

London Borough of Croydon: Alcohol Harm Reduction

Public Health Croydon (PHC) has forged strong links with colleagues in regulatory services with regard to alcohol harm and tobacco control. Work already undertaken or underway includes:

- Work in partnership with colleagues in licensing around the introduction of Cumulative Impact Zones (CIZs) to halt the proliferation of off-licences in specific areas of the borough where there are alcohol issues. In December 2013, the council agreed to introduce four CIZs in main thoroughfares. The Licensing Committee's assumption will be against granting any more licences for the sale of alcohol in these zones. Though public health is not itself a licensing objective, data and evidence - including London Ambulance Service data - was analysed and provided to identify issues of alcohol-related assault and binge drinking in these areas.
- In partnership with Trading Standards, PHC now delivers alcohol and tobacco health promotion training to local licence holders as part of the Proof of Age Standard Scheme (PASS) training in under-age sales. Previously attendees on this course, who tend to be off-licence owners and staff, learnt only of the legal ramifications of under-age sales, whereas now they participate in a brief presentation and discussion on the health and safety risks on children and young people, and explore the role of all adults in protecting them from harm. The training has been positively evaluated, with over two-thirds of participants saying they would change their practice "very much".
- Currently PHC is working with council members, colleagues in regulatory services and the police on a proposal to introduce a voluntary scheme for the banning of cheap 'super-strength' alcohol in the town centre. A discussion has begun with local licence holders and the initial response was favourable. PHC has been instrumental in ensuring that service users are to be included in this discussion. The proposal provides a harm reduction opportunity for street drinkers who would like to begin to reduce their use and eventually recover from alcohol dependency.

"Training with off-licence holders, who now learn not only of the legal situation but the impact of under-age drinking on health, has been successful, with two-thirds saying they will change their practices"

In April 2013, responsibility for public health was transferred to local authorities. This case study is part of a series highlighting the innovative work London local authorities have done to promote healthier lifestyles and reduce health inequalities since taking on this new role. For more information, email addicus.cort@londoncouncils.gov.uk

The ultimate success would be a reduction in alcohol-related harm as measured by alcohol-related violence, perceptions of community safety, alcohol-related ambulance call outs and alcohol-related hospital admissions and A&E attendances. In the short term, the scale and impact of Croydon's interventions mean that it is looking at "process" indicators of success. These include:

- fewer licensing applications or fewer licences granted in the CIZ zones than before their introduction
- town centre licence holders no longer selling high-strength beers
- licence holders and others perceiving less problematic behaviour
- an increase in street drinkers seeking treatment
- stronger partnership between regulatory services, police and public health and other groups with an interest in alcohol licensing.

PHC is also considering other alcohol harm reduction initiatives, including an alcohol diversion scheme for Croydon, opportunistic brief advice and referral, and mapping of alcohol related harm and public order to inform local licensing strategy. Strong partnerships with the police and regulatory services will be key to the success of these plans.

It has been confirmed that Croydon is to be one of 20 areas across England and Wales being set up as Local Alcohol Action Areas (LAAAs), to combat drink-fuelled crime and disorder and the damage caused to people's health. The areas will see local agencies, including licensing authorities, health bodies and the police, work in partnership with businesses and other organisations to address the problems caused by alcohol.