



Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Service & Take Home Naloxone Programme

Quarterly Report

01 July 2024 to 30 September 2024

Title	<p>Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Service and Take Home Naloxone Programme Quarterly Report</p> <p>1 July 2024 – 30 September 2024</p>
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Target Audience	<p>Needle and syringe exchange providers, drug treatment services, pharmacy staff, health professionals working in substance use</p>
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Section 1: Background

The provision of harm reduction services within Northern Ireland is facilitated by the Public Health Agency (PHA) who work alongside other statutory agencies, community pharmacies, community and voluntary organisations, low threshold services and hostels to provide the Needle and Syringe Service (NSES) and Take Home Naloxone (THN) programme across the region. PHA use an online Harm Reduction Information System called Neo360 to capture live data on needle exchange and naloxone transactions across all sites. All data captured is anonymous and non-identifiable.

NSES is vital to the health and wellbeing of the entire community by helping to reduce the spread of blood-borne viruses (including HIV, Hepatitis B and C), reduce needle discards and by offering harm reduction advice and support to those using the service.

The Take Home Naloxone programme has become an integral part of NSES and aims to supply naloxone packs to those at risk of opioid overdose. Naloxone temporarily and rapidly reverses the effects of an overdose.

Currently the PHA have;

- 25 sites delivering NSES only

- 2 sites delivering THN only

- 11 sites delivering both NSES and THN

- 17 hostel sites who have a supply of Naloxone to administer in an emergency only (legally can not make direct supply to the public)

One new site was opened in July 2024 at Medicare Pharmacy in Dungannon.

The NSES is based in areas where there is an existing pattern of people who inject substances and anyone over 18 can use the services.

This report summarises data that has been collated by Neo360 within the three months period between 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024.

Harm Reduction Service providers

Between 1 July 2024 and 30 September 2024 the following sites providing NSES and/or Naloxone as shown in Table 1 below;

Table 1: Participating Service Provider by Trust Area in reporting period 1 July 2024 – 30 September 2024

Trust Area	Provider	Provider Type	NSES	THN
Belfast	Extern	Community-based	√	√
	The Welcome Organisation	Community-based Outreach	√	
	Belfast Drug Outreach Team	Low Threshold Service	√	√
	Chemist Connect	Pharmacy	√	
	Maguires	Pharmacy	√	
	Belfast Health Inclusion Service	Statutory Provider	√	√
	Custody Health Care	Statutory Provider	√	√
	Extern Ormeau Centre	Hostel	√	√
Northern	Boots, Ballymena Health Centre	Pharmacy	√	
	Boots, Antrim	Pharmacy	√	
	Boots, Coleraine	Pharmacy	√	
	Boots, Cookstown	Pharmacy	√	
	Boots, Newtownabbey	Pharmacy	√	
	Boots, Queen's Street Ballymena	Pharmacy	√	
	NHSCT Community Addictions Service	Trust	√	√
	Extern	Low Threshold Service	√	√
Southern	Extern	Low Threshold Service	√	√
	Boots, Armagh	Pharmacy	√	
	Medicare, Dungannon	Pharmacy	√	

	Gordons, Banbridge	Pharmacy	√	
	McKeagneys, Newry	Pharmacy	√	
	Northern Pharmacies, Craigavon	Pharmacy	√	
	Partridges, Lurgan	Pharmacy	√	
	Thomas Street Pharmacy Plus	Pharmacy	√	
	SHSCT Community Addiction Team	Trust	√	√
South Eastern	Clear Pharmacy, Bangor	Pharmacy	√	
	Gordons, Downpatrick	Pharmacy	√	
	Gordons, Lisburn	Pharmacy	√	
	Gordons, Newtownards	Pharmacy	√	
	Simon Community	Low Threshold Service	√	√
	SEHSCT Community Addiction Team	Trust		√
Western	Foyle Haven, DePaul Ireland	Low Threshold Service	√	√
	Bradleys, Derry/Londonderry	Pharmacy	√	
	Bradleys, Enniskillen	Pharmacy	√	
	Gordons, Limavady	Pharmacy	√	
	Mournes, Medicare	Pharmacy	√	
	Superdrug, Derry/Londonderry	Pharmacy	√	
	WHSCCT Community Addictions Team	Trust		√

Section 2: Regional Data Review

Needle and Syringe Exchange Service

Within the three months period between 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024 needle exchange activity was recorded in 38 active sites throughout this period.

There have been 1119 new clients registered on Neo360 using NSES within this reporting period.

In terms of unique client usage for the reporting period, there was a total of 3,357 unique clients across Northern Ireland. When this report is run per Trust area this totals 3,543 unique service users which suggests that 186 clients are crossing Trust boundaries to access multiple needle exchange services. This is a slight reduction from the previous reporting quarter, April to June 2024 when 199 clients were crossing Trust boundaries. This means that people are travelling less to access NSES and with the opening of new exchanges, services are more accessible.

This report includes the regional data across Northern Ireland, followed by a breakdown per Trust.

The following information is collated:

Total number of transactions;

Current Age of clients;

Transaction by provider type;

Gender of clients;

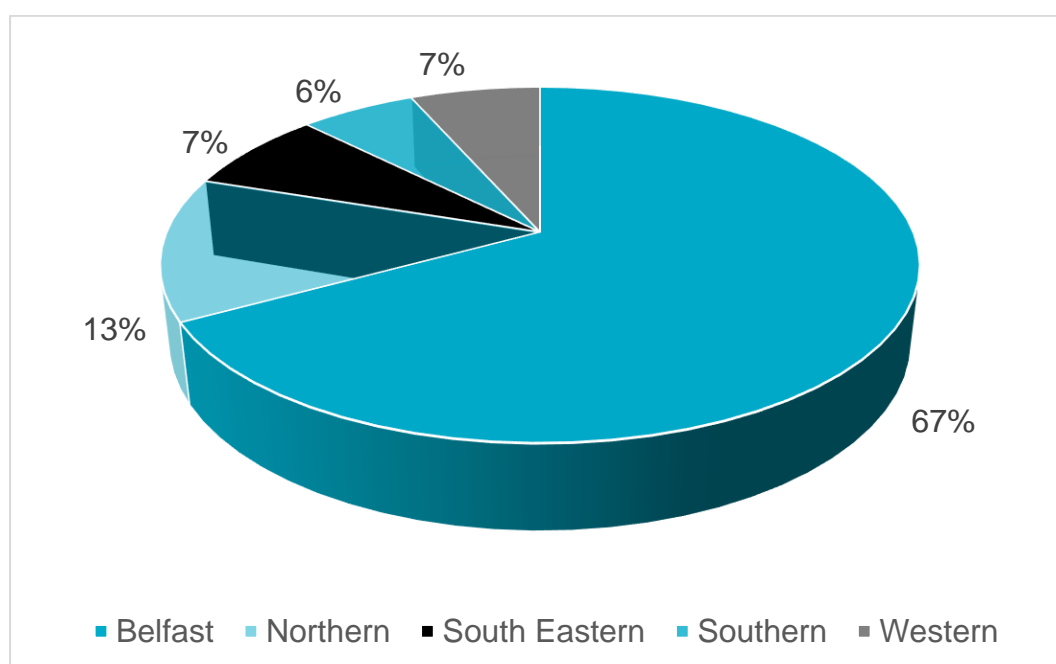
Transaction by Trust location;

Recorded substance/s used.

Needle and Syringe: Key findings and trends

From 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024 there were a total of 8,603 NSES transactions carried out across Northern Ireland. This quarter has increased from last quarter by 988 transactions. This increasing trend of transactions is also reflective when compared with the same reporting period last year with an increase of 678 transactions. The amount of equipment dispensed also continues to increase.

Figure 1: Percentage of transactions by each Health and Social Care Trust Area from 1 July to 30 September 2024



With 5,766 transactions, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust area (BHSCT) accounted for the majority (67%) of the 8,603 transactions. Southern Health and Social Care Trust area (SHSCT) continue to have the smallest number of exchanges across trust areas.

