

# **Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System (DAMIS)**

## **Activity summary report**

April 2020 – September 2020

### **Background**

DAMIS is an “early warning system” designed to find out about emerging trends in drug and alcohol misuse, so we can act quickly and provide relevant information or advice to those who misuse drugs or alcohol. Much of the information sent out through DAMIS is practical advice aimed at reducing the harms to people from their drug use. It is aimed at adults, and those working with young people should exercise their professional judgement to ensure that any information passed on to people under 18 is appropriate.

The kind of information DAMIS collects includes:

1. A sudden increase in a particular drug being misused
2. Drugs being misused in new ways
3. New drugs becoming available
4. Emergence of substances with unexpected unpleasant or dangerous effects

The Department of Health oversees DAMIS with support from lead partners: the Public Health Agency (PHA), the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and Forensic Service Northern Ireland (FSNI).

Representatives of these agencies form the DAMIS Steering Group.

DAMIS is essentially an e-mail network of individuals who work for specialist drug and alcohol services, or for services that work with or treat people who misuse drugs or alcohol (for example homeless services, or Emergency Departments (ED's)). These people have access to information on emerging drugs and their impact on people who use them, and are ideally placed to pass on timely information to DAMIS. Their roles also give them the opportunity to provide timely harm reduction information to their clients.

Those on the DAMIS Network email information they have on substances of concern to a central email address. The information contained in these emails is shared with the DAMIS Steering Group for consideration. However, DAMIS is a confidential system and the identity of anyone who sends in emails is seen only by the PHA coordinators.

People who wish to be added to the DAMIS Network can contact the PHA coordinator to request an application form which they can complete, indicating their role in provision of drug and alcohol, and/or other related services.

As at September 2020, there were 408 individuals on the DAMIS network.

The following tables summarise key information received by DAMIS, and circulated by DAMIS, in the 6 months from April 2020– September 2020.

### Information / Emails received by DAMIS April 2020 – September 2020

Date	Topic
24 <sup>th</sup> April 2020	<p>Harm reduction information Harm reduction resources produced by ASCERT were received</p> <p><b>Action:</b> <i>no further action, for information only</i></p>
26 <sup>th</sup> April 2020	<p>Pregabalin and Bensedin in Sion Mills/Strabane area</p> <p>Information received of two cases in the past two days in the Sion Mills/Strabane area where the young people involved required medical assistance from ambulance crews following the taking of blue tablets, reportedly packaged as Pregabalin 300mg and Bensedin 10mg (diazepam). Drugs taken seem to be very potent, with both young people having the same symptoms i.e. could not be roused from deep sleep, severe agitation when finally revived.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> <i>No further information was provided by partners to corroborate or dispute this</i></p>
28 <sup>th</sup> April 2020	<p>Changes in patterns of substance misuse</p> <p>Information received in response to requests for information around changes in patterns of substance misuse of a service user within the WHSCT</p> <p><b>Action:</b> <i>Information recorded</i></p>
30 <sup>th</sup> April 2020	<p>ACMD report on novel Benzodiazepines</p> <p>Link received for ACMD report on novel Benzodiazepines including WEDINOS contributions</p> <p><b>Action:</b> <i>Report was circulated to DAMIS Steering group for information</i></p>
30 <sup>th</sup> April 2020	<p>Blues</p> <p>Information received that hostel clients in Newry were using what they reported to be 10mg 'Street Blues' and presenting heavily under the influence but with no significant overdose events.</p> <p>Following analysis from WEDINOS, the results have come back to confirm they contained Morphine rather than Diazepam.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> <i>Insufficient information to issue an DAMIS alert</i></p>
14 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p>Flualprazolam</p> <p>Information received of a pill bought as 10mg Diazepam, following analysis by WEDINOS confirmed it contained Flualprazolam rather than</p>

