

Annual Report for Needle Exchange for 2025

1 April 2024 - 31 March 2025



Title	Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Annual Report.
	1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025
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Target Audience	Needle and syringe exchange
	providers, drug treatment services, pharmacy staff, health professionals
	working in substance use
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Section 1: Background

The Needle and Syringe Exchange Service (NSES) is vital to the health and wellbeing of the entire community, helping to reduce the potential of drug-related litter, lowering the risk of HIV and Hepatitis B and C within the wider population, and putting those who use the service in direct contact with a health professional who can help them in engaging with treatment services to address their substance use, should they wish to do so. The provision of harm reduction services within Northern Ireland is facilitated by the Public Health Agency (PHA) who commission NSES across the region based in areas where there is an existing pattern of people who inject. Anyone who injects substances can use a NSES, and this includes people who inject opioids, image and performance enhancing drugs or stimulants.

PHA have fully implemented a new online database to record needle exchange activity alongside anonymous, non-identifiable client data. This database is called Neo360 Harm Reduction Information System.

Currently the PHA are working to incorporate the Take Home Naloxone Programme into all NSES sites.

This report summarises data that has been collated by Neo360 within the twelve months period between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

This report includes the regional data across Northern Ireland, followed by a breakdown per Trust, **correct as of 15 April 2025**. The following information is collated:

- Total number of transactions;
- Transaction by provider type;
- Transaction by trust location;
- Age of client at registration;
- Gender of client at registration;
- Recorded substance/s used

PHA would like to thank all harm reduction practitioners and people with lived/living experience of substance use who have contributed to the provision of data for this report.

Key findings

Needle and Syringe Exchange Services

- 36 sites were active in NSES with a total of 32,667 NSES transactions. This
 includes transactions via NSP Direct (Postal Needle Exchange). This was an
 increase of 7.4% of NSES transactions across Northern Ireland in 2024-25
 compared with the previous year 2023-24.
- Over half of NSES transactions (56.8%) occurred in community pharmacies with the remaining 43.2% occurring in specialist NSES services such as communitybased providers, low threshold services and HSC Trust based Community Addiction Teams.
- Cocaine was the largest reported substance used across transactions.
- Approximately 721,020 needles and syringes were distributed, this marks a 7.5% increase compared with the previous year.

Clients

- 3,986 new clients registered on Neo360.
- 7,978 unique clients accessing NSES.
- 1,225 clients are crossing Trust boundaries to access NSES.

Site update

- In October 2024, the PHA commenced an independent postal service through Exchange Supplies (NSES equipment provider). This service allows anyone with a postcode in Northern Ireland to access online NSES provision free of charge.
- Two new NSES have opened; Harts pharmacy, Newcastle and WHSCT Community Addiction Team at Woodlea House.
- 2 NSES sites closed, these were Queens Quarter Housing and the Welcome Organisation.
- Belfast Health Inclusion Service were relocated and can now only offer an outreach service.
- 58 needle exchange staff have completed the NSES mandatory practitioners training.

NSES providers

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the following sites providing NSES as shown in Table 1 below;

Table 1: Participating Service Provider by Trust Area in reporting period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Trust Area	Provider	Provider Type	Service Type
Belfast	Extern	Community-based	Public Service
	Extern – Ormeau Centre	Hostel	Residents Only
	The Welcome Organisation	Community-based Outreach	Public Service
	Belfast Drug Outreach Team	Low Threshold Service	Public Service
	Chemist Connect	Pharmacy	Public service
	Maguires	Pharmacy	Public service
	Belfast Health Inclusion Service	Trust	Outreach only
	Custody Health Care	Trust	Client only
	Queens Quarter Housing	Hostel	Residents only
Northern	Boots, Ballymena Health Centre	Pharmacy	Public service
	Boots, Antrim	Pharmacy	Public service
	Boots, Coleraine	Pharmacy	Public service
	Boots, Cookstown	Pharmacy	Public service
	Boots, Newtownabbey	Pharmacy	Public service
	Boots, Queen's Street Ballymena	Pharmacy	Public service
	NHSCT Community Addictions Service	Trust	Public service
	Extern	Low Threshold Service	Client and outreach only
Southern	Extern	Low Threshold Service	Client and outreach only
	Boots, Armagh	Pharmacy	Public service

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

Section 2: Regional Data Review

NSES transactions

Currently in Northern Ireland the NSES operates across community pharmacies, low threshold services, community-based providers and Trust community addiction teams as present in table 1. In 2024-25, 36 sites recorded at least one needle exchange transaction.