Most commonly used provider type across the region

Figure 2: Number of NSES transactions by Provider Type

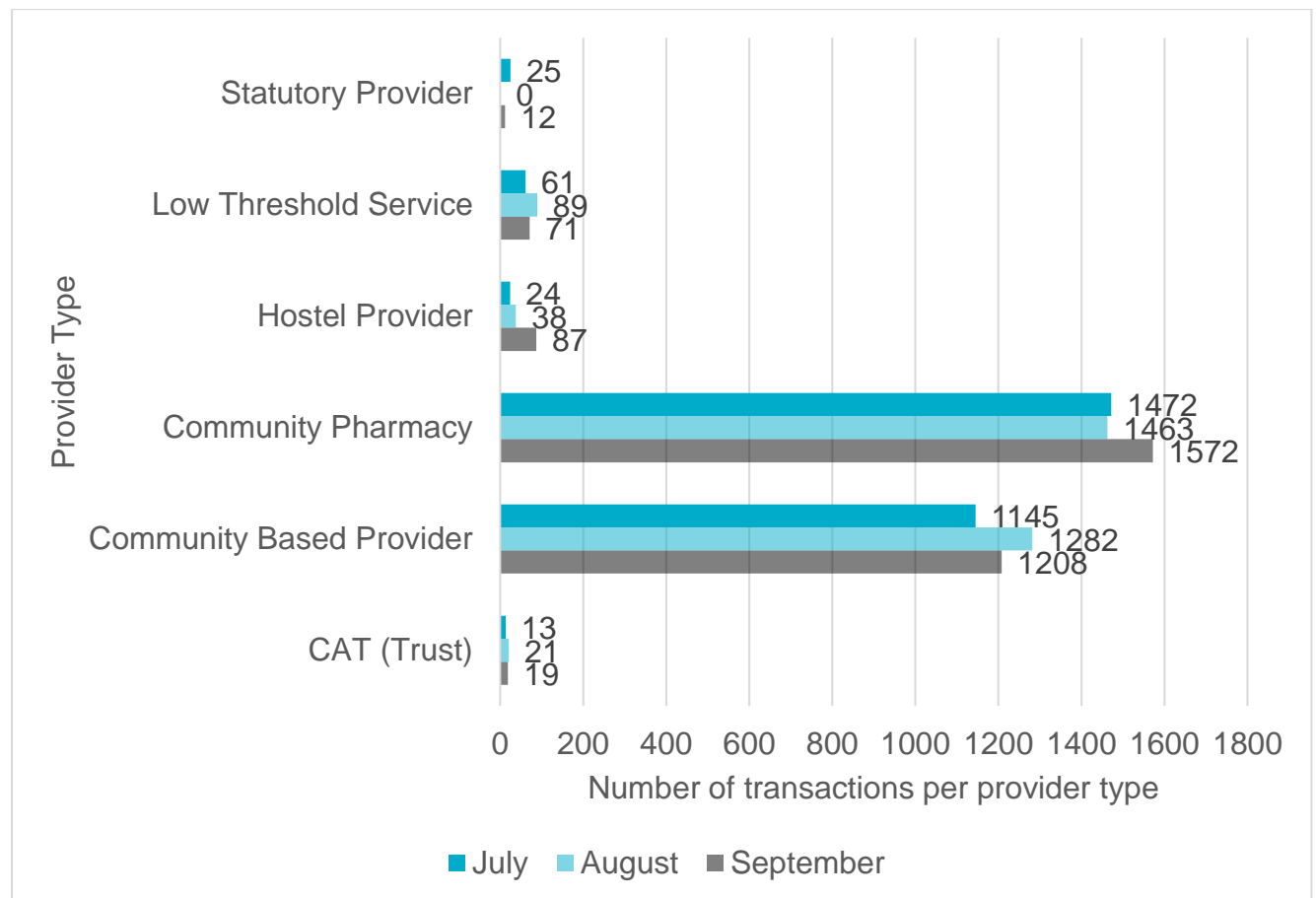
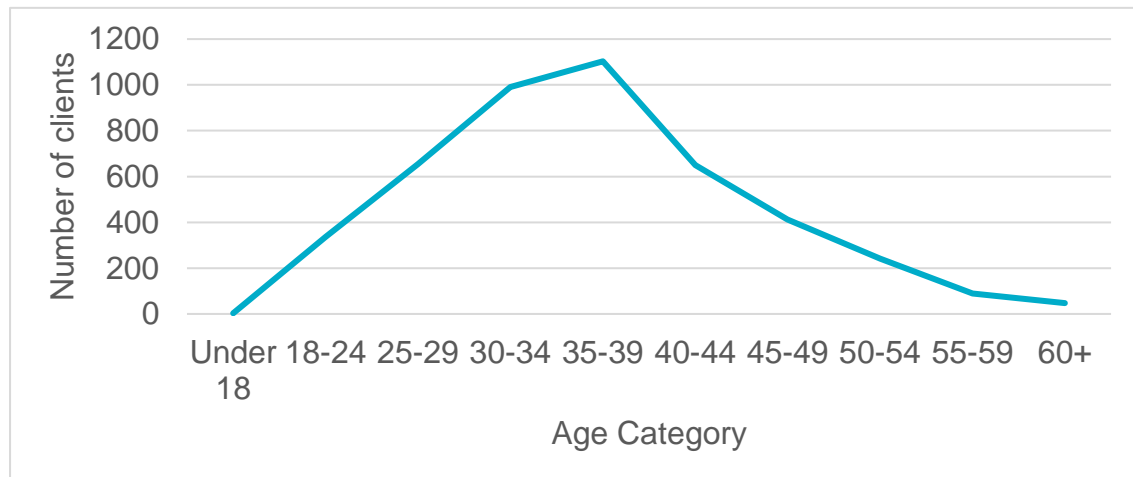


Figure 2 reflects that the community pharmacies completed the majority of transactions (52.4%) for the reporting period, followed by the community-based providers who have completed 42.3% of the total transactions.

NSES User Profile

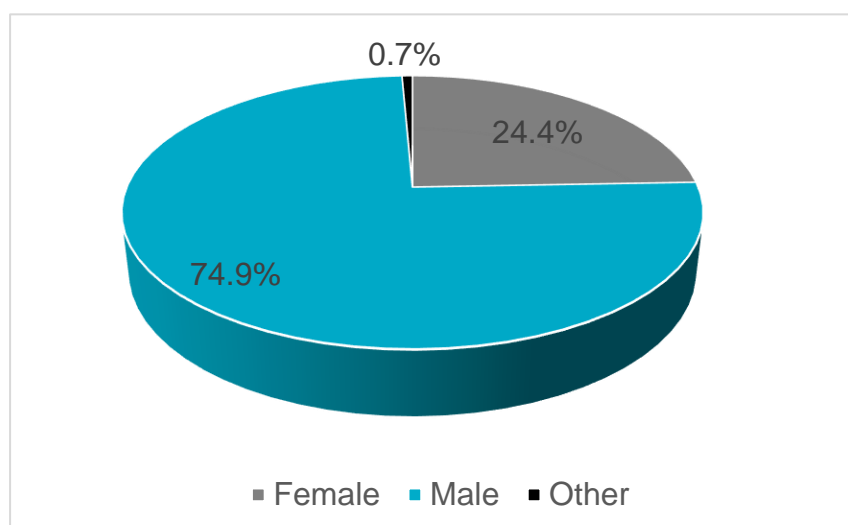
The age and gender profile of the clients using NSES within the reporting period are shown in Figure 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Current age of clients using NSES within reporting period.



Over the reporting period, the most common age category of clients using NSES is 35-39 years followed by those aged 30-34 years. Similarly, of the 1119 new clients registered for the service, the most common age bracket is 35-39 years (253) followed by age 30-34 years (235).

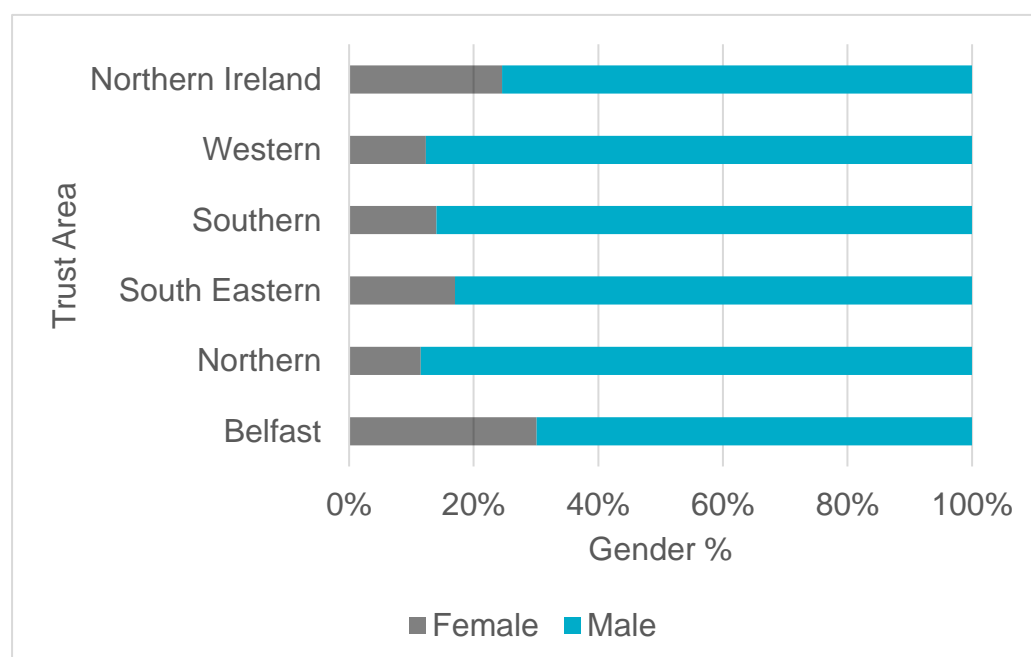
Figure 4: Gender of Clients using NSES within the reporting period



The pie chart reflects that the NSES service is primarily accessed by males (74.9%). This is however a large decrease from the previous quarter which reported 84% male. For those newly registering with NSES in the reporting period, 83.5% were male and females made up 16.1%. The number of females registering and using the service continues to grow considerably.

Figure 5: Gender (%) of clients by Trust area

Figure 5 shows the gender breakdown by Trust of clients registering for needle exchange this quarter. Whilst overall this remains a male dominated service, as noted above there has been a sharp increase of female clients using the service across Northern Ireland, specifically Belfast area (29.8% females).



Recorded Substance used

The graph below reflects the reported substance used by clients for each transaction. Clients may report more than one substance in response to this and therefore only substances recorded on more than 20 transactions are illustrated in the graph below. For the third quarter of 2024, cocaine powder (2,853) has the largest recorded usage within needle exchange clients. Heroin (2,340) has the second largest reported usage closely followed by anabolic steroids (2,114). 2327 were recorded as unknown or unwilling to disclose, clients are more likely to choose this option within a pharmacy setting which has the highest rate of clients selecting unknown, currently 29.1% of clients within a pharmacy setting choose not to disclose substances compared with 21.1 % within all other provider types.

This reflects the continued trend since December 2023, where cocaine has now become the most reported substance used. Within the same quarter last year, heroin was the largest recorded usage followed by cocaine powder.