	<p>Diazepam.</p> <p>The pill was marked MSJ and was found in one of our Belfast hostels where a young male service user overdosed and sadly died at the weekend. A significant increase in these particular pills is being seen across many of our hostels.</p> <p>Flualprazolam is also reportedly linked to 12 recent deaths in the UK also.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert issued on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2020</p>
15 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p>MDMA issue</p> <p>Information received from Welsh partners on MDMA pills analysed by WEDINOS. These were two different branded MDMA pills that were found to contain MDMA at levels that could result in harm. The pills were a yellow pill pressed with the Jurassic Park logo; and a purple pill pressed with the Givenchy logo.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert issued on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2020</p>
22 <sup>nd</sup> May 2020	<p>Intelligence received contaminated diazepam</p> <p>Intelligence received indicating a large quantity of 'contaminated' diazepam is being supplied in the Coleraine, Portrush and Portstewart areas, but may also be in further supply to other areas. It is believed the drugs in circulation are causing 'adverse reactions' when taken.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert issued 26<sup>th</sup> May 2020</p>
22 <sup>nd</sup> May 2020	<p>Nitrous chargers</p> <p>Information provided about nitrous oxide chargers being abused by young people on Belfast Council facilities</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert issued 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020</p>
26 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p>Service user survey on impact of coronavirus, first report</p> <p>The first report from a survey on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on ASCERT service users. The survey was conducted shortly after the lockdown and is due to be repeated in May/June</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Report circulated to DAMIS Network on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2020 for information and sharing</p>
4 <sup>th</sup> June 2020	<p>Illicit Benzos</p> <p>Reports of increased level in use of illicit Benzos. Anecdotal information is that they are being sold as "Blues" and that there are large amounts of these available. There have been 4 separate cases where people have been heavily under the influence reportedly having used these tablets.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert issued 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020</p>

<p>26<sup>th</sup> June 2020</p>	<p>“Foaming” at the mouth after consuming drugs / Increase Intravenous Drugs (possible Heroin) related incidents</p> <p>Information received regarding a number of incidents attended in the Derry City &amp; Strabane District between 01/05/20 and 26/06/20 where “foaming” at the mouth was recorded following suspected consumption of drugs. The drugs mentioned or known to be present in some cases have been provided, although may not be relevant/ responsible. Many (but not all) of these “foaming” incidents were accompanied by violent behaviour or aggression.</p> <p>Similar incidents may have occurred in early May to mid-June in Omagh &amp; Fermanagh, Belfast and Coleraine.</p> <p>There have also been 3 intravenous drugs related incidents Derry City &amp; Strabane in the last 24 hours (25th June), 2 of which are suspected drug related deaths and one overdose, possible heroin.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> separate DAMIS alerts issued 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020 regarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Foaming” at the mouth after suspected consumption of drugs</li> <li>- IV drug related incidents</li> </ul>
<p>21<sup>st</sup> July 2020</p>	<p>Drug finds Belfast</p> <p>Information provided on various drug finds across Belfast, reported to PSNI and disposed of safely</p> <p><b>Action:</b> Insufficient information to issue an DAMIS alert</p>
<p>21<sup>st</sup> July 2020</p>	<p>Cannabis Oil Disguised as Confectionery - alert for distribution</p> <p>Chief Medical Officer alert was issued today in respect of NERDS ROPE Sweets - Cannabis Oil disguised as confectionery following a series of arrests in West Yorkshire earlier this week.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert issued 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2020</p>
<p>24<sup>th</sup> July 2020</p>	<p>CAS alert: Evidence of harm from illicit or fake benzodiazepines</p> <p>Central Alerting System issued an alert on harm from illicit or fake benzodiazepines has been published following concerns about the apparent increasing circulation of illicit benzos that in many cases have been found to contain dangerously potent benzodiazepines or their analogues.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert issued 24<sup>th</sup> July 2020</p>
<p>28<sup>th</sup> July 2020</p>	<p>Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme Briefing</p> <p>A confidential PHA communication briefing was received regarding the closure of the Needle Exchange within McGregor’s Chemist, Botanic, for dissemination internally within partner organisations as appropriate for information and to enable any operational planning / decisions to be taken as necessary.</p> <p>A second update NSES briefing was received 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020</p>

