibit the expansion and development of DToA. This is an issue that the portfolio will want to pick up again with a new government – we note for example the disturbing evidence of the link between use of cocaine and incidents of domestic violence, which the portfolio is currently highlighting in a response to an ACMD inquiry on powdered cocaine and the enforcement response.

Prevention and early intervention

Neither enforcement nor treatment can provide a long-term solution to drug misuse and drug-related crime without the third pillar of the drug strategy: reducing demand through prevention and a generational shift in attitudes to drugs. In addition, while a strong focus on the misuse of opiates and crack cocaine in drug policy - and in the development of adult treatment and recovery services in particular - is understandable given the harms from these drugs, other drugs cause serious harm too, and are a source of crime and ASB, including cannabis, ketamine, MDMA, powdered cocaine and nitrous oxide.

²⁰ [Superiority and cost-effectiveness of monthly extended-release buprenorphine versus daily standard of care medication: a pragmatic, parallel-group, open-label, multicentre, randomised, controlled, phase 3 trial - eClinicalMedicine \(thelancet.com\)](#)

²¹ [Anti-social Behaviour Action Plan \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

For a vulnerable minority these drugs can be the ‘gateway’ to dependency; they also pose significant risks, expose users to criminals and criminality and increase vulnerability. They are often supplied through violent and exploitative markets linked to organised crime. The public consumption of drugs, visible drug markets and discarded drug paraphernalia can make people feel unsafe – with half of people who report that they don’t feel safe alone in their area citing drug taking and drug dealing. They are a cause of death and injury on our roads too. It is for these reasons the APCC portfolio called for the ban on nitrous oxide.

The prevalence of these drugs is much higher than for heroin and crack cocaine, and they account for most children and young people in treatment services:

- Drug use among school aged children increased by over 40% between 2014 and 2021, with notable increases in the use of cocaine, ketamine and tranquillisers, while funding for specialist young peoples’ services has fallen²²
- The proportion of children and young people under 20 sentenced for drug supply has increased significantly for most substances²³
- The England and Wales Crime Survey reports high levels of drug use among the 16 to 24 year old age group, with 17.6% of this age group (around a million people) reporting drug use in the year ending March 2023, with cannabis most common (15.4%)²⁴
- Cannabis remains the most common substance (87%) that young people come into treatment for. Around half of young people in treatment (44%) said they had problems with alcohol, 7% had problems with ecstasy and 9% reported powder cocaine problems²⁵
- According to findings on alcohol and drug treatment in secure settings in 2021 to 2022 (March 2023), while opiates were the most reported drug in treatment (46%) nearly a third (31%) reported problems with cannabis and nearly a quarter (23%) with cocaine.

Key policy in this area has included:

- The White Paper ‘Swift, Certain, Tough: New Consequences for Drug Possession’ (2022), proposed that people found in possession of drugs should be referred to drug awareness courses at their own expense, or face a fixed penalty notice or prosecution. This was broadly supported by the APCC; the proposals have not been taken forward.²⁶
- In July 2023, the then Policing Minister commissioned the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drug to consider “a whole system response, nationally and locally ... to prevent and reduce drug use and harm amongst 11-to-24 year olds over the scope of the 10-year drug strategy’. The APCC portfolio hosted a

²² [PowerPoint Presentation \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

²³ [PowerPoint Presentation \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

²⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023>

²⁵ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023>

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/swift-certain-tough-new-consequences-for-drug-possession-white-paper/swift-certain-tough-new-consequences-for-drug-possession-accessible-version>

session for PCCs with the ACMD Chair, following up with written evidence. We are awaiting the report.²⁷

- The ASB Action Plan highlighted the impact of drug misuse and drug crimes on people’s feelings of safety in their communities and included plans to expand the use of DToA (see above).²⁸

The 2022 Drug Strategy recognised that ‘preventing drug use is more cost-effective and socially desirable than dealing with the consequences’ and called for a ‘whole government approach’ including school-based prevention and early interventions, as well as recognition of the vulnerabilities of children and young people drawn into drug crime. It called for the right balance of prevention, support and sanction: ‘addressing the causes of criminal behaviour, intervening early to provide support and divert children away from the formal justice system where possible’. PCCs have played a pioneering role in developing such approaches – for example, through the Checkpoint programme and in the work of violence and reduction units, as well as helping to ensure local engagement of public health, safeguarding, schools and education at their Combating Drugs Partnerships.

Beyond drugs

The focus of this induction pack is on drug policy. However, the APCCs Addictions and Substance Misuse portfolio is equally concerned with other forms of substance use and addiction with a strong link to crime. We know, for example, that

Alcohol

Alcohol is a factor in around [39% of all violent crimes](#) in England and 49% in Wales²⁹, as well as contributing to public disorder and anti-social behaviour. Furthermore, much hidden harm is associated with alcohol misuse – e.g., through its role in domestic and intimate partner violence and child neglect.