From 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 there were a total of 32,666 NSES transactions carried out across Northern Ireland. This represents an increase of approximately 7.4% NSES transactions from the previous report.

Table 2 reflects the total number of transactions completed per year. Please also see that we have two years where data was not analysed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Table 2: Number of transactions per year

Year	No of visits/Transactions
2017-2018	30,065
2018-2019	33,992
2019-2020	34,464
2020-2021	No data available
2021-2022	No data available
2022-2023	34,989
2023-2024	30,259
2024-2025	32,666

Overleaf, Figure 1 reflects that over half of NSES transactions (56.8%) occurred in community pharmacies.

Figure 1: Number of NSES transactions by Provider Type

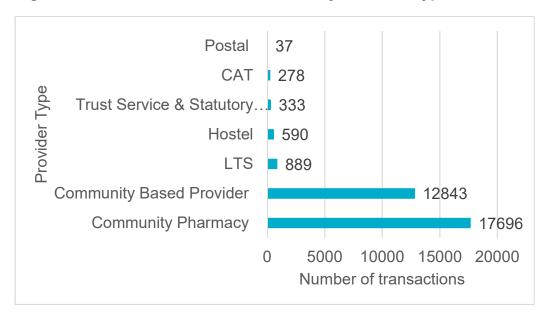


Figure 2: Number of transactions by each Health and Social Care Trust area

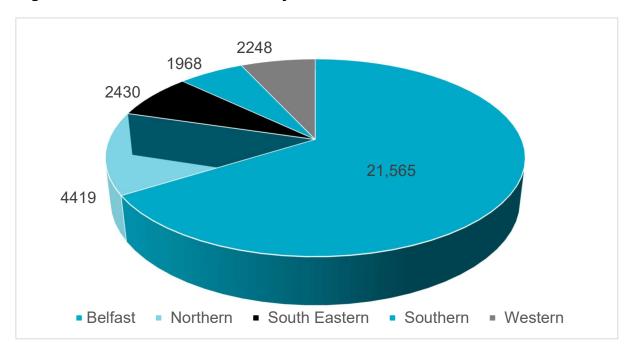


Figure 2 presents the number of transactions per each Health and Social Care Trust area. The highest number of overall transactions continue to take place in Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) area which accounted for approximately two

thirds of transactions (66.1%). Whilst the lowest percentage of transactions (6%) remains in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust (SHSCT).

In 2024-25, a total of 3,986 new clients registered with NSES. Of these unique clients, 1,440 (36.1%) were registered in BHSCT area. The lowest number of clients registered was within the SHSCT area which had 332 (8.3%) clients registered.

The trends in terms of transactions and unique clients remains the same across the trust areas for 2023-2024 into 2024-2025.

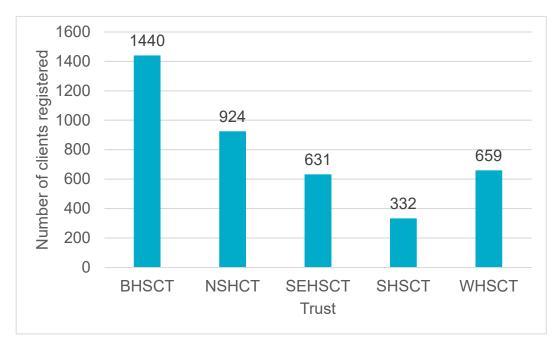


Figure 3: Number of Clients Registered by Trust in reporting period

NSES User Profile

The age and gender profile of the 3,986 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 4 and 5.

Figure 4: Current Age of new Clients registered in reporting period

The most common age of users was those aged 35 - 39 years old. This was closely followed by those aged 30 - 34 years old. Comparing with previous years, there has been no substantial change in the age demographic of those registering with NSES.



Registration numbers suggest that the majority of new clients registered were male.