Figure 6: Number of Recorded substances used across region

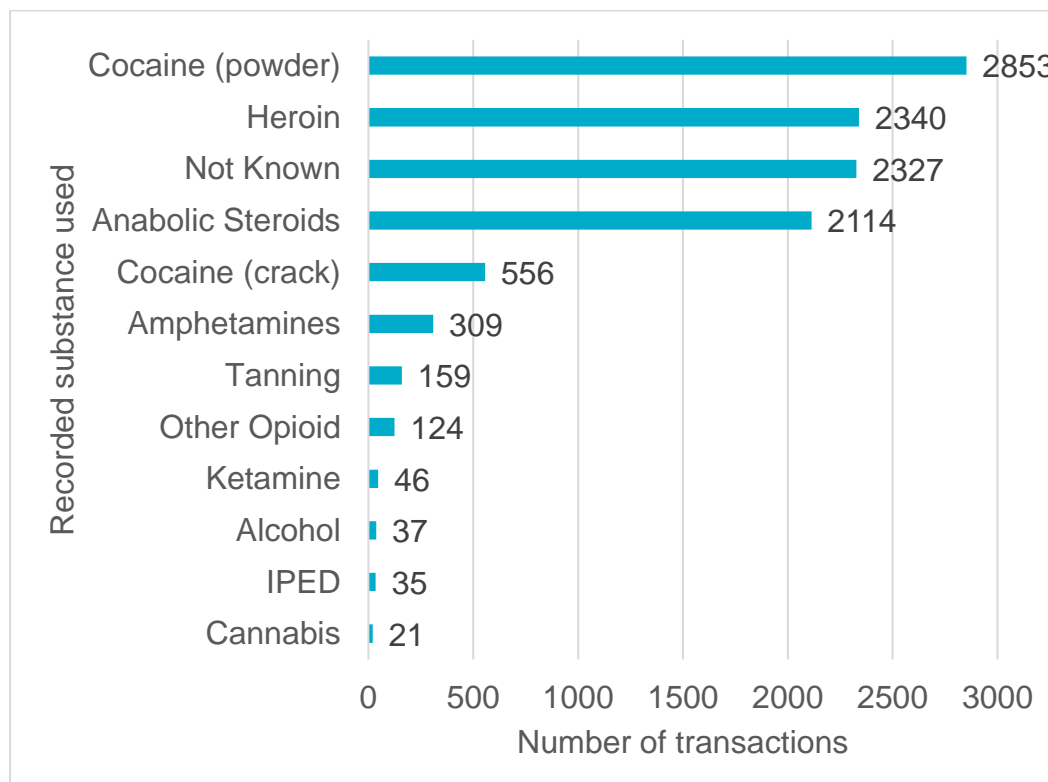


Table 2: Number of clients using most reported substances from 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024

Substance	Number of NSES unique clients using
Anabolic Steroids	1469
Heroin	403
Cocaine (powder)	461

Although cocaine was reported most frequently during transactions, the number of unique clients using anabolic steroids by far exceeded those using cocaine or heroin.

Table 3: Quantity of Needles Dispensed

Please see below a breakdown of the needles dispensed across all needle exchange sites for the reporting period. A total of 181,919 needles were dispensed across needle exchange in Northern Ireland.

Category	Item	Total
Needles	Needles 16mm [5/8 inch] orange	3540
Needles	Needles 25mm [1 inch] blue	1586
Needles	Needles 25mm [1 inch] orange	5155
Needles	Needles 30mm [1 1/4 inch] blue	38,868
Needles	Needles 38mm [1 1/2 inch] black	438
Needles	Needles 40mm [1 1/2 inch] green	37,687
Needles	0.5ml Fixed Syringe	55,339
Needles	1 ml 30G unisharp fixed	38,758
Needles	0.3ml unisharp fixed	548
Total Needles Dispensed		181,919

Basic principles are that the shorter needles are used for surface vein injecting (arms, hand, feet etc), and the longer ones for deeper veins (legs and groin) and steroids which are intramuscular injections.

The 0.5ml and the 1ml unisharp are the mainstay of all injecting equipment, they are the shortest and thinnest needles and also the lowest dead space syringes. It is positive from a harm reduction perspective these continue to be used frequently within needle exchange with 94,097 (51.7%) in total dispensed in the reporting period. The last quarter seen the introduction of 0.3ml fixed syringe into needle exchange to promote the use of even smaller needles, targeting female injectors especially.

The highest dispensed needle heads are blue (30mm) and green (40mm) with a total of 76,555 (87.7%) dispensed in the reporting period. These are the largest needles which are used with a 2ml syringe for both groin injecting and steroid injecting.

Use of Foils

In promoting harm reduction, staff within needle exchange sites are encouraged to dispense foils which will support smoking, thus, reducing the harm caused through injecting. 14 sites dispensed 983 packets (20 sheets per pack). This is a reduction from the same period of last year where a total of 1,296 packs were distributed however is an increase from the previous quarter this year.

Returns

This quarter 28,913 estimated needles were returned within exchanges. This is a return rate of 15.9%. This is a decrease of returns from the previous quarter (29,973 returned). Clients are encouraged to return used needles at every transaction.

Take Home Naloxone Programme

Within the three months period between 1 July 2024 to 30 September 2024 Take Home Naloxone was recorded in 15 active sites throughout this period.

THN includes the take home supply or emergency administration of the following products:

- Prenoxad® 2mg/2ml pre-filled syringe for intramuscular injection.
- Nyxoid® 1.8mg nasal naloxone spray x 2 doses
- Pebble® 1.26mg intra-nasal spray x 2 doses

The following information is collated on Neo360:

- Recording of the dispensing of naloxone as an initial supply (first use of the service and requires trained in usage) or resupply (registered previously and training up to date)
- Number of units of naloxone dispensed and type of naloxone
- If resupply, information of usage of previous unit requested ie if it was used to reverse overdose, stolen, expired, lost, service user not carrying naloxone and has expressed an intention to use opiates or not specified.

The PHA requests only minimal information on supply so that clients can remain anonymous and unidentifiable when given the initial supply. When naloxone is then resupplied to someone who has used it to reverse an overdose, the PHA requests additional information about the overdose, in order to build a better picture of how naloxone is used and its impact in reversing overdose.

Take Home Naloxone: Key findings and trends

Between 1 July 2024 and 30 September 2024, a total of 486 naloxone kits were dispensed and recorded on Neo360

Table 4: Number of Naloxone packs reported to have been dispensed to providers and administered by providers in an emergency.

Month	Number of THN packs dispensed
Initial supply	119
Resupply	261
Emergency use by staff	65
Public Naloxone Administration training sessions	41
Total kits	486

The reported distribution includes 119 initial kits supplies to those who were newly registered onto the THN programme and received training as part of their registration. There were 261 resupplied kits to those who were previously registered for THN but required replacement naloxone supplies. In addition, 41 kits were dispensed as part of naloxone administration training.

The most common type of naloxone dispensed was Prenoxad® 2mg/2ml pre-filled syringe for intramuscular injection.

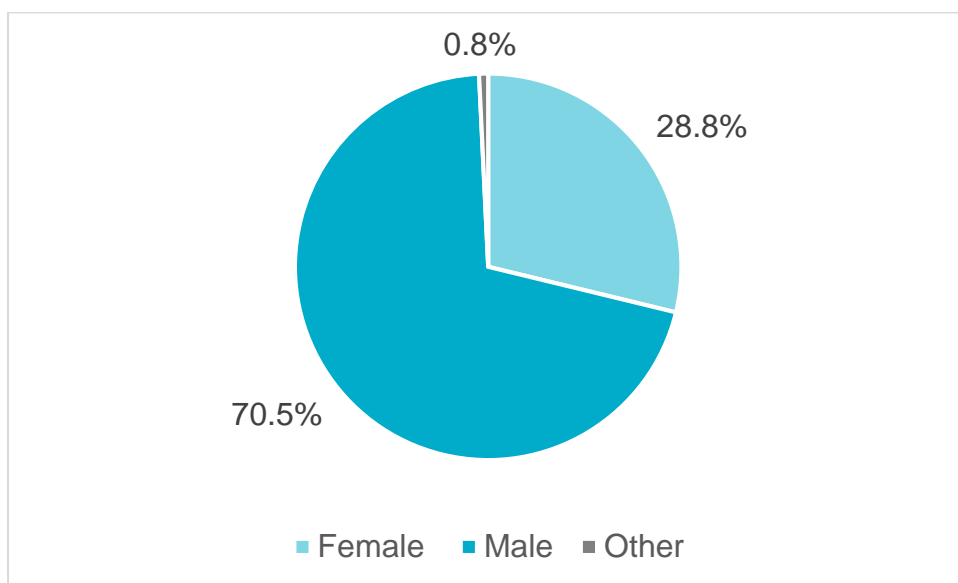
Take Home Naloxone packs used to reverse an overdose

During the period 1 July 2024 and 30 September 2024, naloxone was reported to have been administered on 140 occasions. This includes the number of times naloxone was reportedly used to reverse an overdose, reported at resupply (75) and the number of times naloxone was used in an emergency by staff (65).

THN User profile

The age and gender profile of the 132 reported users of the THN programme within this reporting period is shown in Figures 7 and 8. This does not include those service users who were administered naloxone in an emergency, or kits dispensed for training purposes as the gender and age is not recorded on Neo360.

Figure 7: Gender breakdown of clients supplied (Initial and Resupply) with Naloxone in reporting period (n=132)



Males (93) accounted for the majority of clients accessing the THN programme.

Figure 8: Recorded age of clients supplied (Initial and Resupply) with Naloxone in reporting period (n=132)

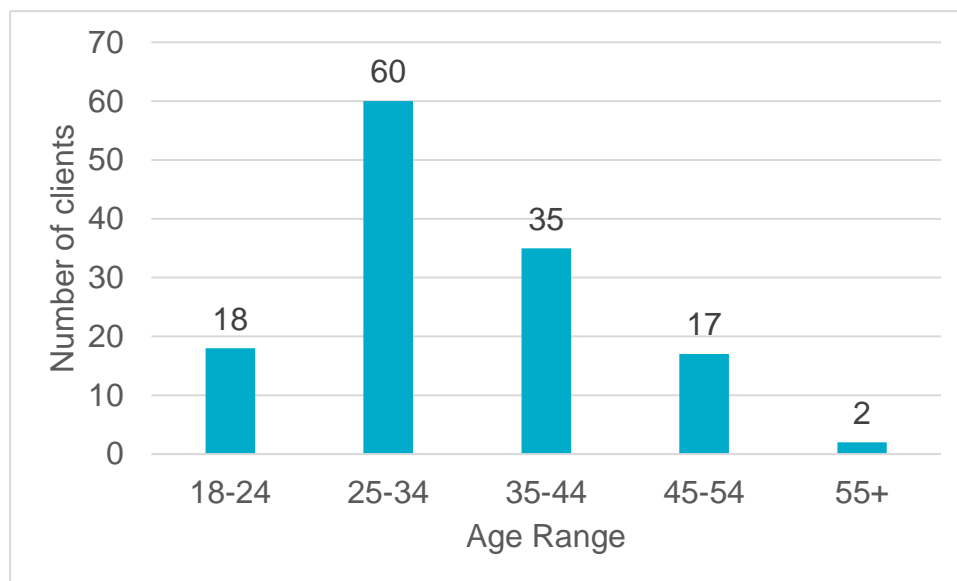


Figure 8 reflects the recorded age of clients supplied, either initial or a resupply of naloxone. The most common overall age group of clients supplied with Naloxone was 25- 34 years.

