



A call to pilot Overdose Prevention Centres (Supervised Injecting Facilities) in the UK

As public health and healthcare professionals, we the signatories can no longer accept the UK's record number of drug-related deaths without implementing all available evidence-based interventions to save lives and protect health.

Urgent action is needed to tackle the spiralling rates of drug deaths across the UK. Last year there were 4,561 deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales, whilst in Scotland there were 1,339 drug related deaths; the highest rates we have seen since records began. [1-2]

We welcome Dame Carol Black's recent independent report on drug treatment, recovery, and prevention, which concluded that despite the best efforts of health and care professionals, current services are unable to deliver results to match the scale of the challenge we face.

Whilst the Government has recently issued a new 10-year strategy to tackle harms from drug use in England, these plans fail to go far enough in implementing a full public health approach as they do not include setting up Overdose Prevention Centres (OPCs).

Drug deaths are avoidable, and it is unacceptable that we see evidence-based actions to prevent harm such as OPCs go unutilised in the UK. OPCs are healthcare facilities where individuals consume their own drugs supervised by trained staff who can intervene if they overdose.

Available evidence demonstrates that OPCs are effective in preventing drug deaths [3-5], with reviews highlighting that there has never been a fatal overdose reported in the over 130 sites available globally. [6] Evidence reviews also highlight the benefits of OPCs in facilitating patient referrals to treatment services and the adoption of safer injecting practices to reduce blood borne virus transmission. [7-8]

In addition to the substantial body of evidence demonstrating that OPCs reduce drug deaths and related harms, we also see no evidence linking OPCs to increased drug use, criminal activity, or associated policing problems. [7]

Indeed, the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee on drug policy, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce, and the Independent Working Group on Drug Consumption rooms have all recognised the clear evidence in support of Overdose Prevention Centres as an effective public health intervention. [9-12]

With numbers of drug deaths consistently rising for the past seven years, it is clear that current strategies to tackle this crisis are failing to deliver for populations across the UK. Unless the Government follows the evidence to take further action, we are likely to see these rates of preventable deaths continue to rise.

With evidence supporting the effectiveness of OPCs as a harm reduction measure, we call on Government to take steps towards funding pilots on their implementation to save lives and reduce harm

Organisational signatories

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British Journal of General Practice
British Psychological Society
British Viral Hepatitis Group
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Conservative Drug Policy Reform Group
Conviction
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Correlation
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DrugWise
English Substance Use Commissioners Group
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Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine
Faculty of Occupational Medicine
Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine
Faculty of Public Health
Faculty of Public Health Drugs Special Interest Group
Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health
Forward Trust
Foundations
Global Law Enforcement and Public Health Association
Harm Reduction International
Health Poverty Action
Hepatitis C Trust
Humankind
Independent Person Limited
Inquest
International Doctors for Healthier Drug Policies
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Kaleidoscope
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Leaders Unlocked
London Network of Nurses and Midwives Homelessness Group
National AIDS Trust
National Needle Exchange Forum

NHS Addictions Provider Alliance
Pathway
Prisoners' Advice Service
Probation Institute
Project 6
Radical Recruit CIC
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Release
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Restorative Thinking
Revolving Doors
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Royal College of General Practitioners
Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
Royal College of Pathologists
Royal College of Physicians
Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons Glasgow
Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh
Royal College of Psychiatrists
Royal Pharmaceutical Society
Sackler Pain
Single Homeless Project
South Yorkshire Police
Streetlight
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