Hertfordshire Drug and Alcohol Strategy

2025 - 2030



Background

Substance use involving drugs and alcohol, remains a significant public health and community safety challenge, with profound impacts on individuals, friends, families, and communities across Hertfordshire. Not only is the use of drugs and alcohol associated with poor physical health, poor mental health, and premature death, but it is also closely linked with involvement in the criminal justice sector and domestic violence. It is also a significant factor in the cause of anti-social behaviour, safety on our roads and perceptions of safety in our communities.

The estimated total cost to society of alcohol use in Hertfordshire, including treatment and support, crime, and costs to the economy is estimated to be around £524.8 million[1]. Whilst data is not readily available for the cost of illegal drug use in Hertfordshire, HM Government's own figures approximate the cost to society for England and Wales as approaching £20 billion[2]. The impact on the NHS nationally of treating drug use is approximately £1.3 billion[3] and £3.5 billion[4] for alcohol use.

Addressing the harms from drugs and alcohol use is complex. We know harmful drug and alcohol use is often found alongside risk factors such as untreated mental health conditions, poor physical health, neurodiversity, chronic pain, homelessness, or experience of trauma. These factors may be both the drivers and consequences of drug and alcohol use. This requires a whole system approach, whereby local stakeholders including communities come together to agree actions to tackle the complexity of drug and alcohol addiction based on local need. However, in undertaking research or in delivering any public health interventions Public Health Hertfordshire will not fund or work with any person or organisation affiliated with the alcohol industry.

This strategy sets out national and local evidence and an understanding of local need, to outline the context, our partnership approach, and our priorities for the next 5 years.