Figure 5: Gender of Clients at registration

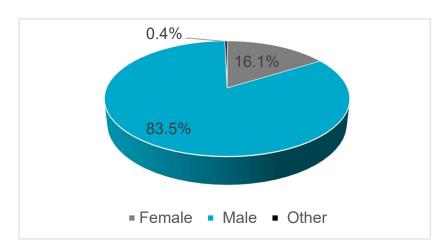


Table 3 reflects the gender breakdown of individuals accessing NSES which remained a male dominated service for the last number of years. However, there has

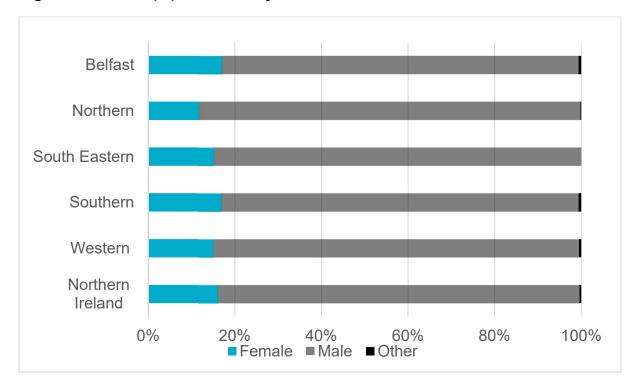
been a gradual increase in the number of females accessing the service. In 2016/2017 females accounted for 14.2% of the transactions and in 2024-25 this grew to 22.5% of all transactions.

Table 3: Number of transactions per year by gender

Gender	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2023	2024/2025
Female	4,183 (14.2%)	4,650 (15.4%)	5,209 (15.3%)	5,710 (16.5%)	6,411 (20.1%)	7,342 (22.5%)
Male	24,903	25,222	28,457	28,205	25,377	25063 (76.2%)
Other	197	193	326	549	63	261
Total	29,283	30,065	33,992	34,464	31,851	32,666

Figure 6 presents the gender breakdown by Trust of clients registering for needle exchange.

Figure 6: Gender (%) of clients by Trust area



Southern Health and Social Care Trust area reflects the largest number of female clients and the Northern Health and Social Care Trust area reflects the largest number of male clients

Recorded substances used

Clients are asked at the point of registration to record the substance used and they may report more than one substance in response to this question. Neo360 alerts staff on a quarterly basis to confirm any changes with clients which substances they are using.

Of the 32,666 transactions that took place in 2024-25, 42,565 reports of substance used were recorded across 31 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which accounted for 21.6% of all transactions. Figure 7 presents the substances used which were reported more than 20 times. Cocaine powder was reported as substance used in approximately a quarter (25.7%) of all transactions and is therefore the most reported substance across the region. Heroin is the second most recorded substance used (19.7%). The reported use of anabolic steroids has increased by approximately 11%.

Figure 7: Reported substances used on more than 20 NSES transactions

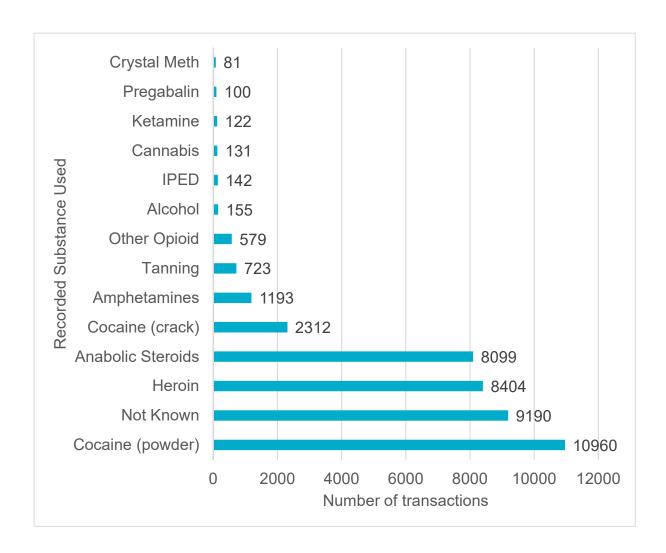


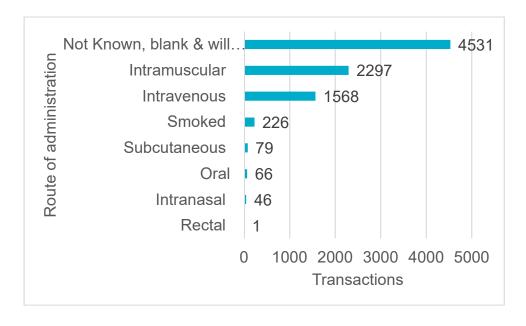
Table 4 presents the number of unique clients reporting substances used. Although cocaine powder was reported most frequently during transactions, the number of unique clients using anabolic steroids by far exceeded those using heroin or cocaine powder. From the previous financial year, there has been an increase of approximately 430 unique clients using anabolic steroids.

