



Department of Health & Social Care

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BY EMAIL –

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Dear Chair,

Public Accounts Committee hearing – 2 March 2023:

In the hearing on Alcohol Treatment Services on 2 March, I agreed to write to you on three issues: the methodology for calculating the costs of alcohol to society in lost productivity; the number of people in NHS inpatient detoxification services and local authority commissioned residential rehabilitation; and whether there has been any assessment of, or any data collected on, the costs of children's social care associated with alcohol to local authorities and on outcomes for children living with alcohol-dependent adults.

Regarding the methodology for calculating the costs of alcohol to society in lost productivity:

In 2012, it was estimated that alcohol cost the economy £7.3bn (2009/10 prices) in lost productivity. This estimate includes:

- Potential years of life lost due to premature death (approximately 40% of the total productivity cost)
- Reduced employment due to days out of work (approximately 33% of the total productivity cost)
- Employee absenteeism due to sickness absence (approximately 25% of the total productivity cost)

The cost of reduced efficiency at work (lower quality and/or quantity) could not be estimated and so is not included in the £7.3bn figure.

Given these estimates were last updated in 2012, it would not be advisable to rely on this data to accurately reflect levels of alcohol harm today. Work is underway to produce new cost figures.

Regarding the number of people in NHS inpatient detoxification services and local authority commissioned residential rehabilitation:

Detoxification is a planned medically assisted withdrawal from drugs or/and alcohol.

Inpatient detoxification, often in a hospital setting, is a specialist high-cost, low-volume intervention for people with the most complex needs for whom detoxification in a community



Department of Health & Social Care

setting is unlikely to be safe. The number of people in specialist inpatient detox in 2021/22 for alcohol was 2,954 (3.5% of all those in treatment for alcohol-only).

We set a national ambition in the Supplemental Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery Grant planning material for all areas to send 2% of their drug and alcohol treatment population to residential rehabilitation each year. Local areas responded well to that with plans to achieve it and we are starting to see the numbers go up.

After falling for several years, numbers of people receiving treatment in residential rehabilitation for alcohol-only rose from 1,294 in 2020/21 (1.7% of all in treatment for alcohol-only) to 1,525 in 2021/22 (1.8% of all in treatment for alcohol-only).

Regarding whether there has been any assessment of, or any data collected on, the costs of children's social care associated with alcohol to local authorities and on outcomes for children living with alcohol-dependent adults:

In 2018/19 it was estimated that there were 120,552 alcohol dependent adults living with children in England. The number of children living with adults with alcohol dependency in England was estimated at between 189,000 – 208,000 in the same year.

Parental problems with alcohol and drug use can lead to:

- Children taking on the role of carer for parents and siblings
- Poor educational attendance and attainment
- Internalising and externalising behaviours
- Behavioural, emotional or cognitive problems and relationship difficulties
- Gang membership and offending
- Increased likelihood of being hospitalised
- Poor dental health and associated problems
- Depression and suicidal ideation

The [Parents with alcohol and drug problems: Investing in families workbook](#), produced by the former Public Health England, provides examples of the cost of these impacts to local authorities and NHS (in 2020/21 prices). These include:

- Annual cost of child being looked after (not in a high-cost residential placement) (per child) – £60,000
- Annual cost of child in need (per child) - £9,000
- Annual cost of school exclusion (per child) - £13,000
- Annual cost of school truancy (per child) - £4,000
- Annual cost of conduct disorders (per child) - £6,000
- Cost of counselling for children with mental or emotional difficulties (per intervention) - £1,000



Department of Health & Social Care

Parental drug and alcohol treatment can be a protective factor for children and can enable parents to engage with support agencies. As a result, these costs can potentially be avoided through effective treatment services.

There may be additional costs to local authorities associated with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), a neurodevelopmental disorder caused by pre-natal alcohol exposure. Data on the economic costs of FASD in the UK are limited; so I am unable to provide a more specific cost estimate directly attributable to local authorities.

With regard to children interacting with the social care system due to alcohol misuse, Children's Social Care carried out 645,070 assessments in 2021/22. In 70,310 (11%) of Children's Social Care assessments, concern about 'alcohol misuse of a parent' was a factor. In 12,970 (2%) of Children's Social Care assessments, concern about 'alcohol misuse of a child' was a factor. In 11,910 (2%) of Children's Social Care assessments, 'alcohol misuse of another person' was a factor.

The Department for Education analysed serious case reviews between [2017 and 2019](#) and found that parental alcohol and drug misuse was recorded in over a third (34%) of serious case reviews carried out when a child has died or been seriously harmed. Alcohol misuse was reported for nearly 30% of the over-11s (and drug misuse for over 40%).

The Drug Strategy 'menu of interventions' includes several interventions relating to children and families, through which local authorities may invest some of their funding allocations.

I hope you find this update satisfactory, please let me know if you require further detail.

Yours Sincerely,

Jonathan Marron
Director General, OHID
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