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Cuts could worsen drug problems among young people

Funding cuts and structural reforms to services for young people risk worsening drug problems, according to a group of drug policy and young people's charities.

A new report, produced by the UK Drug Policy Commission (UKDPC) in partnership with DrugScope and Mentor, warns that a wide range of young people's services in England are under threat from budget reductions and public service reorganisations, which could undermine the ability of these services to prevent and treat drug and alcohol problems among young people.

Domino Effects describes the changes affecting young people's services as a result of funding cuts and structural reforms, and examines the impacts these changes are likely to have on future drug problems.

The report finds that 51% of local Drug Action Teams responding to a survey have experienced a significant decline in funding for activities to prevent substance misuse, and 41% reported a significant decrease in funding for treatment for young people with substance misuse problems.

In response to the loss of funding, some local areas have reduced the activities they provide for young people and others have restricted access to services.

There are concerns that these changes could reduce the ability of services for young people in some areas to prevent drug problems and to identify and address problems early when they do develop.

The researchers also examined the impact of reforms to public services in England, including the creation of a new public health system, NHS reform, the introduction of police and crime commissioners, and the growing use of payment by results to fund public services.

The report warns that these reforms could lead to services for young people increasingly competing for funding with adult care budgets. There are concerns that young people's services

will be particularly vulnerable to financial pressures as the new national public health framework does not require local areas to prioritise young people's needs.

Nicola Singleton, Director of Policy and Research at the UK Drug Policy Commission, and author of the report, said:

"Drug use among young people has fallen sharply over the last decade, at the same time as we saw a sustained investment in young people's services. That investment helped create joined-up services that allowed early intervention before specialist drug services were needed.

"Now these services are threatened by a combination of financial pressure and the speed and scale of the current public service reforms.

"Some areas have reacted to these changes by finding efficiency savings and improving the links between different services. It's important that these positive lessons are shared – but it's also important that we don't lose the knowledge that has been built up of what works to reduce and treat drug problems among young people."

Dr Marcus Roberts, Director of Policy and Membership at DrugScope, said:

"Many young people who need help with drug or alcohol problems are also experiencing other social or emotional issues, such as mental health problems, difficulties at home or school, unemployment or involvement with the criminal justice system.

"Unfortunately, we've been hearing concerns from DrugScope's member agencies for some time now about the impact of local spending cuts and structural reforms on young people's drug and alcohol treatment. This report provides evidence that significant changes in the way that services are planned and commissioned, coupled with severe budgetary pressures, are threatening to undo the progress that has been made in treatment for this group over the past decade. It maps out some of the challenges facing young people's services - in a way that makes it difficult for policymakers to ignore."

Notes to editors:

1. *Domino Effects: The Impact of localism and austerity on services for young people and on drug problems* will be published by the UK Drug Policy Commission on 2nd October 2012. The report has been developed jointly with DrugScope and Mentor.
2. The proportion of 16 to 24 year olds who said they had used a controlled drug in the previous year fell from 30.0% in 2001/02 to 19.3% in 2011/12.
3. The research for *Domino Effects* drew on a combination of methods:
 - Review of national-level literature.

- National survey of 142 English Drug Action Teams (or local equivalent), completed by 43% of teams, conducted towards the end of the 2011/12 Financial Year as part of a wider UKDPC project. For more information about the survey see the UKDPC report *Charting New Waters: Delivering drug policy at a time of radical reform and financial austerity*, available at: <http://www.ukdpc.org.uk/publication/charting-new-waters/>
 - The delivery of 27 semi-structured interviews in seven English case study areas.
 - A one-day seminar organised jointly by the UKDPC and DrugScope attended by people from statutory and voluntary organisations working with young people.
4. Drug Action Teams are publicly-funded partnerships that coordinate agencies in local areas to deliver the national drug strategy.
 5. The research was funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and by Barclays who funded a wider research project which highlighted the need for further research into issues for young people's services. The principal funder of UKDPC is the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.
 6. The UK Drug Policy Commission is an independent charity that provides objective analysis of the evidence concerning drug policies and practice. It is finishing its work at the end of 2012 and will publish its final report in October 2012.
 7. For more information and interviews, contact **Leo Barasi**, lbarasi@ukdpc.org.uk, **020 7812 3792 / 07988 054241**.