Section 3: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Area (BHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

5,767 NSES transactions completed

1,674 unique clients using NSES

391 new clients registered for NSES

55 anonymous transactions completed

Figure 9: Number of Transactions per provider type in BHSCT

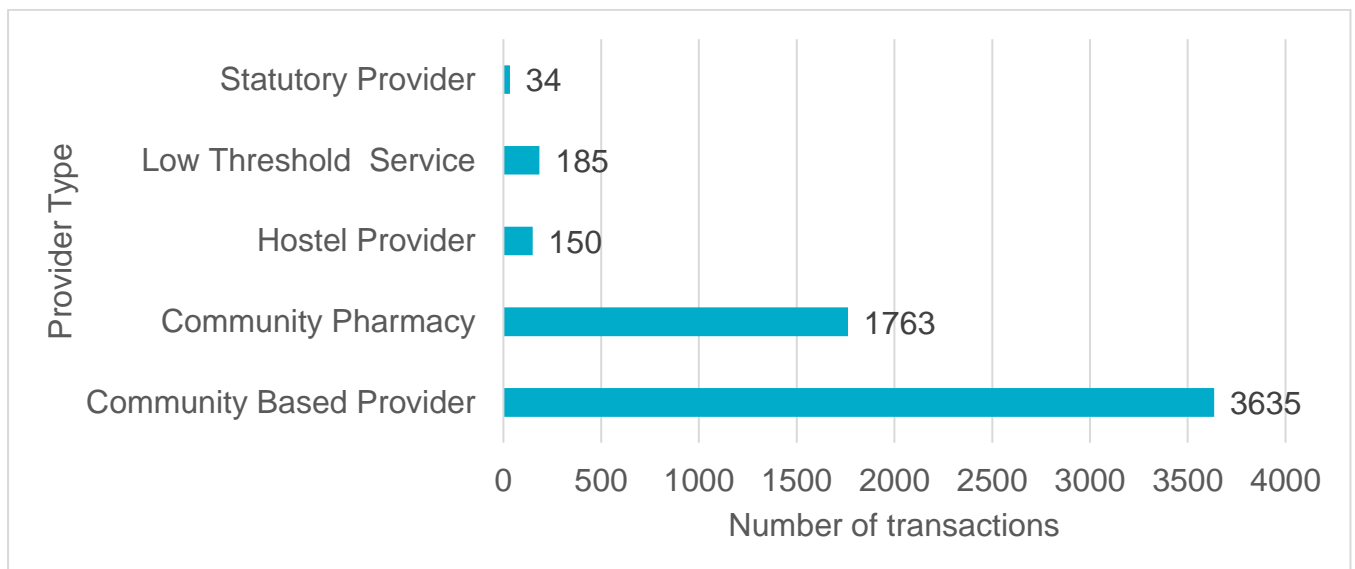
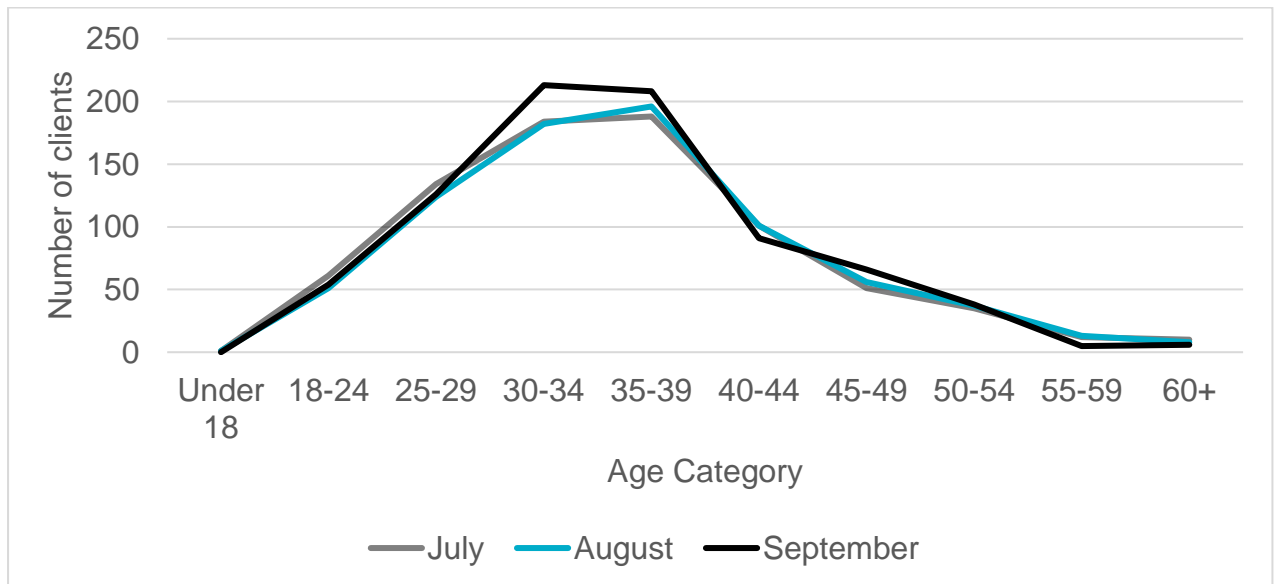


Figure 9 presents that community based providers completed the highest volume of transactions for BHSCT area, accounting for 63% of transactions.

NSES User Profile

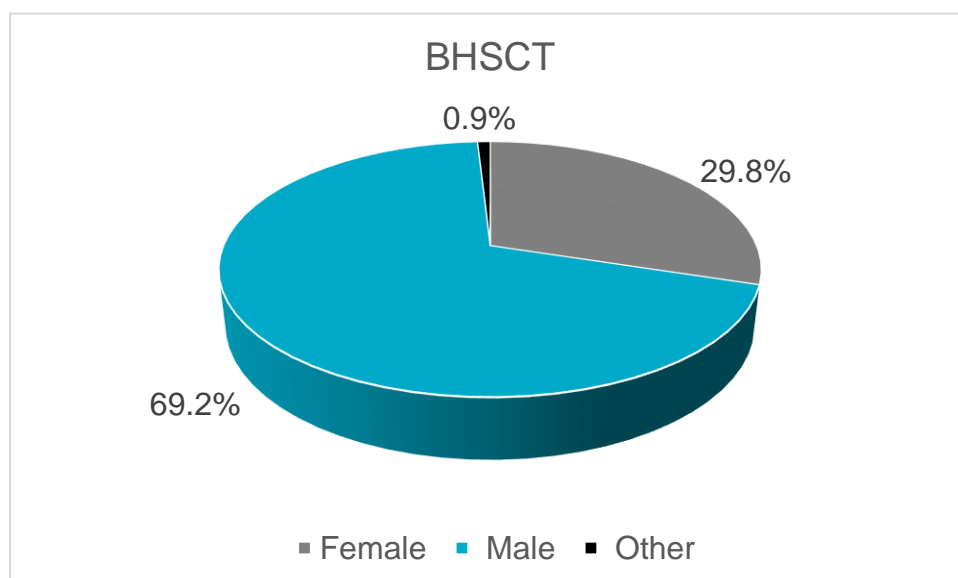
The age and gender profile of the unique clients who have completed a transaction within the reporting period is shown in Figures 10 and 11.

Figure 10: Current age of clients in BHSCT



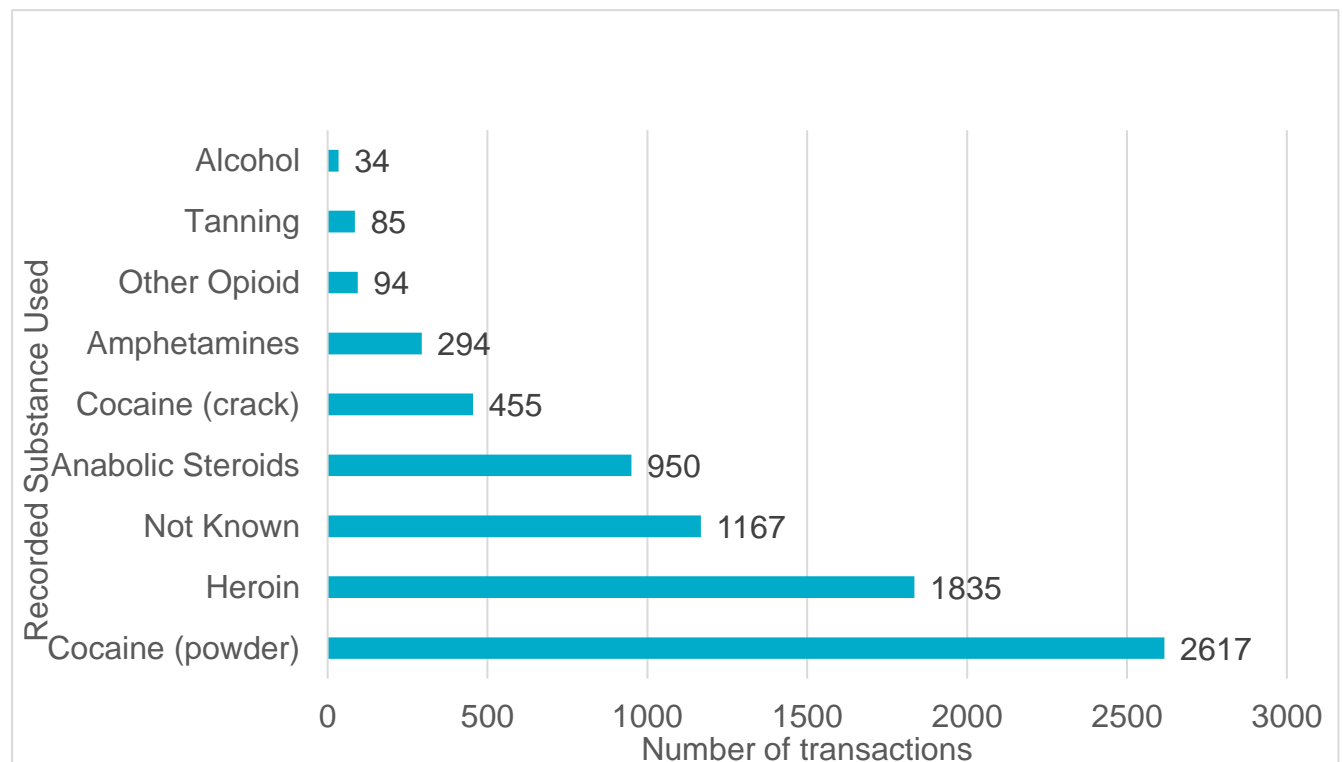
The most common overall age group of users in BHSCT were those aged between 35-39 years. For new clients registering, the most common of age group were those between 30-34 years.

