

£4.5M innovation fund open to help children of dependent drinkers

PHE encourages local authorities to apply for funding support.

£4.5m of joint funding for up to eight local authorities aimed at improving the support services for children of dependent drinkers and alcohol dependent parents has been committed by the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Work and Pensions. The fund is being managed by PHE, who today announce that local authorities (LAs) can now bid for funding.

The impact of parental alcohol dependency on the lives of children can be significant and long-lasting. Alcohol can be a major factor in causing parental conflict, which can lead to a range of poor outcomes for children including damaging their education, employment and health. It's estimated there are 200,000 children living with adults who are dependent drinkers. Not only are children of parents with alcohol dependency more likely to become dependent themselves, but between 2011 and 2014 parental alcohol misuse was recorded as a factor in 37 per cent of cases where a child was seriously hurt or killed. Similarly, a Department for Education's census showed that in 2016/17 18% of children 'in need' were affected by alcohol.

Alongside this call for bids PHE has published [a toolkit](#) to support LAs in planning services. The toolkit includes data and advice on how best to meet the needs of children growing up in these situations and those of their parents and carers. This is the first time PHE has published local prevalence data of this nature. It is hoped that the data will assist LAs in identifying and commissioning appropriate services with sufficient capacity and resources in their area.

Duncan Selbie, Chief Executive at Public Health England said:

"Alcohol can have a devastating impact on a child's future, but we can significantly reduce it by children's and alcohol services working well together to improve how quickly issues are picked up and help is given. As well as changing children's lives for the better, this benefits the local community: every £1 spent on alcohol treatment, sees £3 returned.

"Local authorities have already embraced their duty to improve the health of their populations with great creativity and determination. The fund represents an opportunity to go further for a particularly vulnerable group of children and parents and I hope to see a range of applications, showcasing creative local solutions to an emerging public health issue."

Public Health Minister Steve Brine said:

"For far too long children of alcoholics have had to suffer in silence too embarrassed and afraid to seek help or know who to turn to.

"We know being the child of an alcoholic can lead to a lifetime of problems, from mental health issues to increased risk of alcohol abuse.

"Local authorities have the local knowledge and power to make a huge difference – that's why it's right we offer this lifeline to thousands of silent sufferers."

Kit Malthouse, Minister for Family Support, said:

“Alcohol abuse can have a poisonous effect on a home – it can lead to increased conflict and can ultimately tear families apart. We want to prevent this from happening, and this initiative will get help to alcohol dependent parents earlier and make sure that children are also supported.

“As a former councillor, I know how effective Local Authorities can be in delivering targeted support to families in need and I’d encourage them apply for funding to develop proposals to tackle this hugely important issue too.”

PHE welcomes ambitious bids where there are robust joint plans from public health and children and family commissioners that are designed to lead to identifying more children and parents. In particular we hope to see how LAs will:

- Identify more children of alcohol dependent parents and how they can increase support (including where they have taken on inappropriate caring responsibilities)
- Increase the number of alcohol dependent parents receiving and completing treatment, and to provide support that reduces parental conflict
- Reduce the number of ‘Looked after Children’ of alcohol dependent parents being taken back into care, and/or reducing the time spent on the child protection register

In total, PHE is expecting to fund up to eight areas. The application phase for the innovation fund opens on 22 May, running until 17 July. The total available fund is up to £4.5million over three years. Those interested in the fund should submit an application form to: InnovationFund@phe.gov.uk

Background information

- Successful applicants will be able to draw down a revenue grant to support their work over the period 2018-19 to 2020-21
- Areas that are working with the Department of Work and Pensions’ (DWP) reducing parental conflict programme are out of scope for this funding
- Payments to successful applicants will be awarded to the local authority as a section 31 grant, under the Local Government Act