

**Drug and Alcohol Programme COVID19 work update (October 2020)**

The COVID19 crisis is having a disproportioned impact on Travellers and is highlighting the use of drugs and alcohol as an increasingly problematic issue. Since the start of the crisis, there have been reports of increased alcohol and substance use across the board which is further impacting on the wider social determinants of health.

Pavee Point has been working alongside our partners in the HSE, across government departments, with local and regional DATF and through our national networks to address someof the emerging issues whilst supporting local Traveller organisations to address these issues on the ground through a targeted and mainstreamed approach.

***Pavee Point Drug and Alcohol Programme National Work***

In addition to delivering on contractual obligations, the programme has been busy responding to emerging issues in relation to substance use and COVID19. Some work includes;

* Coordinating and hosting the National Traveller Drug Network meetings
* Providing COVID19 related information and support to our networks – including the National Traveller Drug Network, Eastern Region Traveller Health Network and the National Traveller Health Network
* Linking with local and national Traveller organisations offering support and compiling and disseminating relevant COVID19 substance misuse information and resources
* Developing Traveller specific COVID19 substance misuse resources in line with HSE guidelines ( [Podcast](https://soundcloud.com/user-191932918-464071478/advice-for-travellers-on-substance-use-during-covid-19) and [Alcohol and COVID19 stay safe measures](https://www.paveepoint.ie/covid-19-and-substance-use-misuse/))
* Development of a COVID19-Be Well Campaign for Travellers aimed at addressing substance use issues in addition to overall health & well-being (additional areas covered; men’s health, mental health and domestic violence)
* Linking with local and regional DATF’s, DATF community reps, addiction services and local groups through various platforms
* Supporting wider COVID19 health-related work and responding to emerging issues
* Exploring creative ways of increasing Travellers access to services and online platforms
* Attendance at HSE Homeless teleconference

**Emerging issues and the impacts of drugs and alcohol since the onset of COVID19;**

*Drug and alcohol use;*

* There is a noticeable increase in alcohol use and there is concerns re; the long-term impacts COVID19 will have on individuals with regards to increased problematic use and/or addiction
* Bulk buying alcohol and/or substances and the emergence of ‘home deliveries’ from local pubs has and continues to be an issue
* Since pubs have been working at reduced capacity/closed there is an increase in on-site/ drinking at home which is leading to an increase in problematic behavior
* A lack of availability of some drugs such as heroin has been reported – there is a concern that people will switch to using more available drugs due to the lack of supply and therefore place themselves at further risk (polydrug use, overdose etc)
* Noticeable increase in cocaine and tablet use since August
* The cost of drugs, especially cannabis has increased (reports of it costing triple the price)

*Financial / debt:*

* Reported increase in online gambling and associated ‘betting’ games
* Increased financial difficulties with loss of jobs, reduction in hours and reduction in payments
* Drug-related debt and intimidation has increased
* Financial issues and debt due to spending the weekly money on alcohol and/or drugs
* Due to the number of drug seizures and reduction in supply individuals are not receiving drugs on ‘tick’ and/or been given less time to pay back – meaning additional pressures and intimidation are being faced by individuals /families

*Service provision;*

* There is a backlog of access to essential services such as addiction and mental health services. In addition to this, many support services are working at a reduced capacity and through online platforms which are not accessible for all Travellers due to things such as overcrowding, little or no access to the internet and not having (or able to use) smartphones/ Wi-Fi etc
* Prior to COVID19 timely access to detox/rehab was an issue and since the onset of the crisis this has become increasingly difficult due to the closure of some services (Keltoi and the Lantern) and reduced capacity of others to comply with safety guidelines

*Other:*

* Reports of an increase in domestic violence throughout COVID19 which has highlighted additional barriers to leaving relationships and access to domestic violence services and protective measures such as court orders. There have also been reports of increased child to parent violence
* Mental and physical health have been widely affected due to things such as loss of jobs, restrictions, lack of connection/isolation and overall social/community support

***Concerns across the addiction sector post COVID19;***

* Lack of disaggregated data has further highlighted the need for Ethnic Equality Monitoring to be strengthened across all health administrative systems nationally
* Many services, including addiction and mental health services, are working at reduced capacity and have therefore taken very few new referrals – it is feared that this will widen the gap in access to these essential services due to a backlog of cases once ‘normal’ service provision resumes
* The closure of residential detox and treatment facilities and reduced capacity of community projects and aftercare services nationally has led to an increase in incidents of relapse and overdoses. Before the crisis, timely access to residential detox and treatment was of concern and the onset and impacts of COVID19 mustn't further marginalise hard to reach groups

***We continue to advocate for:***

* Ethnic equality monitoring to be strengthened across all health administrative systems nationally - to include addiction services
* It is evident that an interagency, partnership approach has underpinned the successful ways of responding to the COVID19 crisis which has been recognised across all Depts. Therefore, it is important this approach continues in relation to the implementation of the National Drug Strategy and its actions. Furthermore, such a response should form the basis of the rapid assessment being carried out by the Dept of Health and the National Drug Strategy 3-year review
* Current context of the National Drugs Strategy to be implemented - to include actions relating to Travellers
* Funding across the sector for the implementation of actions in the NDS to be maintained at pre COVID19 budgets and the need for ongoing mainstream and targeted interventions for Travellers

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