	<p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS informed network members on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2020 of NSES closure in Botanic</p>
4 <sup>th</sup> August 2020	<p>Kratom</p> <p>Southern Trust has had 2 patients who have presented having used this substance</p> <p><b>Action:</b> information was issued on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020 to the Community Addiction Teams within the Trusts on Kratom, for their information</p>
5 <sup>th</sup> August 2020	<p>Kratom</p> <p>NHSCT Community Addiction Service had a patient who has reported use of "Kratom" to manage opiate withdrawal symptoms over the last 3 weeks. Patient was presenting for opiate substitution therapy with a history of codeine misuse. He reported buying capsules online but that he was aware of others using it to make a tea. He was seen at 10am and presented with no opiate withdrawal symptoms having last used Kratom at midnight the night before. The patient did not report any adverse effects</p> <p><b>Action:</b> information was issued on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020 to the Community Addiction Teams within the Trusts on Kratom, for their information</p>
7 <sup>th</sup> August 2020	<p>Drug Harms Assessment and Response Team (DHART)</p> <p>The latest Public Health England DHART health harm summary was issued for circulation</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS email link to summary was issued 7<sup>th</sup> August 2020</p>
4 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	<p>'Contaminated' batch of Lyrica</p> <p>Intelligence received regarding a concern that there is a 'contaminated' batch of Lyrica being illegally supplied in the Coleraine/North West area. Those who consume this may have an adverse reaction to the drug. No further information known.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert issued 7<sup>th</sup> September 2020</p> <p>Following further information received to PHA duty room a further DAMIS alert was issued 14<sup>th</sup> September 2020</p>
15 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	<p>'Contaminated' batch of Lyrica</p> <p>Request for further information and if sample could be sent for test analysis</p> <p><b>Action:</b> followed up with original information source and there was no sample available for testing</p>
17 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	<p>Smoking substances through E-cigarettes</p> <p>Information received regarding groups of young people within Belfast who are suspected of smoking a liquid form of marijuana mixed with spice through E-cigarettes. From the reports, the person collapses /</p>

	<p>'crumbles' to the ground very quickly after taking it and becomes unconscious.</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert was issued 17<sup>th</sup> September 2020</p>
23 <sup>rd</sup> September 2020	<p>4F-MDMB-BINACA</p> <p>Information received that following analysis by WEDINOS, a sample of liquid substance purchased as THC oil was identified as a Synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists (SCRAs) 4F-MDMB-BINACA (Psychoactive), also known as 'spice' or 'mamba'</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS Follow up Information email was issued 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020</p>
24 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	<p>Flubromazolam</p> <p>Following testing via WEDINOS of tablets left in a hostel by a service user, the blue tablets sold as diazepam, test results came back that they are Flubromazolam and has a more pronounced hypnotic, amnesic and sedative effects at low doses and high risk of overdose if used with other substances</p> <p><b>Action:</b> DAMIS alert was issued 25<sup>th</sup> September 2020</p>

## Alerts issued by DAMIS during April 2020– September 2020

In some cases, more information was sought either from the original informant, or from other experts in the field (addictions staff, homeless staff and drug users) and DAMIS partners continued to monitor the situation. In some cases, information was sent to specific groups, for example GP Practices, or Needle Exchange Providers, if the information was particularly relevant to / or would impact on their client group.

In some cases, information was considered to be of sufficient urgency for it to be circulated to the full DAMIS database in the form of an 'alert'. Information of general interest was also circulated to the full DAMIS database. Formal emails issued are shown in the table below. Unless specified otherwise, these were sent to the full DAMIS database.

<b>Formal emails circulated by DAMIS to the full DAMIS database April 2020– September 2020</b>	
<b>Date</b>	<b>Topic</b>
2 <sup>nd</sup> April 2020	<p><b>Directory of services - Drug &amp; Alcohol / Mental health and emotional wellbeing</b></p> <p>Information on the directory of Drug and Alcohol locality services as well as Mental health and emotional wellbeing directory of services with links to PHA website for electronic access</p>
23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2020	<p><b>REQUEST FOR INFORMATION - Drug monitoring re COVID-19 (follow up email)</b></p> <p>The Public Health Agency and Department of Health (NI) along with key partners are continuing to monitor how the current COVID-19 situation is potentially affecting / changing local drug supply and markets.</p> <p>Request for further information of any developments or changes in drug supply / markets that could be a cause for concern so DAMIS Network, key stakeholders and other relevant contacts can be kept informed, as appropriate.</p>
7 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p><b>DAMIS Alert - Harm reduction advice during Covid-19</b></p> <p>DAMIS has been made aware of a number of suspected drug related deaths in recent days.</p> <p>DAMIS has also received information during this period of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- increased drug potency</li> <li>- increasingly unknown drug content</li> <li>- changing drug taking patterns amongst some drug users</li> </ul>