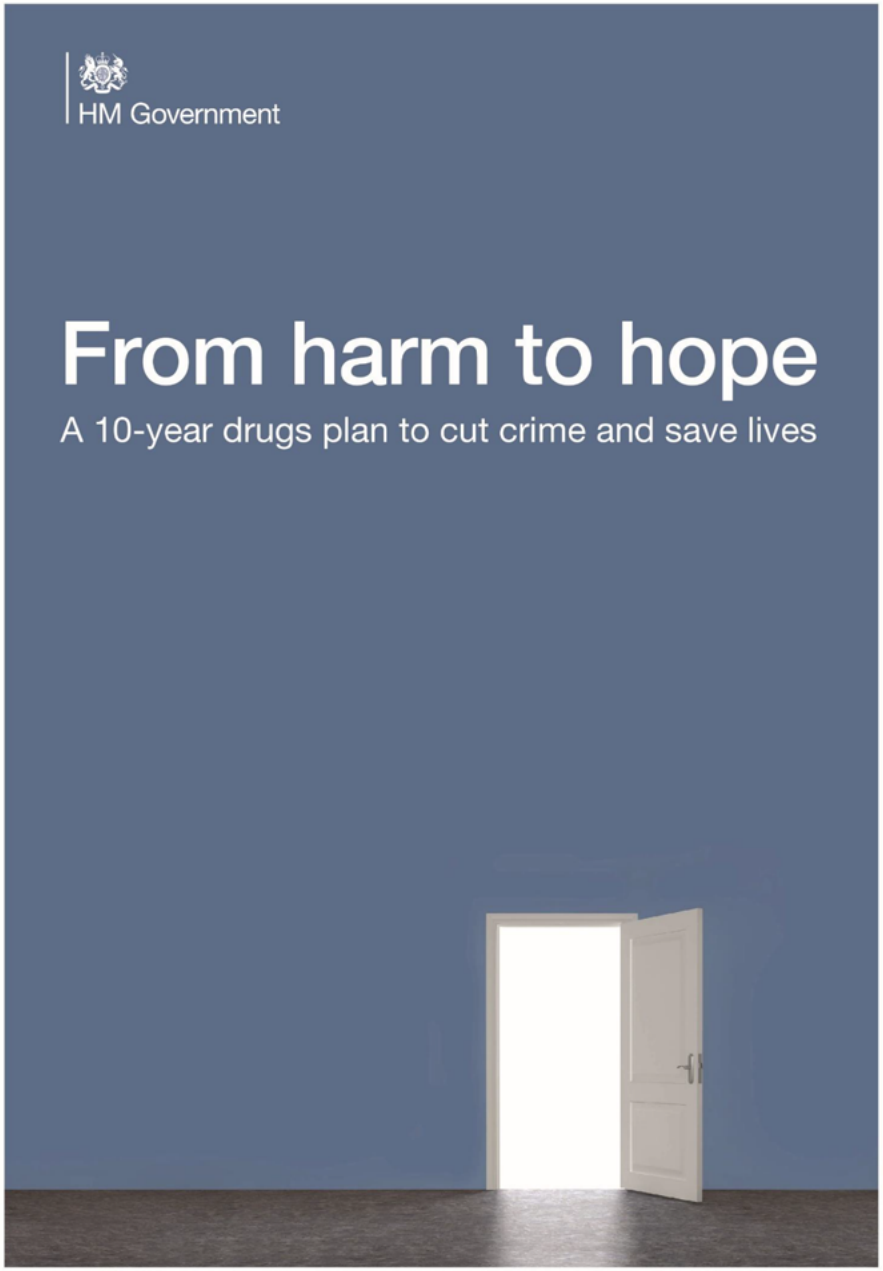
National context

In 2021, the UK government published its 10-year drug strategy, From Harm to Hope: a 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives'[5] following Dame Carol Black's Independent Review of Drugs[6]. The Dame Carol Black review was influential in stressing the importance of the treatment and recovery agenda, highlighting unmet need nationally and gaining government backing for increased funding for drug and alcohol treatment and support. Additional funding distributed to Hertfordshire via the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities has contributed significantly to the delivery of objectives under the 2019-24 drug and alcohol strategy.

The 10-year strategy outlines three strategic priorities which local drug and alcohol partnerships are expected to deliver on:

1. Breaking drug supply chains
2. Delivering a world-class treatment and recovery system
3. Achieve a generational shift in the demand for drugs

The national strategy also emphasised the need for a whole system approach to achieve these goals, ensuring an increase in treatment uptake at the same time as reducing demand, preventing harm, and avoiding unintended consequences.



Local context

The Hertfordshire drug and alcohol strategy 2019-2024

The previous Drug and Alcohol Strategy for Hertfordshire expired in 2024. Noting the significant investment in drug and alcohol treatment and support from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, it is important to recognise and celebrate the significant progress and achievements in this area:

- Overall numbers in treatment have increased significantly, both for adults and children and young people.
- Several lives have been saved with the introduction of Naloxone – an overdose recovery drug – across frontline services and those with substance use issues.
- An increase in continuity of care for prison leavers.
- A reduction in alcohol-related deaths of 5% and a reduction in drug-related deaths of 2%.
- A reduction in drug trafficking of 23% and a reduction of drug possession of 6%.
- The introduction of a Local Drug Information System (LDIS) based on best practice models in Scotland and parts of England.
- The introduction of a programme of digital, telephone, or face-to-face intervention treatment for children and young people at risk of problematic use.
- The launch of a major programme to improve pathways, services and outcomes for people with a co-occurring mental health condition alongside substance use.
- Strengthening the criminal justice team within the county commissioned drug & alcohol treatment service.
- Introducing a new ‘real-time’ surveillance programme for drug and/or alcohol deaths to mirror the current real-time suicide programme across the partnership.



Hertfordshire needs assessment

Since the publication of the previous Hertfordshire drug and alcohol strategy (2019-24), several joint strategic needs assessments (JSNAs) have been published to document the needs around substance use nationally and in Hertfordshire[7]. These and updated data have been considered in the development of the new strategy (2025-30).

The key findings highlighted that in Hertfordshire:

- We have 5,712 opiate and/or crack users and 11,826 problem alcohol prevalence.
- We have 60.6% unmet need for opiate and/or crack users and 76.7% for dependent alcohol users.
- The majority of individuals accessing substance use treatment had a co-occurring mental health need e.g. 81.0% and 78.0% for non-opiate and alcohol use respectively.
- In 2023, there were 71 deaths registered as related to drug overdoses or poisoning in the county. Heroin-related deaths have also increased compared to previous years e.g. from 10-19 between 2022 and 2023.
- Of the 2,670 mental health investigations recorded by police in Hertfordshire between April 2021 and March 2024, 4.0% (n=108) had a marker for alcohol, and 1.4% (n=38) had a marker for drugs. This suggests likely under-recording.
- As of July 2024, 679 individuals on the Hertfordshire probation caseload had a mental health, drug and alcohol need identified, with 30 of these offenders recorded as having both a psychiatric and drug-related psychotic disorder.
- The number of children and young people entering structured substance use treatment in Hertfordshire has continued to increase year on year, with the current number for the latest year standing at 149 young people engaging with services for any substance type.
- Cannabis remains the most common substance of concern for young people engaging with substance use services in Hertfordshire.
- More also needs to be understood regarding the prevalence and impact of synthetic opioids in Hertfordshire. More recent data suggests a significant increase in those presenting for Ketamine use.

