

Peer to Peer Naloxone

Volunteers with living experience reducing harm caused by opiates

The Cardiff and Vale Area Planning Board (APB) has implemented a peer-to-peer programme of volunteers with lived and living experience of drug use and dependency to enhance its drug poisoning prevention strategies. Recognising the successes often owed to the expertise, experience, and social connections gained by individuals with lived experiences, the programme aims to advocate for and support individuals using substances, whilst bringing additional scope and capacity to existing commissioned programmes.

Accidental drug poisonings remain the leading cause of preventable death amongst people who use opioids in the United Kingdom. Office of National Statistics indicate drug misuse deaths across Wales remain high, with opioids (e.g. heroin / morphine) being represented in approximately three quarters of reported deaths. Easy access to harm reduction interventions such as the distribution of Naloxone (an opioid receptor antagonist used to temporarily reverse the effects of an overdose caused by opioids such as heroin) are critical to preventing fatal drug poisonings.

As part of Welsh Government's Substance Misuse Delivery Plan each APB across Wales has the responsibility for making Naloxone available and training people to use it with the aim of saving lives.



Photo credit: Cardiff and Vale Drug and Alcohol Service (CAVDAS)

Access to Naloxone has been available across Cardiff and Vale of Glamorgan via commissioned specialist Substance Misuse Services and Needle and Syringe Programmes since 2011. However, routine surveillance indicated a plateau in distribution rates and coverage amongst at risk populations. Indicating new and novel distribution models were required in order to further access to Naloxone amongst populations who are seldomly in contact with services. Where established in the UK and internationally, peer to peer programmes have been demonstrated to be both efficient and low-cost mechanisms in extending the reach and lowering the threshold of local services.

In October 2021, the APB implemented its first peer-to-peer Take-Home Naloxone programme involving 5 volunteer peer workers with ongoing lived experience of using opioid drugs, and homelessness. Initially focused on Cardiff city centre, volunteers were trained to engage and support individuals who use drugs in recognising the signs of overdose, alongside the use and supply of Naloxone. During its first year of implementation the programme was able to engage, train and distribute Naloxone to 303 individuals across the Cardiff local authority, including 196 individuals who had never received Naloxone before. Thus, accounting for 21% of all naloxone kits supplied in Cardiff during the same period.

As part of its implementation the programme was integrated with the APB's harm reduction subgroup and drug poisoning forums, enabling the APB Support Team and associated partners to identify hotspot areas for targeted outreach and inform new trends in relation to drug related harm.

This has since resulted in several unintended outcomes such as overdose prevention training and Naloxone being given to staff in city centre businesses including; McDonalds, Tesco and Costa Coffee. The programme's development includes volunteers now carrying emergency injecting paraphernalia and sharps disposal bins as part of targeted harm reduction to reduce transmission of infectious diseases, and equipment which promotes alternatives to injecting. As part of the programme's next steps, the volunteers will be trained to provide Blood Borne Viruses (BBV) testing, and expansion is being planned to replicate the programme in the Vale of Glamorgan.



Photo credit: Cardiff and Vale Drug and Alcohol Service (CAVDAS)

This programme has helped the APB to better understand the needs and experiences of those using substances through the improvement of learning, offering context to data, and enabling direct intelligence regarding trends and changes in drug related harms and emerging threats. Using a peer-to-peer approach has been pivotal to improving Naloxone availability and providing a range of additional benefits as opportunities for harm reduction are identified.