The APCC portfolio leads have sat on the Home Office’s Alcohol Related Crime and Homicide (ARCH) Taskforce, which was set up in February 2023 with the aim of developing policies and initiatives to minimise the incidence of alcohol-related violence within the Nighttime Economy (NTE) and other public spaces and lessen its impact on communities and victims.

ARCH has funded and supported the development of a toolkit³⁰ on alcohol-related offending for use by frontline police officers published by Alcohol Change UK and developed a checklist with the APCC on alcohol-related offending for use by PCCs. Work is ongoing on NTE hotspot mapping, offender intervention pathways, improving local data, in-depth analysis on alcohol-related homicides occurring in the NTE, and exploring options for an interactive good practice and networking hub with the LGA.

²⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preventing-drug-use-in-young-people-commissioning-letter/preventing-drug-use-in-young-people-commissioning-letter>

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/anti-social-behaviour-action-plan/anti-social-behaviour-action-plan>

²⁹ [Alcohol, crime and disorder - Alcohol Change UK from the Crime Survey for England and Wales \(2019/20\)](#)

³⁰ [Police led alcohol intervention checklist and toolkit \(accessible\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The APCC portfolio has been proactive in supporting and promoting schemes like LSAVI and Purple Flag which work with licensees and others in the NTE to reduce alcohol-related crime and anti-social behaviour. The portfolio has supported the work led by the Victims portfolio to raise awareness of and tackle spiking.

The APCC Checklist on alcohol-related crime (2023), developed with the Home Office ARCH Group is here:
<https://www.apccs.police.uk/media/8739/next-steps-for-pccs-on-alcohol-related-crime-and-homicides.pdf>

Gambling

The Howard League's Commission on Gambling and Crime³¹ which reported in 2023 found 'high prevalence rates of crimes being committed by people in order to fund their gambling', including theft, fraud and street robbery, with evidence of links to domestic abuse and child neglect as well.

Raising awareness of gambling-related crime and other harms has been a priority for the APCC's Addictions and Substance Misuse portfolio with PCCs playing a leading role in raising awareness of this issue and in developing projects and interventions locally to address it. In 2023, following a meeting with Lord Goldsmith, who chaired the Howard League Commission, the APCC led in setting up a new National Taskforce on Gambling and Crime, working with partners including the NPCC, Howard League, Local Government Association, HMPPS, and CPS. The portfolio has produced a range of resources to inform work locally, including a checklist that PCCs/OPCCs can use to audit and inform their work on gambling-related crime.

In Hertfordshire, the former PCC funded a two-year pilot with GamCare to introduce screening and referral for gambling harms at key points across the criminal justice system, training over 500 frontline staff.

The APCC Checklist: Next steps for PCCs on disordered gambling (2022) can be found here:
<https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Problem-gambling-checklist-for-pccs.pdf>

Vaping

This has been an issue of increasing concern for the APCC portfolio leads. It is estimated that a third of all vapes on the market are illegal, with a proportion of those containing illicit drugs.³² However, we do not at this point know what proportion of these vapes contain illicit drugs. Crimestoppers are now using the umbrella term 'vaping-related exploitation' to refer to instances in which vapes are used to "attract, groom and exploit children".³³ There have been reports of children and young people being harmed where drugs and or nicotine are present in vapes. For example, five teenagers in London were hospitalised after smoking vapes containing the synthetic cannabinoid spice. This may be a growing problem with unregulated vape liquids, especially those marketed as containing THC or cannabis.³⁴

³¹ [Final-report Commission-on-Crime-and-Gambling-Related-Harms Howard-League-for-Penal-Reform 26-April-2023.pdf \(howardleague.org\)](#)

³² [Illegal Vapes - Hansard - UK Parliament](#)

³³ [The use of vapes to attract, groom and exploit children | Crimestoppers \(crimestoppers-uk.org\)](#)

³⁴ [Spice: the 'zombie drug' being found in some vape liquids \(theconversation.com\)](#)

Key resources

Policy:

Dame Carol Black's Independent Review, Parts 1 and 2 (2020-21)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/independent-review-of-drugs-by-professor-dame-carol-black>

From Harm to Hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives (2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/from-harm-to-hope-a-10-year-drugs-plan-to-cut-crime-and-save-lives>

Drug Strategy guidance for delivery partners (2022)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drugs-strategy-guidance-for-local-delivery-partners>

Data and statistics:

Dame Carol Black's Independent Review, Part 1 (see above)

National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (NDTMS) - [NDTMS - Home](#)

England and Wales Crime Survey (EWCS), Drug Misuse in England and Wales: year ending March 2023

[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023#:~:text=1.-,Main%20points,\(around%201.1%20million%20people\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/drugmisuseinenglandandwales/yearendingmarch2023#:~:text=1.-,Main%20points,(around%201.1%20million%20people))

APCC Reports:

APCC Tackling Addictions in Focus (2023)

<https://www.apccs.police.uk/media/8506/tackling-addictions-in-focus-v10.pdf>

APCC Findings Report: Deep Dive on Combatting Drugs Partnerships (2024)

<https://www.apccs.police.uk/media/9439/apcc-deep-dive-on-combating-drugs-partnerships.pdf>