Figure 11: Gender of clients in BHSCT



The majority of unique clients using the service were male (69.2%) and females now account for 29.8%. The number of females using the NSES is increasing and of the 391 new clients registered with the service in the reporting period, 19.4% of those were female.

Figure 12: Recorded Substance used by transaction in BHSCT.



Of the 5,767 transactions in this reporting period, 7621 reports of substance used were recorded across 24 substances. Figure 12 reflects only those substances recorded on more than 20 transactions. This includes those selecting 'unknown' category which was 1167 (15.3%). The largest recorded substance used was cocaine powder (2,617) followed by heroin (1,835) and anabolic steroids (950).

Section 4: Northern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the Northern Health and Social Care Trust Area (NHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

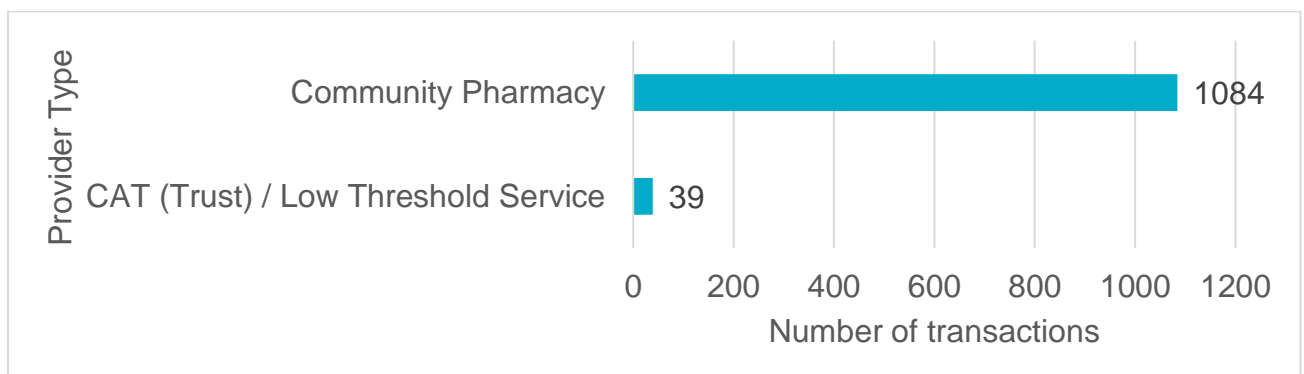
1,123 NSES transactions completed

736 unique clients using NSES

302 new clients registered for NSES

1 anonymous transactions completed

Figure 13: Number of transactions per provider type in NHSCT

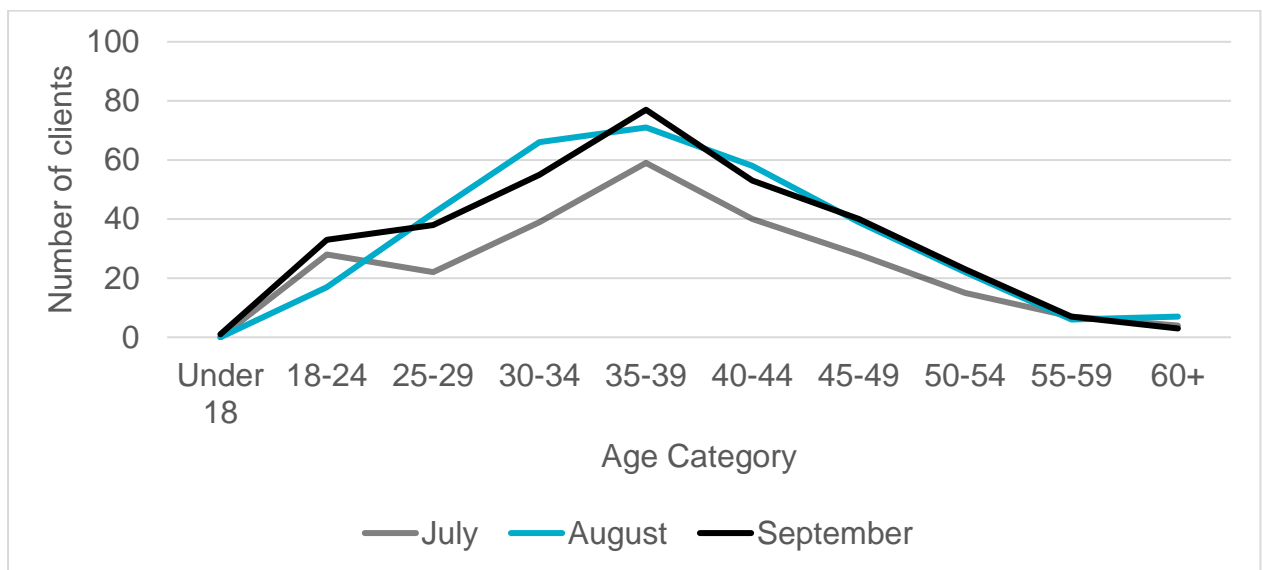


Community pharmacy remains the most common site for transactions within NHSCT (96.5%).

NSES user profile

The age and gender profile of unique clients who have completed a transaction within the reporting period is shown in Figures 14 and 15.

Figure 14: Age profile of users in NHSCT



The most common age group of clients using NSES were in the age category 35-39 years. Similarly, the most common age group of new clients in NHSCT was aged 35-39 years.

Figure 15: Gender profile of users in NHSCT

Similar to the previous quarter, the majority of clients were males (88.5%) compared with females (11.5%). Of the 302 new clients registered, males (89.1%) and females (10.9%).

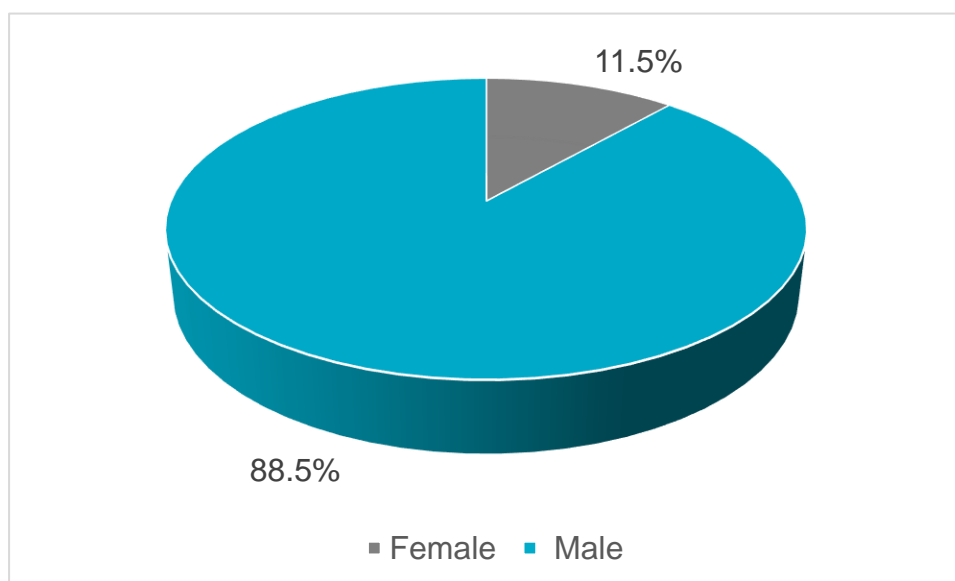
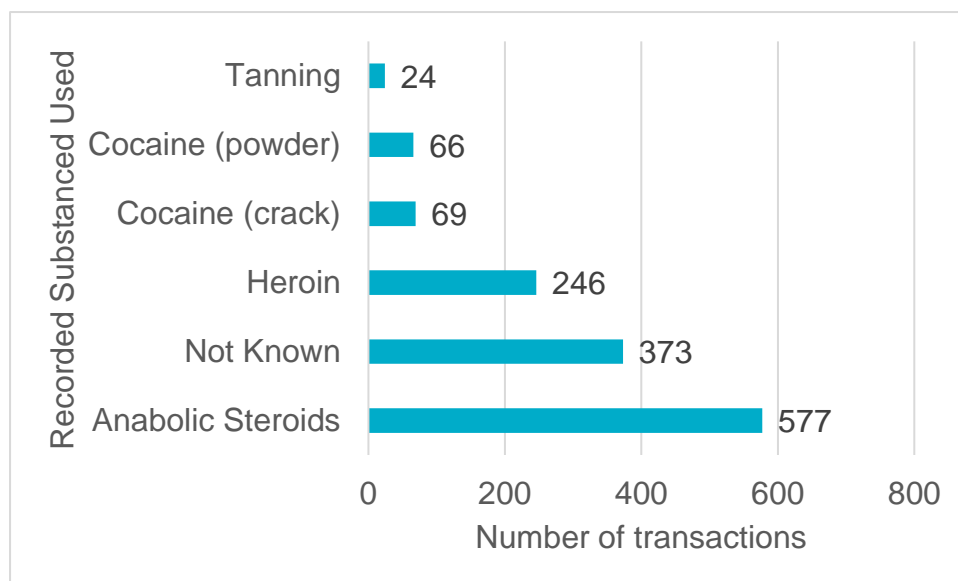


Figure 16: Recorded Substance used by transaction in NHSCT



Of the 1,123 transactions in this reporting period, 1447 reports of substance used were recorded across 23 substances. Figure 16 reflects only those substances recorded on more than 20 transactions. This includes those selecting 'unknown' category which was 373 (25.7%). The largest recorded substance used was anabolic steroids (577), followed by heroin (246) and cocaine crack (69).