An important recent JSNA on co-occurring mental health and substance use[8] also identified that individuals from an ethnic minority or migrant background, those from deprived areas, and people who have had adverse childhood experiences are at higher risk of developing mental health and substance use problems together.

A new strategy for Hertfordshire, 2025-30

Our new strategy aims to bring together the progress made by the partnership to date, the learning from the additional government investment, local needs, stakeholder views and alignment to the National Drugs strategy. It also considers the priorities from Hertfordshire's public health strategy (2022-27)[9], which aims to achieve healthy and fulfilling lives for our residents, including helping everyone keep safe from harm and promoting inclusive and safe communities in the context of our drug and alcohol service provision.

The strategy will also link together with other relevant countywide strategies with overlapping themes and priorities including, for example, the Domestic Abuse strategy[10], Supporting Adults with Complex Needs strategy[11] as well as integrating with the Co-occurring Mental Health and Substance Use programme and approaches such as Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM).

Hertfordshire will build on the excellent working relationships that have developed between all stakeholders to further develop collaboration and partnership working; to increase the availability of treatment and support; and to improve the experience of the people that access our services and carers.

This strategy is underpinned by the data evidenced in Hertfordshire's joint strategic needs assessments (JSNAs)[12]. Using the findings of these needs assessments, a series of engagement events have also been held to develop local priorities and ensure that our plans to address the priorities in the national strategy are informed by an understanding of local needs, resources, and community assets. This has included:

- Interviews with professional stakeholders
- Stakeholder engagement event
- Public consultation
- Focus groups with people accessing drug and alcohol treatment services and carers



Our priorities

Taking a lead from the national strategy 'From Harm to Hope', Hertfordshire's drug and alcohol strategy over the next five years will focus on three key areas:

- Enforcement
- Treatment and support
- Prevention and young people

The strategy will be used as a direction of travel to develop a delivery plan which will be refreshed annually.

Aims and objectives

Over the course of the consultation, Hertfordshire has agreed on the following aims and objectives to shape our direction of travel over the next five years, and which follow the nationally informed priorities outlined above. All aims and objectives will be supported by specific actions, which will be further co-produced with key stakeholders as part of the delivery plan.

Aim 1: We will tackle drug supply using robust enforcement measures, proactive policing, and effective information and intelligence sharing.

This is focused on disrupting the supply chain of drugs and alcohol, improving community safety and, supporting those who commit crime related to drugs or alcohol into treatment and support. This priority will be delivered collaboratively across a range of organisations including the police, probation services, the secure estate, and community safety partnerships.

Objectives:

- We will work to identify those involved with drug supply.
- The police will work in partnership with other agencies to share information effectively.
- We will target 'county lines' and protect those at risk of exploitation e.g. children, young people, and vulnerable groups.
- We will target and dismantle organised crime groups.

Public consultation on the above objectives showed 93% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this approach. Focus groups with people accessing drug and alcohol treatment services and carers expressed the importance of identifying vulnerable people, for example those who have been cuckooed, and better awareness and training for police on mental health issues.

A new strategy for Hertfordshire, 2025-30

Continued

Aim 2: We will seek to improve access for both people accessing drug and alcohol treatment services and carers, providing clear pathways into treatment, recovery, and support for both adults and young people.

This is focused on ensuring people accessing drug and alcohol treatment services do not 'fall through the gaps' when accessing treatment and support. People accessing drug and alcohol treatment services at different stages of recovery, require process-based support that helps to navigate them through a system that takes a 'whole-person' approach. Co-production is a vital aspect of ensuring people accessing our services' needs are met.