	<p>- increased mixing of drugs, especially with alcohol</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme provided as well as contact details and information for support services</p>
15 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p><b>DAMIS alert - sample result flualprazolam</b></p> <p>DAMIS has been notified that a tablet, bought as 10mg Diazepam, sent for analysis by a DAMIS Network member organisation has come back as containing Flualprazolam rather than Diazepam. Flualprazolam, is an analogue of alprazolam which is commonly known as Xanax.</p> <p>The tablet tested was marked MSJ and found within a Belfast hostel where a young service user died at the weekend of a suspected drug overdose. Service providers are reporting a significant increase in these particular tablets being found within the hostels.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice provided as well as information on alprazolam (Xanax) and request for further information</p> <p><i>Further information received: Suspected circulation in the Fermanagh area, quite a few ED presentations to hospital with drug overdoses last night (1 had to be ventilated in ICU) - all state they took diazepam and pregabalin.</i></p>
18 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p><b>DAMIS Alert – MDMA</b></p> <p>DAMIS has been notified of pills recently sent for analysis. These were two different branded MDMA pills that, following qualitative and quantitative analysis, were found to contain MDMA at levels that could result in harm. The pills were, a yellow pill pressed with the Jurassic Park logo; and a purple pill pressed with the Givenchy logo.</p> <p>Individuals who are determined to use should be aware of doses, duration of effects, the effects themselves and potential significant risks to themselves and others.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice, contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme and information on MDMA provided as well as a request for further information</p>
26 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p><b>DAMIS Alert / request for information- 'contaminated' diazepam</b></p> <p>DAMIS has received intelligence from PSNI indicating that a large quantity of 'contaminated' diazepam is being supplied in the Coleraine, Portrush and Portstewart areas, but may also be in further supply to other areas. It is believed the drugs in circulation are causing 'adverse reactions' when taken. No further information is known at present.</p>

	<p>Please continue to highlight to anyone you work with who uses these substances the risks of increased sedation and possible respiratory suppression, especially when used with alcohol, opioids and gabapentinoids, and as ever remind your clients / users to exercise extreme caution when taking any substance if they are unsure what is in it.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme provided as well as a request for further information</p>
28 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p><b>ASCERT Service user survey on impact of coronavirus, first report</b></p> <p>For information, first report was circulated from a survey on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on ASCERT service users, conducted shortly after the lockdown.</p> <p>The report reinforces some of the more anecdotal feedback received as well as impacts on mental health.</p>
28 <sup>th</sup> May 2020	<p><b>DAMIS Alert - Nitrous Oxide Canisters</b></p> <p>DAMIS has received information from partners regarding a number of small, empty, purple and silver gas type / nitrous oxide canisters being found in parts of Belfast. There has also been associated antisocial behaviour from the young people involved as well as concerns about the dangers to their health.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and information on Nitrous Oxide provided as well as request for further information.</p> <p><i>Further information received regarding the discarded canisters in other areas outside Belfast</i></p>
5 <sup>th</sup> June 2020	<p><b>DAMIS Alert - increased level of illicit Benzodiazepines</b></p> <p>DAMIS has received reports of an increased level of illicit Benzos usage over the last week in Belfast. Anecdotal information is that they are being sold as "Blues" and that there are large amounts of these available. There are reports of a number of cases where people have been heavily under the influence having used these tablets.</p> <p>Please continue to highlight to anyone you work with who uses these substances the risks of increased sedation and possible respiratory suppression, especially when used with alcohol, opioids and gabapentinoids, and as ever remind your clients / users to exercise extreme caution when taking any substance if they are unsure what is in it or if has not been prescribed for them.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme provided as well as a request for further information</p>