Section 5: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Area (SEHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

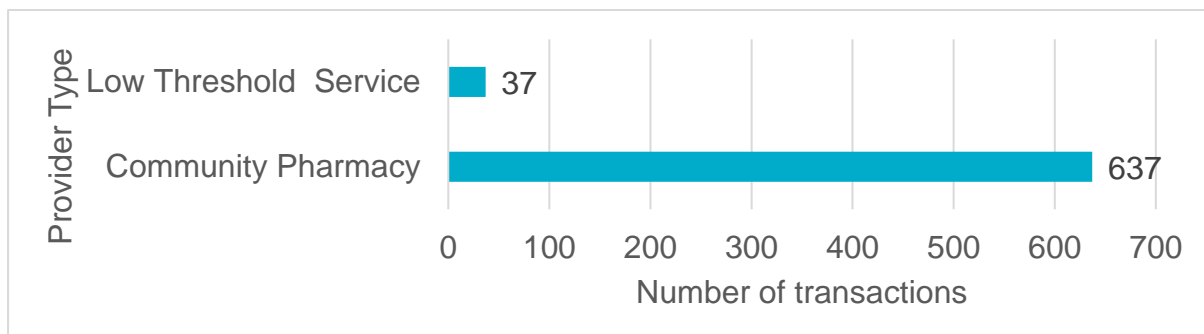
637 NSES transactions completed

278 unique clients using NSES

160 new clients registered for NSES

7 anonymous transaction completed

Figure 17: Number of NSES transactions per provider type in the reporting period in SEHSCT

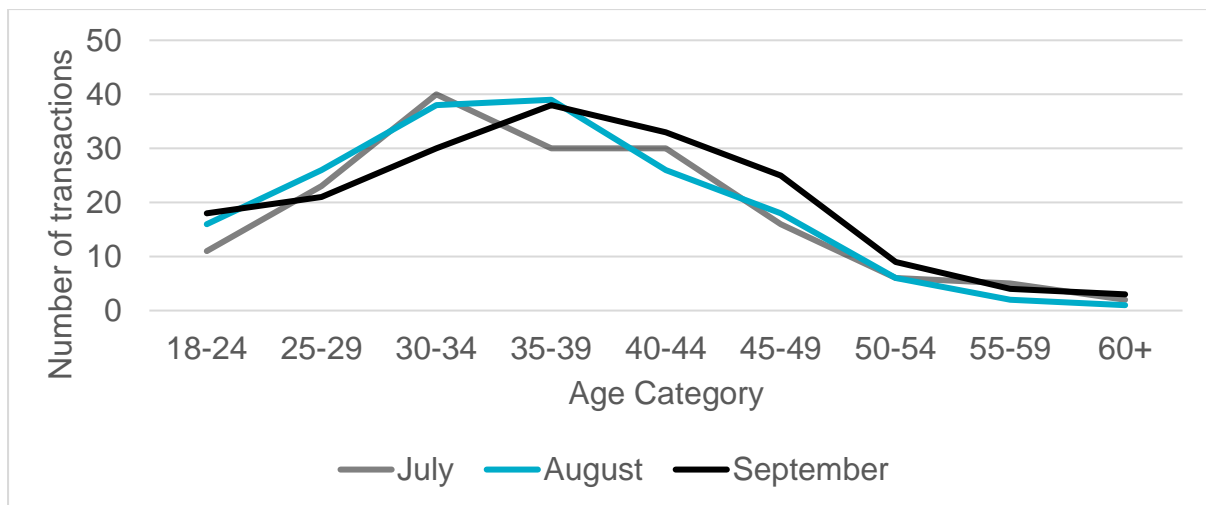


As shown in figure 17, the majority (77.3%) of transactions within SEHSCT were completed by community pharmacies.

NSES user profile

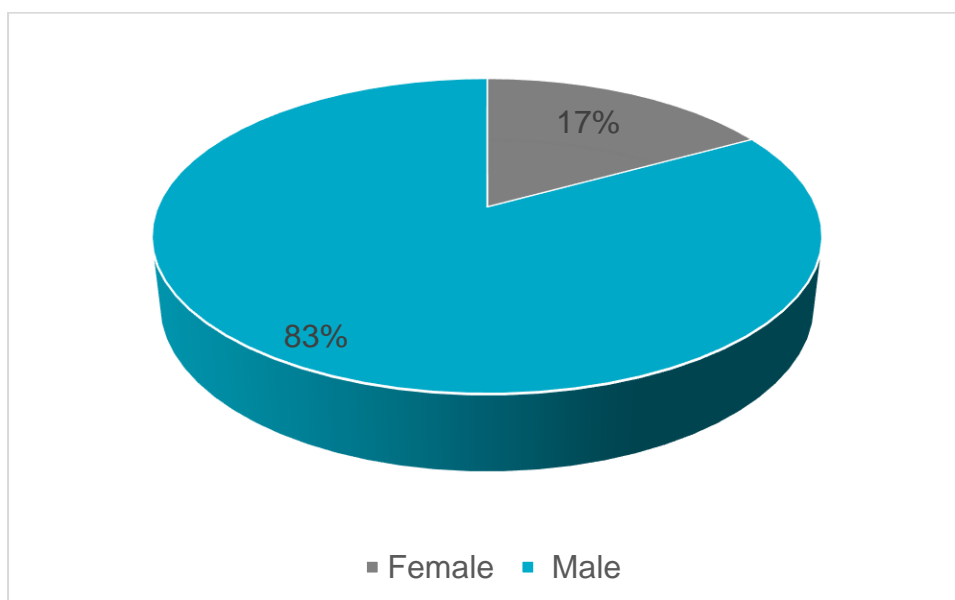
The age and gender profile of those who have completed a transaction within the reporting period is shown in Figures 18 and 19.

Figure 18: Current Age of Clients in SEHSCT registered in reporting period.



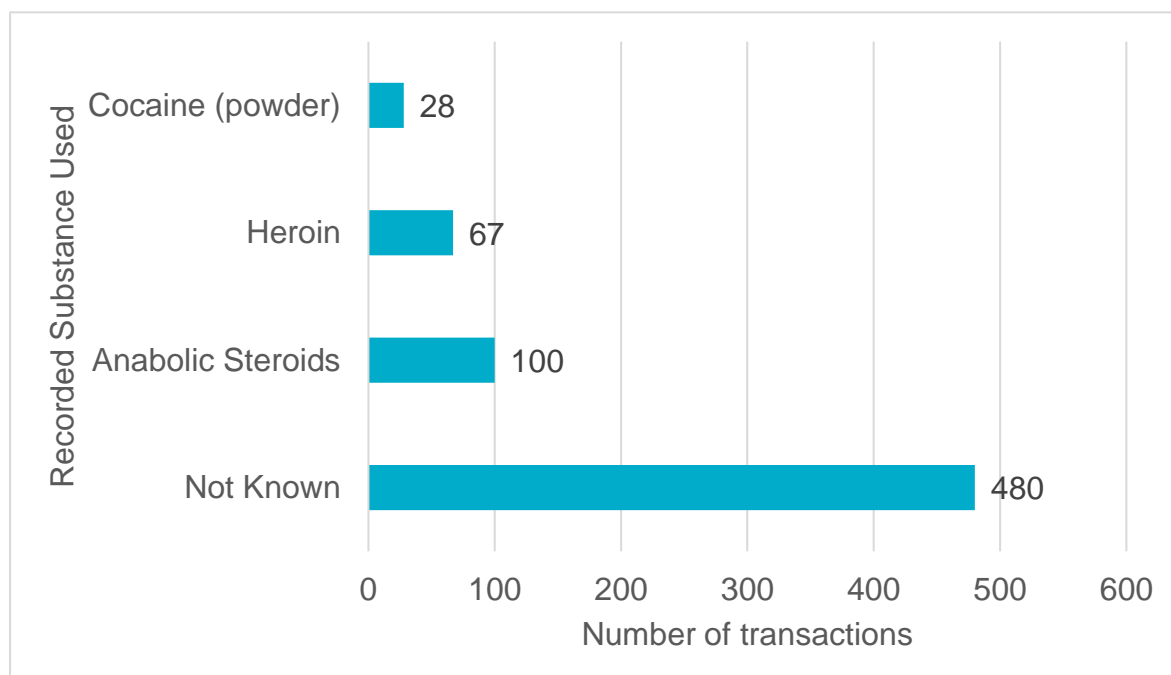
The most common overall age category of those using NSES are those between 30-34 years. In comparison, of the 171 new clients registered with NSES, the most common age category was 35-39 years.

Figure 19: Gender profile of users at registration in SEHSCT



Overall, the majority of clients were male accounting for 83% of those accessing NSES compared to females who accounted for 17%. Of the 160 new clients registered with the service, (83%) were male and (18%) female. The number of females using the service and registering as new clients with needle exchange continues to increase within SHSCT as in the previous reporting quarter 16% of new clients were female.

Figure 20: Recorded substance used by transaction in SEHSCT



Of the 637 transactions in this reporting period, 688 reports of substance used were recorded across 8 substances. Figure 20 reflects only those substances recorded on more than 20 transactions. This includes those selecting 'unknown' 480 (69.7%). The largest recorded substance used was anabolic steroids (100), followed by heroin (67) and cocaine powder (28).

