



Government cuts funding for young people's drug and alcohol services by 10%

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A Government grant to fund young peoples drug and alcohol prevention and treatment services across England is being cut by 10% (6.6 million) in 2007/08, the charity DrugScope reveals today. DrugScope, the UK's leading independent centre of expertise on drugs, was alerted following calls from local projects alarmed about the impact on services and job losses.

The charity reports that drug and alcohol prevention and education services are being hit hardest with projects being forced to make cuts and job losses, but treatment provision is also being affected in some areas.

The cut is being made even though the Government has so far failed to achieve its target to reduce Class A drug use among young people and alcohol consumption among young people who drink is increasing [1]. Only last week the Prime Minister promised a greater emphasis on prevention with more early intervention to identify children and young people at risk of substance misuse and crime [2]. A treatment strategy for young people promised in 2006 has yet to be published.

The cut is being made to a cross-departmental grant, managed by the Home Office, to deliver a range of local services for children and young people these include education and prevention projects (some working with school truants and excludees) as well as specialist drug and alcohol treatment services. The Young Peoples Substance Misuse Grant will total 55.2 million in 2007/08, a reduction of just over 10% from 61.8 million in 2006/07. Cuts are being made in all regions. The grant, additional to mainstream funding sources, is ring-fenced and can only be used to address young peoples drug and alcohol use.

Drug services for young people face further uncertainty as in 2008 the ring-fencing for the grant is due to be removed with responsibility passing to local authorities. Some services have already been told that they may receive no funding for drug and alcohol prevention work from 2008.

The Government estimates that 20,000 young people a year become problem drug users [3]. Around 18,000 young people (under 18) a year access specialist treatment services [4].

Chief executive of DrugScope, Martin Barnes, said:

"This is disastrous for local services, many working with vulnerable children and young people with drug and alcohol problems or at risk of becoming problem drug users. Services are being cut back and experienced, qualified staff being made redundant or moved.

"The cut is extraordinary given that tackling drug and alcohol misuse among young people is a Government priority and the Prime Ministers promise to step up prevention work.

"Local grant allocations were announced by the Home Office in late February but the cut in funding and its severity has only just come to light. DrugScope was alerted following calls from drugs workers alarmed about the impact on services.

"Officials say that budgets for adult drug treatment can be used to make up shortfalls in young peoples treatment, but this is simply robbing Peter to pay Paul adult services have demanding targets to meet and in some areas funding for adult treatment has been reduced.

"A new treatment strategy for young people was promised last year with the aim of improving service provision, but we are still waiting. In the meantime, cuts in prevention and other services are being made.

ENDS

Notes for editors:

1. Reducing drug use by young people, particularly the most vulnerable, is central to the Governments National Drugs Strategy. The Home Office and Department for Education and Skills share a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target to reduce the use of Class A drugs among young people under 25. The Home Office Targets Autumn Performance Report 2006

(December 2006) stated that the target had not yet been met.

Figures published last week reveal that while overall drug use among 11-15 year olds has continued to fall, Class A drug use has remained relatively constant since 2001. In 2006 17% of 11-15 year olds had taken a drug in the past year (29% of 15 year olds), 4.3% had taken a Class A drug.

The average amount of alcohol consumed by 11-15 year olds who have had a drink in the last seven days has doubled since 1990 from 5.3 units to 11.4 units in 2006.

Source: Drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England in 2006

2. The early intervention approach for children (which will include addressing truancy and substance misuse) was included in Building on Progress: Security, crime and justice launched by the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary on 28th March 2007.

3. Source: Every Child Matters: Change for Children - Young People and Drugs published by the DfES in 2005.

4. Source: information provided by the National Treatment Agency for substance misuse (NTA).

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