Objectives:

- We will improve access to treatment and the quality of service received.
- We will focus on early help and where to get support.
- We will aim to improve support pathways and outcomes for individuals who have both substance use and mental health issues.
- We will improve the way that treatment and support services (incl. housing, employment) work well together.
- We will promote the use of multi-disciplinary teams so that we work together, better.
- We will listen to people accessing our services as well as carers when designing services.

Public consultation on the above objectives showed 99% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this approach. Focus groups with people accessing drug and alcohol treatment services and carers identified increased mental health support, improved access, and better service integration as priorities.



A new strategy for Hertfordshire, 2025-30

Continued

Aim 3: We will work to prevent young people from becoming involved in substance use and support those that do.

This is focused on ensuring that we have the best possible understanding of substance use amongst young people in Hertfordshire, the drivers that underpin problematic use, and how to inform, educate and support young people towards healthy behaviours. Findings from existing best practice and academia will also be utilised to shape our approach going forward.

Objectives:

- We will carry out a programme of research examining substance use amongst young people.
- We will develop a dedicated action plan based on the findings of this research.
- We will ensure that young people requiring support with substance use are accessing our services.
- We will continue to raise awareness amongst adults and young people of the harms of substance use.

Public consultation on the above objectives showed 92% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this approach. Focus groups with people accessing drug and alcohol treatment services and carers identified the importance of early education and addressing underlying issues.



How will we know when we are successful?

The Combatting Drugs Partnership will monitor progress against the objectives over the life of the strategy. All stakeholders have a role to play in the effective delivery of services and we will use multiple metrics to determine success. The following table list examples of the types of metrics we will measure to understand performance against the objectives.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and further metrics may be introduced over the life of the strategy.

Aims	How we will measure success
1. We will tackle drug supply using robust enforcement measures, proactive policing, and effective information and intelligence sharing.	• 'County lines' operations carried out. (data source: Herts Police) • Drug trafficking and supply arrest numbers. (data source: Herts Police) • Referrals through the Drugs Test on Arrest scheme (data source: Herts Police)
2. We will seek to improve access for both people accessing drug and alcohol treatment services and carers, providing clear pathways into treatment, recovery, and support for both adults and young people.	• Numbers successfully completing treatment. (data source: NDTMS[13]) • Awareness raising interventions carried out. • Mental Health referrals and interventions carried out. (data source: TBD)
3. We will work to prevent young people from becoming involved in substance use and support those that do.	• Joint Strategic Needs Assessment completed. • Successful treatment completions (data source: NDTMS) • Young People's Health and Wellbeing Survey (data source: Hertfordshire County Council)

Governance

Monitoring progress

A delivery plan will be co-produced in collaboration with multi-agency partners to support implementation of the strategy, which will be overseen by the Hertfordshire Drug and Alcohol Strategic Board (Hertfordshire's Combatting Drug and Alcohol Partnership). This is a partnership of key stakeholders to work together to tackle drug and alcohol related harms. The Board is co-chaired between the Director of Public Health and Assistant Chief Constable for Herts Constabulary. The Strategic Partnerships Team at Hertfordshire County Council will oversee the co-ordination of the action plan and report into the Hertfordshire Drug and Alcohol Strategic Board.



Strategic oversight

The Drug and Alcohol Strategic Board will provide assurance on the implementation of the Hertfordshire Drug and Alcohol Strategy through the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board and the Hertfordshire Countywide Community Safety Partnerships.



Simplified drug and alcohol governance in Hertfordshire

References

[1] Cost of alcohol harm in Hertfordshire - Institute of Alcohol Studies

[2] Review of drugs: phase one report - GOV.UK

[3] Alcohol and drug prevention, treatment and recovery: why invest? - GOV.UK

[4] The public health burden of alcohol: evidence review - GOV.UK

[5] From harm to hope: A 10-year drugs plan to cut crime and save lives - GOV.UK

[6] Independent review of drugs by Professor Dame Carol Black - GOV.UK

[7] JSNA documents, JSNA documents

[8] co-occurring-mental-health-and-substance-use-jsna-briefing.pdf

[9] public-health-strategy-2022-2027.pdf

[10] Hertfordshire DA VAWG Partnership Strategy 22-25

[11] Hertfordshire Supporting Adults with Complex Needs Strategy

[12] JSNA documents can be viewed at https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/microsites/jsna/hertfordshires-joint-strategic-needs-assessment.aspx

[13] NDTMS – National Drug Treatment Monitoring System, www.ndtms.net