Section 6: Southern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the Southern Health and Social Care Trust Area (SHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

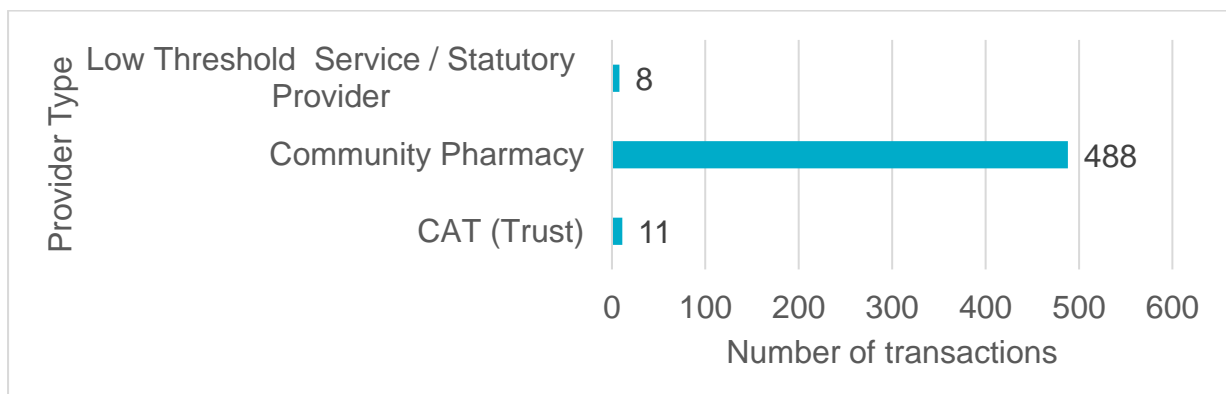
507 NSES transactions completed

278 unique clients using NSES

92 new clients registered for NSES

13 anonymous transactions completed

Figure 21: Number of NSES transactions per provider type in the reporting period in SHSCT

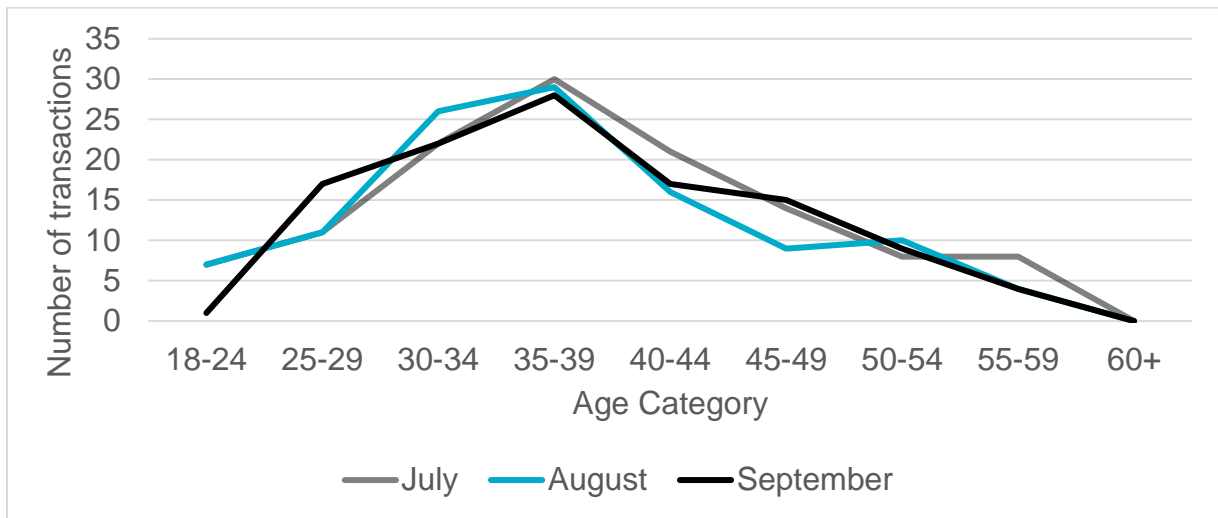


As in the previous quarter, community pharmacy accounted for the majority (95.7%) of transactions in SHSCT.

NSES user profile

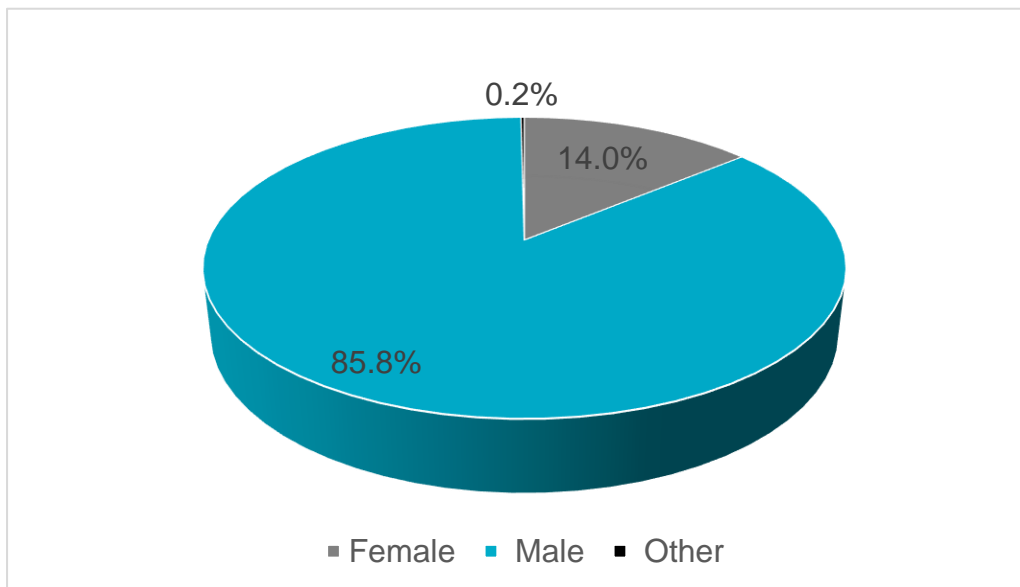
The age and gender profile of those who have completed a transaction within the reporting period is shown in Figures 22 and 23.

Figure 22: Current Age of clients in SHSCT registered in reporting period



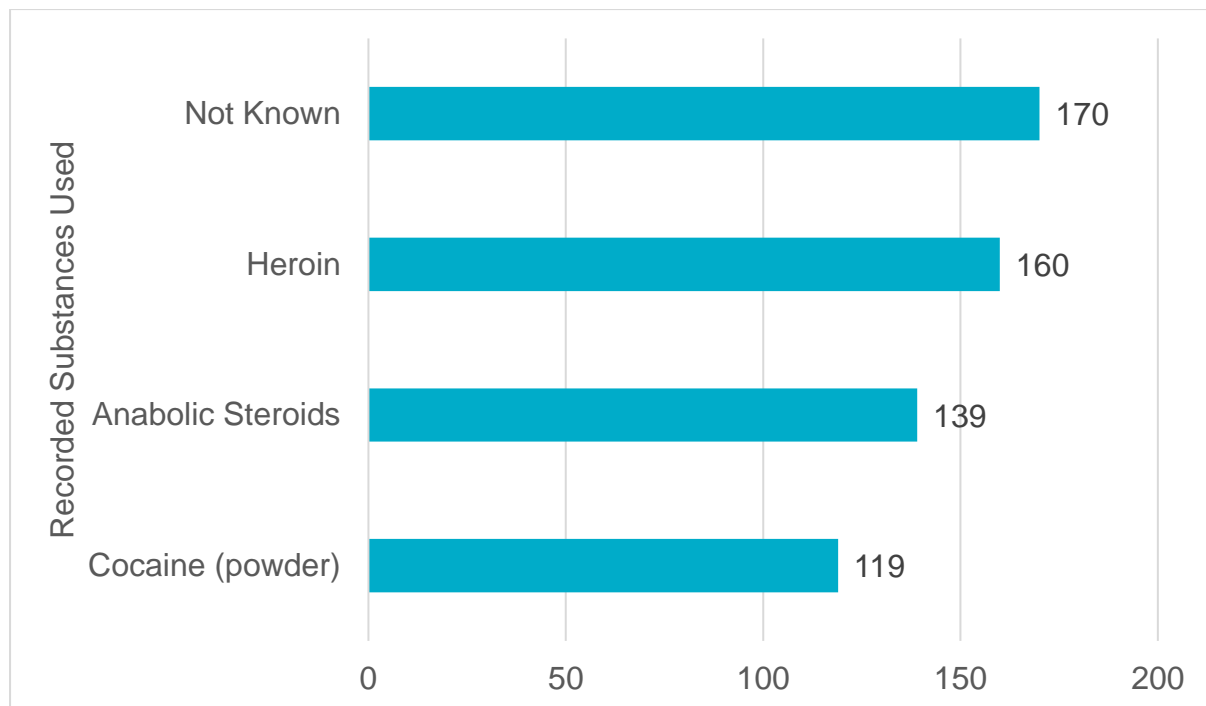
The most common age group of clients using NSES in re reporting period was age 35-39 years. Of the 92 new clients registered, the most common overall age group of clients in SHSCT was age 35-39.

Figure 23 Gender of clients at registration in SHSCT



Males (85.4%) accounted for the majority of clients using the service compared with females (14%). The ratio of new clients registering with the service during this reporting period shows a slight increase of females who accounted for 17% of new clients registered, whilst males were 82%.

Figure 24: Recorded substance used by transaction in SHSCT



Of the 637 transactions in this reporting period, 632 reports of substance used were recorded across 17 substances. Figure 24 reflects only those substances recorded on more than 20 transactions. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which was selected 170 times (26.8%). The largest substance recorded was heroin (160) followed by anabolic steroids (139) and cocaine powder (119).