Table 4: Number of clients using most reported substances from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Substance	Number of NSES unique clients
Anabolic Steroids	3,452
Cocaine (powder)	894
Heroin	813

Reported Route of Administration of Substance

Clients are asked at the point of registration and subsequently on a quarterly basis to report how they administer the substance used. In over half of the transactions this information was not disclosed (51.4%). Intramuscular was the most reported route of administration (26.1%) followed by intravenous injecting (17.8%) Smoking was reported at 226 transactions (2.6%).



Frequency of Substance Used

Table 5 presents how frequently clients used the various substances. Heroin and cocaine powder were most frequently used daily and more than once per day. Anabolic steroids were reported to be used 3-4 times a week, weekly or occasionally.

Table 5: Frequency of use within most reported substances used.

Substance injected	More than once a day	Daily	3-4 times a week	Weekly	Monthly	Occasionally
Anabolic	40	00	000	000	00	044
Steroids	42	96	329	808	99	241
Cocaine						
(crack)	37	54	22	20	3	14
Cocaine						
(powder)	158	169	59	36	8	36
Heroin	161	196	57	33	9	39
IPED	3	3	11	10	1	9
Other Opioid	6	13	6	4	1	5
Other						
stimulant	1	3	5	10	2	0
Tanning	2	7	17	81	13	15

Table 6: Quantity of Needles Dispensed

Table 6 presents breakdown of the needles dispensed across all needle exchange sites for the reporting period.

	Needles Dispensed				
Category	Item	Quantity Dispensed			
Needles	16mm [5/8 inch] orange	16,159			
Needles	25mm [1 inch] blue	7,185			
Needles	25mm [1 inch] orange	18,843			
Needles	30mm [1 1/4 inch] blue	149,035			
Needles	38mm [1 1/2 inch] black	1,785			
Needles	40mm [1 1/2 inch] green	142,718			
Syringes	0.5ml Fixed Syringe	230,335			
Syringes	1 ml 30G Unisharp fixed	152,093			
Syringes	Unisharp 31g 0.3ml Fixed Needle Syringe	2,857			
Total		721,020			

In 2024-25, a total of 721,020 needles and syringes combined were dispensed. This is a 7.5% increase compared with the previous period. In 2023-24, a total of 175,448 0.5 fixed syringes were dispensed. This increased to 230,335 for the reporting 2024-25 period. This increase is consistent with the increasing number of people who are reporting cocaine injecting.

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 NSES with 382,298 (53%) in total dispensed in the reporting period.

NSES also dispenses 2ml packs, however, these do not contain needles. Clients then select needles separately, accounting for the high number of single coloured needles dispensed. The highest dispensed single needles are blue (30mm) 149,022 dispensed and green (40mm) 142,718 dispensed with a total of 291,740 (40%) dispensed in the reporting period. These are the largest needles and are used for both groin injecting and also for steroid injecting.

Table 7 reflects the number of packs dispensed which shows the most popular pack is the 0.5ml pack. Starter packs have now ceased to be offered due to the low uptake.

Table 7: Packs dispensed between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025

Item	Quantity Dispensed
0.5ml Fixed Syringe Pack	16,925
1ml Fixed Syringe Pack (Twin)	2,501
1ml Standard Pack	12,348
1ml Starter Pack	610
2ml Standard	3,658
2ml Starter Pack	283
2ml Syringe Pack (Twin)	1,254
Steroid pack	13,307
Total	50,886

Use of Foils

In promoting harm reduction, all individuals who are injecting or at risk of initiation to injecting are therefore encouraged to consider less harmful routes of administration. Staff within needle exchange sites are encouraged to dispense foils which will

support smoking. Twenty-three sites dispensed 3,829 packets (20 per pack). The uptake of foil has decreased substantially.

Returns

During the reporting period, 111,712 estimated needles were returned within exchanges.

