

Embargo: 00.01h Wednesday 14th March 2012

Families of drug users need more help

- Adult relatives of people with drug problems are not receiving the help they need
- Adult family members can help their relative recover from addiction, but they are often left out of the treatment process
- Services for adult family members should be assertively promoted to increase awareness and tackle stigma
- Drug recovery services should assess the needs of adult relatives when drug users enter treatment

Adult relatives of people with drug problems are not receiving the help they need, according to the UK Drug Policy Commission. A new report concludes that the needs of family members are often overlooked, missing opportunities to address their problems and support the recovery of their drug-using relative.

There are estimated to be at least 1.5 million adult relatives of people with severe drug problems in the UK, who are themselves significantly affected by their family member's drug use. Yet, these family members are often isolated and not able to access the help they need.

The Forgotten Carers warns that the lack of help **makes it harder for family members to cope with their relative's problems**, as their own needs are often overlooked.

There are also concerns that the involvement of family members in their relatives' treatment is still limited, despite evidence that such involvement **can improve success rates and help sustain recovery**.

UKDPC underline that this is often a hidden problem. Many people providing support for relatives with drug problems do not realise that help may be available. Others are reluctant to expose themselves to the potential stigma attached to having a relative with a drug problem.

The report recommends that there should be much more promotion of help for adult relatives of people with drug problems. This should include **advertising services** at locations like GP surgeries, carer organisations and local community centres.

The Forgotten Carers also calls for changes in the way that drug services work, so that they take more account of the needs of adult family members. The report recommends **routine assessment of adult family members' needs** when drug users enter treatment.

Roger Howard, Chief Executive of UKDPC, said: "The expansion of drug recovery services in the last decade has improved and saved many people's lives. But the focus on helping drug users recover has now to be accompanied with help for their family members.

"Not only is this a problem because family members are not getting help to deal with the difficulties they face, but it also limits their ability to help their relative recover from addiction."

Vivienne Evans OBE, Chief Executive of Adfam, the national charity for families affected by drug and alcohol use, said: "Adfam welcomes this new study, which recognises not only the impact that someone's drug or alcohol use can have on the people around them, but also the crucial contribution that families can make to recovery.

"Over the last few years we have seen increasing recognition of families in policy and strategy, but we really need this family focus to be mirrored in frontline practice, and in times of cuts this could be a challenge. Families who are involved in their loved one's treatment can help secure better outcomes, but this should always be accompanied by support for the family in their own right.

"I hope families will hear about this report and be encouraged to seek support for themselves – at Adfam we know there is some great work going on to support families affected by drug and alcohol use, and we want to work until this is available everywhere."

Notes to editors:

For more information including case studies and interviews, contact Leo Barasi, lbarasi@ukdpc.org.uk, 020 7812 3792, 07988 054241.

The Forgotten Carers: support for adult family members affected by a relative's drug problems is published on Wednesday 14 March 2012, and will be available to download for free from www.ukdpc.org.uk.

The Forgotten Carers builds on previous work by UKDPC, published in November 2009. That research estimated that at least 1.5 million UK adults are caring for relatives with drug problems, providing services worth at least £1.8 billion.

The research was commissioned by UKDPC and the report was written by Professor Alex Copello and Lorna Templeton.

Professor Alex Copello is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist with Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Foundation Trust and Professor of addiction research at the University of Birmingham. He has researched extensively on the impact of addictions problems upon families and publishes regularly in academic journals.

Lorna Templeton is a Research Consultant, and was previously Research Manager at the Mental Health Research & Development Unit in Bath (Avon & Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust and the University of Bath) where she undertook a programme of research focused on addiction and the family.

The research was funded by The Pilgrim Trust, Scottish Families Affected by Drugs, and Adfam. The principal funder of UKDPC is the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

The UK Drug Policy Commission is an independent charity that provides objective analysis of the evidence concerning drug policies and practice.