Section 7: Western Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the Western Health and Social Care Trust Area (WHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

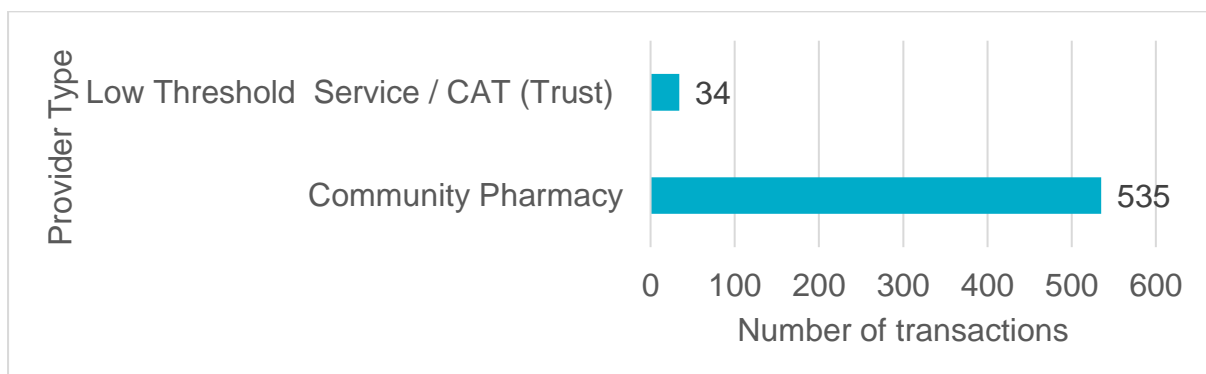
569 NSES transactions completed

441 unique clients using NSES

177 new clients registered for NSES

5 anonymous transactions completed

Figure 25: Number of NSES transactions per provider type in WHSCT

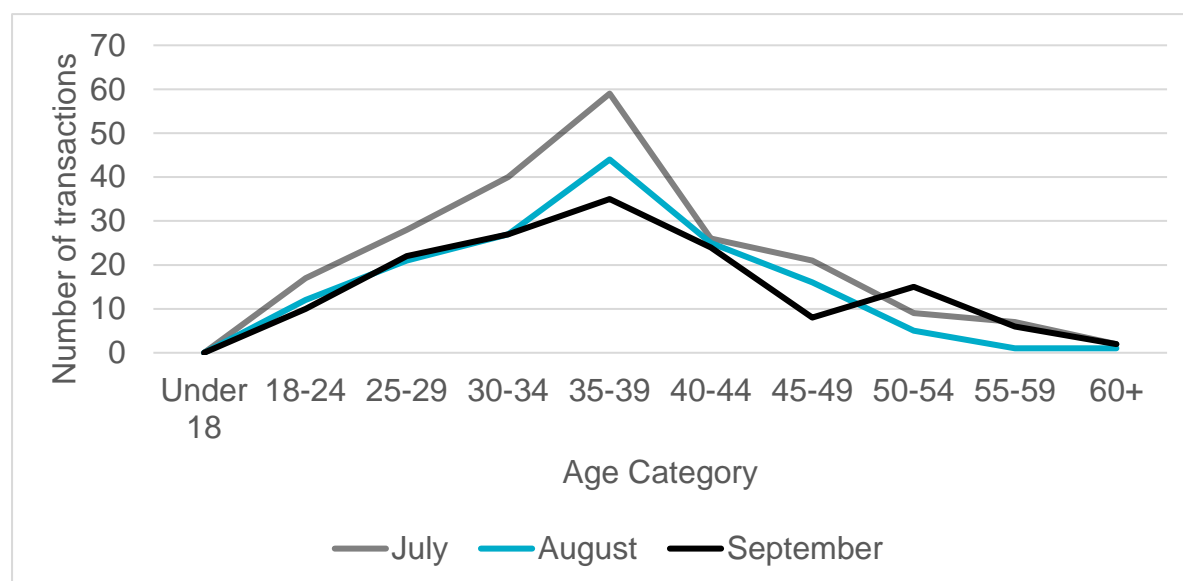


As shown in Figure 25, the majority (93.4%) of transactions within WHSCT were completed by community pharmacies.

NSES user profile

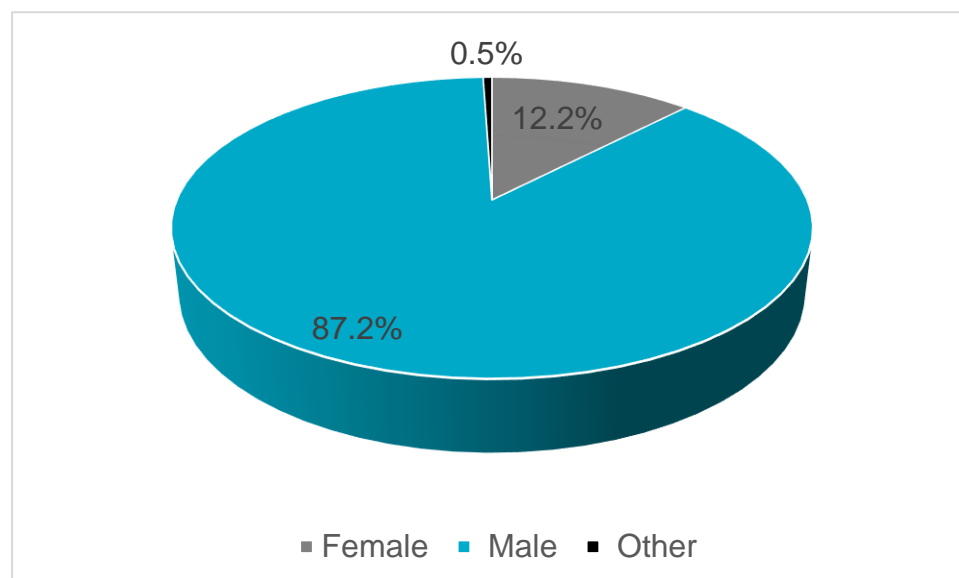
The age and gender profile of users who have completed a transaction within the reporting period is shown in Figures 26 and 27.

Figure 26: Current Age of Clients in WHSCT in reporting period



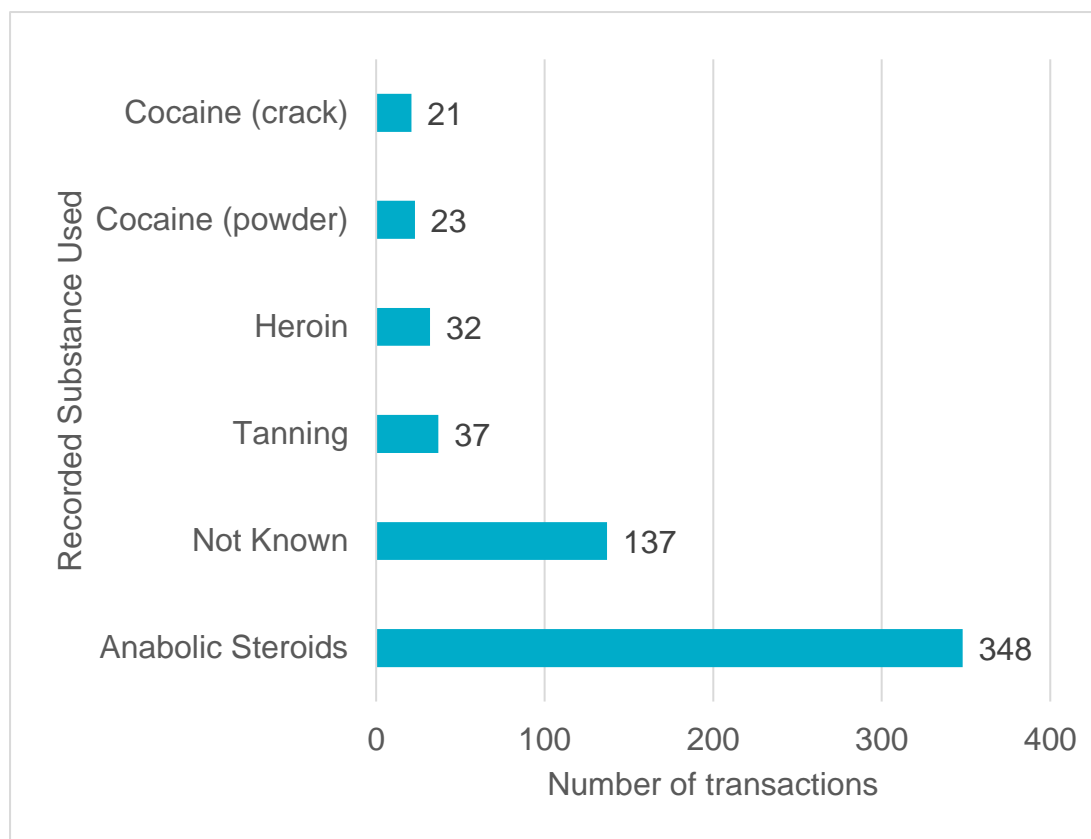
The most common age category in the WHSCT area was 35 – 39 years. This is reflective of the age category of those registered as new clients within the reporting period.

Figure 27: Gender of clients in WHSCT in reporting period



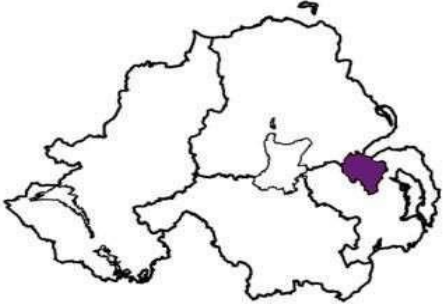




The majority of clients accessing the service were male (87.2%). For those new clients registering with NSES within the reporting period the majority were males (85%) compared to females (15%).

Figure 28: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in WHSCT area



Of the 569 transactions in this reporting period, 629 reports of substance used were recorded across 16 substances. Figure 28 reflects only those substances recorded on more than 20 transactions. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which accounted for 137 reports (21.8%). The largest recorded substance usage in needle exchange was anabolic steroids (348) followed by tanning (37) and heroin (32).

Section 8: Summary of NSES activity per Trust Area

<p>Belfast HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 1674</p> <p>Percentage male: 80%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cocaine Powder 2. Heroin 3. Anabolic Steroids <p>Lead Sector: Community Based Provider</p>	<p>Northern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 736</p> <p>Percentage male: 87%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin 3. Cocaine Crack <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	<p>South Eastern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 414</p> <p>Percentage male: 88%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin 3. Cocaine Powder <p>Lead Sector: Community pharmacy</p>
<p>Southern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 278</p> <p>Percentage male: 86%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heroin 2. Anabolic Steroids 3. Cocaine Powder <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	<p>Western HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 441</p> <p>Percentage male: 91%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Tanning 3. Heroin <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	