29 <sup>th</sup> June 2020	<p><b>Request for further information - “foaming” at the mouth after suspected consumption of drugs</b></p> <p>DAMIS has received information from PSNI regarding a number of incidents within the Derry City &amp; Strabane District in May and June where “foaming” at the mouth was recorded following suspected consumption of drugs. Although there were a range of drugs mentioned or known to be present in some cases, including Diazepam, Lyrica, Pregabalin and cocaine, these may not be relevant or responsible. Similar incidents may have occurred in Omagh &amp; Fermanagh, Belfast and Coleraine. Many, but not all, of these “foaming” incidents were accompanied by violent behaviour or aggression.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme provided as well as a request for further information</p>
29 <sup>th</sup> June 2020	<p><b>DAMIS Alert - IV drug related incidents</b></p> <p>DAMIS has been informed of three intravenous drugs related incidents within the Derry City &amp; Strabane District in a 24 hours period on 25<sup>th</sup> June 2020, two of which are suspected drug related deaths and one overdose, possibly heroin.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme provided as well as a request for further information</p>
22 <sup>nd</sup> July 2020	<p><b>SS(MD) 52/2020 - Cannabis Oil Disguised as Confectionary - alert for distribution</b></p> <p>CMO alert that issued in respect of NERDS ROPE Sweets - CANNABIS OIL DISGUISED AS CONFECTIONERY following a series of arrests in West Yorkshire</p>
24 <sup>th</sup> July 2020	<p><b>CAS alert: Evidence of harm from illicit or fake benzodiazepines</b></p> <p>Evidence of harm from illicit or fake benzodiazepines has been issued by the Central Alerting System (CAS) of the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency. While the alert relates to England, similar issues pertain in NI.</p> <p>A CAS alert on harm from illicit or fake benzodiazepines has been published following concerns about the apparent increasing circulation of illicit benzos that in many cases have been found to contain dangerously potent benzodiazepines or their analogues.</p> <p>In addition to sharing information on particular dangerous benzodiazepines in circulation, the alert advises action and advice for people in contact with those at risk of harm, for local authority and health commissioners, and for emergency departments and paramedics.</p>

7 <sup>th</sup> August 2020	<p><b>PHE DHART health harm summary Aug 2020</b></p> <p>Public Health England have issued the latest DHART health harm summary which is now live on <a href="#">Knowledge Hub</a></p>
24 <sup>th</sup> August 2020	<p><b>For Information - Needle Exchange within Belfast</b></p> <p>DAMIS informed network members that McGregor's Chemist took the decision to withdraw the NSES service from the Botanic branch, Belfast from 1st September 2020.</p> <p>Contact detail information on the nearest needle exchanges and service providers was provided.</p>
7 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	<p><b>DAMIS Alert - Request for further information - potential fake batch of Pregabalin (Lyrica)</b></p> <p>DAMIS has received information regarding a potential fake batch of Pregabalin (Lyrica) being supplied in the Coleraine/North West area. There is a risk that those who consume this may have an adverse reaction to whatever is contained in this batch of drugs.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and information on pregabalin provided as well as request for further information</p>
14 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	<p><b>DAMIS Alert - Further information - potential fake batch of Pregabalin (Lyrica)</b></p> <p>DAMIS has received further information of 4 people within the Causeway locality who were hospitalised over the weekend, with a number of them being seriously ill. While at this stage it is not known what, if any, substances had been taken, it is believed that the individuals may have taken potentially fake pregabalin (Lyrica) and alcohol.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice and information on pregabalin provided as well as request for further information</p>
15 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	<p><b>Drug overdose and coronavirus (COVID-19)</b></p> <p>PHA has produced a "Drug overdose and coronavirus (COVID-19)" poster for sharing with service users, staff as well as other interested parties.</p> <p>The poster provides harm reduction advice for people who use drugs, highlighting the additional risks in relation to the coronavirus pandemic</p> <p>Contact details for 'Services near you' also provided</p>
17 <sup>th</sup> September 2020	<p><b>REQUEST FOR INFORMATION - smoking of substances with E-Cigarettes</b></p> <p>DAMIS has received information regarding groups of young people within Belfast who are suspected of vaping a liquid form of cannabis mixed with spice through E-cigarettes.</p>

