

## Fall in heroin and crack use as drugs lose appeal, particularly for the young

March 7 2013

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(Medical Xpress)—The number of heroin and crack cocaine users in England has fallen below 300,000 for the first time.

The latest estimates support the continuing shift away from the most [harmful drugs](#), particularly among younger people. Independent research published today by the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (NTA) reveals a significant fall in use among the under 25s and under 35s in the last year.

The estimates were produced by researchers at the Centre for Public Health, Liverpool John Moores University, Glasgow Prevalence Estimation Limited, and The National Drug Evidence Centre, University of Manchester.

According to the new estimates, the number of [heroin](#) and crack users fell to 298,752 in 2010-11, from a peak of 332,090 in 2005-06. The number of people [injecting drugs](#) has also fallen significantly, from 129,977 in 2005-06 to 93,401 in 2010-11. These reductions in use are mirrored by a fall in numbers entering treatment for dependency. The number of people starting a new treatment programme for addiction to heroin and/or crack fell from 64,288 in 2005-6 to 47,210 in 2011-12.

However behind this positive picture, an older and vulnerable population of users poses major challenges for local treatment systems. While more and more people have been helped to recover from addiction to heroin and crack, thus contributing to the fall in numbers using these drugs, the

proportion of over-35s in treatment has increased and these are more entrenched users who are harder to help. The annual increases in recovery rates seen since 2005-06 will become increasingly difficult to sustain in this environment.

These latest estimates are published as the NTA prepares to hand its 12-year stewardship of drug treatment over to Public Health England (PHE) on 1 April 2013. Within the new healthcare structures, local authorities will have lead responsibility for commissioning substance misuse services.

Paul Hayes, Chief Executive of the NTA, said: "The NTA is handing over to PHE and local authorities a world class drug treatment system, with rapid access to evidence-based interventions and increasing rates of recovery. Since 2006, 104,879 people have been helped to overcome their drug dependency. The benefits have spread far beyond the individuals themselves, to their families, their communities and the wider economy.

"Since 2001 government has invested in the evidence from the scientific literature that by expanding the treatment system, making it more easily accessible and improving practice, more people would recover, drug use would fall, there would be less drug-related crime and fewer drug-related deaths.

"The [drug treatment](#) system in England has delivered on all these fronts and the investment, which has been continued by the Coalition Government, has paid off. The new [public health](#) landscape presents both opportunities and challenges. [Local authorities](#) are well placed to bring together all the support people need to help them recover from addiction, including access to housing, employment and social networks. However the strong recovery ambition called for in the Government's 2010 Drug Strategy, and the investment in [treatment](#), must be

maintained if we are to consolidate and build on the gains we have made."

Dr Tim Millar, from the Institute of Brain Behaviour and Mental Health, at The University of Manchester, who helped with the research, welcomed the findings. He said: "There are some encouraging signs that fewer youngsters are taking up heroin or crack, but the use of these drugs remains a significant problem, particularly in the North West: and many of the young people who started using over the past 25-30 years have carried on using into their 30s and 40s."

Provided by University of Manchester

Citation: Fall in heroin and crack use as drugs lose appeal, particularly for the young (2013, March 7) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-03-fall-heroin-drugs-appeal-young.html>

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