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**APPROVED PREMISES NEED MORE EFFECTIVE FOCUS ON DRUG
TESTING AND MANAGING THE RISKS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE, SAYS
OMBUDSMAN**

Approved Premise (APs), home to people released from prison or on bail or court orders, need more effective drug testing practices and better staff guidance to identify and address the risks associated with substance misuse, and support individuals, according to a report by the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (PPO).

Overdoses of opiate and other drugs, including alcohol, by people released from prison remain a significant risk, the PPO 'Learning Lessons' bulletin found. People are at a higher risk of overdose if they slip back into drug and alcohol use after periods of abstinence or detoxification.

The bulletin - *Approved Premises – substance misuse* - based on findings from deaths in APs investigated by the PPO also raised significant concerns about New Psychoactive Substances (NPS). These range from stimulants to hallucinogens and are commonly seen in prisons and the community as synthetic cannabinoids, known by names such as Spice and Mamba.

Elizabeth Moody, the acting Ombudsman, said: "The rise of New Psychoactive Substance use in the prison estate is well documented and is

widely recognised, in the words of the previous Ombudsman, as a “game-changer”. However, it is clear from our investigations that the implications of NPS for the AP estate have not yet been fully understood or addressed by the National Probation Service (which is responsible for APs).”

The PPO examined 29 of their investigations into AP deaths that were drug-related, or where there was a history of substance misuse. The bulletin expressed concern that testing for NPS in APs “appears to lag behind that in prisons and does not draw on the experience of prisons”. One case study in the bulletin discloses that AP staff were unable to test a man despite their concern he had taken NPS.

The PPO found some good practice in the management and care for those who misuse drugs and alcohol. However, Elizabeth Moody added, “we also see cases with too little focus on the risk of relapse and overdose.”

Some of the PPO investigations identified deficiencies in information sharing and in welfare checks. The bulletin made a number of recommendations relating to:

- Ensuring a good flow of information between stakeholders, which is critical, particularly for managing substance misuse where there is a clear requirement for effective multi-disciplinary working. PPO investigations found this did not always happen.
- Checks on the welfare of AP residents - another important way to ensure the risks associated with substance abuse are well managed. PPO investigations found checks were not always carried out effectively.
- An overarching need for the National Probation Service to improve the AP manual to give staff better guidance on NPS use, information sharing and making welfare checks.

Elizabeth Moody said:

“We know offenders can be at heightened risk of death following their release into the community. I hope this bulletin will help AP staff apply the learning from our investigations to improve the ways they identify, monitor and address the risk factors associated with substance misuse.”

- ENDS -

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The bullet is available here - <https://www.ppo.gov.uk/?p=10336>
2. There are 101 APs in England and Wales, providing accommodation for 2,267 residents. APs are the responsibility of the National Probation Service. Some are managed directly by the National Probation Service and some are managed by contractors.
3. APs are staffed 24 hours a day and provide an enhanced level of residential supervision in the community, as well as a supportive and structured environment to reduce the likelihood of further offending and manage risk.
4. There is a high risk of overdose in the first month after release from prison and the first few days after release are the peak period – possibly due to changes in individual tolerance for opiates, which can decrease in a matter of days after a period of abstinence, and/ or a lack of understanding of the strength of the illicit substances available in the community. The risk of overdose is particularly acute when the resident has undertaken a detoxification programme in prison. The risk of death for newly released prisoners is between 40 and 70 times higher than the general population.
5. The PPO investigates deaths in APs as well as other places of detention, including prisons.
6. The PPO investigated 46 deaths in APs from September 2012 to August 2017. There were 29 cases where the resident’s death was drug-related or where they had an identified history of substance misuse.
7. Please contact John Steele on 020 3334 0357 or 07880 787452, or at john.steele@justice.gsi.gov.uk if you would like more information