	<p>From the reports, the person collapses / 'crumbles' to the ground very quickly after taking it and becomes unconscious. There is a concern regarding the mixing of substances, unknown strength of substances involved, increased vulnerability of individuals who fall unconscious as well as the health implications and potential lung damage of inhaling substances.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice provided as well as request for further information</p>
<p>24<sup>th</sup> September 2020</p>	<p><b>FOLLOW UP INFORMATION - smoking of substances with E-Cigarettes</b></p> <p>As follow up to the previous alert, DAMIS has been notified of a sample of liquid substance recently sent for analysis.</p> <p>The substance purchased as THC oil was identified as a Synthetic cannabinoid receptor agonists (SCRAs) 4F-MDMB-BINACA (Psychoactive), also known as 'spice' or 'mamba'.</p> <p>SCRAs are a diverse group of chemicals sold in a range of strengths, as the chemicals are frequently changing; it is difficult to predict harm.</p> <p>It is advised not to use illicit and unregulated vaping products or adding substances to vaping fluids</p> <p>Reported side-effects from using synthetic cannabinoids included, with harm reduction advice and contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme provided as well as a request for further information</p>
<p>25<sup>th</sup> September 2020</p>	<p><b>DAMIS alert - sample result Flubromazolam</b></p> <p>DAMIS has been notified that a blue tablet bought as Diazepam and sent for analysis by a DAMIS Network member organisation has come back as containing Flubromazolam rather than Diazepam. Flubromazolam is a newer benzodiazepine and is an analogue of alprazolam which is commonly known as Xanax. Flubromazolam has a more pronounced hypnotic, amnesic and sedative effect and can be dangerously high in potency, especially when used with alcohol, opioids and gabapentinoids.</p> <p>This result shows that novel benzodiazepines such as this continue to be in circulation in the Belfast area and across Northern Ireland. Given their potency over more commonly used benzodiazepines such as diazepam, please continue to highlight to anyone you work with who uses these substances the risks, and as ever remind your clients / users to exercise extreme caution when taking any substance if they are unsure what is in it.</p> <p>Harm reduction advice, information on alprazolam (Xanax) and contact details for Take Home Naloxone programme provided as well as a request for further information</p>

## **DAMIS - Drug and Alcohol Monitoring and Information System Summary report**

### **What is DAMIS?**

DAMIS is an “early warning system” designed to identify, verify and assess emerging threats and potential trends in drug and alcohol misuse within Northern Ireland, so we can act quickly and provide relevant information or advice to those who misuse drugs or alcohol. The purpose of DAMIS is to share information via email amongst people who work with drug users within Northern Ireland (the DAMIS Network).

These people can provide information on emerging issues at a **very early** stage and are also ideally placed to provide targeted harm reduction information to their clients.

The kind of information DAMIS collects includes:

1. A sudden increase in a particular drug being misused
2. Drugs being misused in new ways
3. New drugs become available
4. Emergence of substances with unexpected unpleasant or dangerous effects.

The Department of Health oversee DAMIS with support from the lead partners: the Public Health Agency, the Department of Justice and the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

### **Collecting information**

Every year, Northern Ireland-wide surveys are carried out to find out what drugs people are using and how much alcohol they are drinking. This information helps organisations decide the priority actions required to reduce drug misuse or drug-related harm. However, these surveys are not designed to gather localised information on drugs being used by small numbers of people, or information on urgent issues such as contaminated drugs. This is what DAMIS is for. It can identify trends and issues at an early stage and warn people about them quickly.

The information which DAMIS receives usually comes from local drug and alcohol support organisations, or from people who misuse or have misused substances themselves. These people may have contact with a wide range of individuals who misuse substances and are in an ideal position to tell us what is happening in their local area as soon as it happens. While DAMIS can be used to alert people to emerging risks around alcohol as well as drugs, so far, all DAMIS alerts have focussed on drugs.

DAMIS is confidential – this means that when we collect information, we do not ask about who is misusing drugs. We do not need to know the names of individuals, but it can be useful for us to know general information like where drugs are being used,

and the gender and age of users. This can help tell us who is at risk and to which particular groups we may need to give information.

Anyone can send information to DAMIS at [damis@hscni.net](mailto:damis@hscni.net) .

### **What happens next?**

Each lead organisation has identified a named member of staff to coordinate this work. All information sent to DAMIS at [damis@hscni.net](mailto:damis@hscni.net) is received by the PHA DAMIS Coordinator, who removes any identifying details (e.g. who the email is from, or any information which could identify an individual drug user), then sends it on to the DAMIS Steering Group. The “level” of the information and what kind of response is needed is agreed by the DAMIS Steering Group.

#### Level One:

A level one response will be to record the information which may be used to inform policy and practice.

#### Level two:

A level two response means that the information will be circulated the information to everyone on the DAMIS database, either to seek more information, or as an alert or a bulletin. We ask everyone on the database to pass the information on as appropriate.

Alert – an alert is an email sent quickly (usually within 24 hours of receiving information) warning people of a specific risk. An alert may be sent when we still have limited evidence, but the need to inform people of a possible risk outweighs the need to collect more evidence.

Bulletin – if we need more information on an issue, a request for information is sent to the DAMIS network. Information received can then be pulled together and sent out as a bulletin. This takes longer than an alert to produce, but can provide a fuller picture of the Northern Ireland situation.

#### Level three:

A level three response means that a formal warning letter is issued through Chief Medical Officer procedures, and consideration is given to information/awareness raising with the public.

### **Who is on the DAMIS database?**

The database includes around 410 people, individuals who work for specialist drug and alcohol services, or for services that work with or treat people who misuse drugs or alcohol (for example homeless services, or Emergency Departments (ED's)). These people have access to information on emerging drugs and their impact on

people who use them, and are ideally placed to pass on timely information to DAMIS. Their roles also give them the opportunity to provide timely harm reduction information to their clients. Much of the information sent out through DAMIS is practical advice aimed at reducing the harms to people from their drug use. It is aimed at adults and those working with young people should exercise their professional judgement to ensure that any information passed on to people under 18 is appropriate.

People who wish to be added to the DAMIS Network can contact the PHA coordinator to request an application form, by emailing [damis@hscni.net](mailto:damis@hscni.net), which they can complete, indicating their role in provision of drug and alcohol, and/or other related services.

## **Drug and Alcohol Monitoring Information System (DAMIS)**

### **Application to sign up to DAMIS Network**

DAMIS is an “early warning system” designed to identify, verify and assess emerging threats and potential trends in drug and alcohol misuse within Northern Ireland. It is an information sharing tool in support of the wider DAMIS partnership which comprises Department of Health, Department of Justice, Public Health Agency, Police Service of Northern Ireland and Forensic Service Northern Ireland. Representatives from these agencies form the DAMIS Steering Group, and they make decisions about how to act on any information received.

The purpose of DAMIS is to share information via email amongst people who work with drug users within Northern Ireland (the DAMIS Network). These people can provide information on emerging issues at a **very early** stage and are also ideally placed to provide targeted harm reduction information to their clients.

The kind of information DAMIS collects and shares includes:

1. A sudden increase in a particular drug being misused
2. Drugs being misused in new ways
3. New drugs become available
4. Emergence of substances with unexpected unpleasant or dangerous effects.

Because DAMIS is an early warning system and information fed into it is acted upon quickly, emails sent to the DAMIS Network are often based on anecdotal and/or unsubstantiated evidence and should be treated with initial caution. Many of the reports received by DAMIS are second or third-hand information from a single source, and are not supported by any additional evidence.

If information received by DAMIS is substantiated then the Steering Group considers how best to further share that information with the target groups. Evidence suggests that providing warnings about drugs to the whole population, the majority of whom do not use drugs, can normalise drug use, and increase experimentation with drugs. It is therefore vital that information is shared appropriately. Sometimes, the need to get information to a wider audience is sufficient that DAMIS will issue a media alert to raise awareness among the public.

Much of the information sent out through DAMIS is practical advice aimed at reducing the harms to people from their drug use. DAMIS is aimed at adults. Those working with young people should exercise their professional judgement to ensure that any information passed on to people under 18 is appropriate.

## DAMIS Network Application Form

If you are interested in receiving Drug and Alcohol alerts please fill in the required information below.

**Name:**

**Organisation:**

**Job title:**

**Email address:**

**Please outline why you would like to receive these alerts and who you will share these with:**

**Those registered with the Drug and Alcohol Monitoring Information System can email information they have on substances of concern to a central email address of PHA coordinators who will share information with the DAMIS partners. (*DAMIS is a confidential system and the identity of anyone who sends in emails is seen only by the PHA coordinators*). Please outline how your job / role will enable you to provide information to DAMIS:**

**I have read the information on page 1, and understand the purpose of DAMIS, and will seek to ensure that I treat any information I receive from DAMIS appropriately.**

**Signed:**

**Date:**