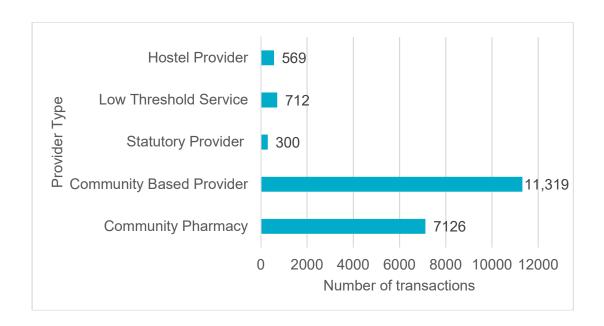
A list of all NSES equipment can be found in Appendix 1.

Section 3: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT) Data

In BHSCT area within the reporting period there were:

- 21,565 NSES transactions completed;
- 3,952 unique clients using NSES;
- 1,440 new clients registered for NSES;
- 247 anonymous transactions completed.

Figure 9: Number of Transactions per Provider Type in BHSCT

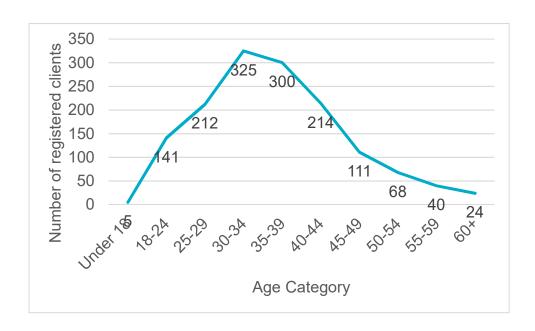


Community-based providers had the highest rate of transactions (56.5%) for BHSCT. Community pharmacies completed 35.6% of transactions.

User profile

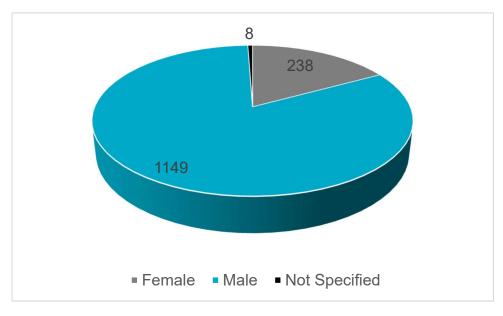
The age and gender of profile 1,440 users registered within the reporting period is shown in figures 10 and 11.

Figure 10: Age of Clients at registration in BHSCT



Of the 1,440 newly registered users in 2024-25, 22.6% of service users were aged between 30-34 years and 20.8% were aged between 35-39 years.

Figure 11: Gender of clients at registration



For 2024-25, a large proportion of new clients registered in BHSCT area were male (79.8%), however the number of females using NSES continues to increase.

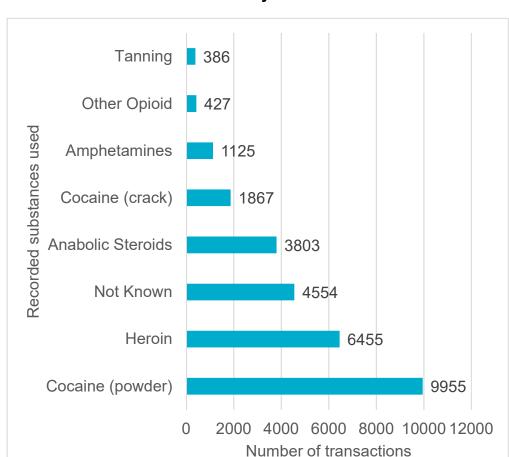


Figure 12: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in BHSCT

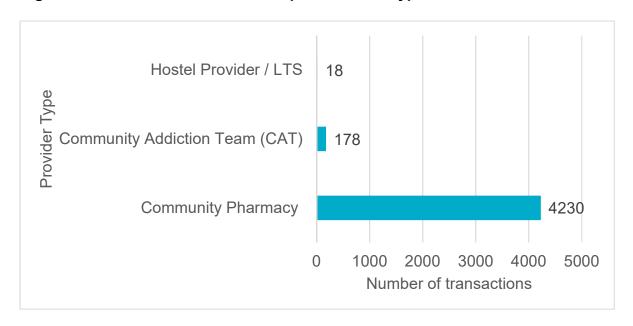
Of the 21,565 transactions in this reporting period, 29,158 reports of substance used were recorded across 30 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category (15.6%). Figure 12 reflects the substances used which were recorded on more than 20 transactions. For the second consecutive year in BHSCT, cocaine was the largest reported substance used (34%). Heroin was the second largest recorded substance (22%). This is a decrease of 7.4% from the previous year. Anabolic steroids have remained consistent with approximately 13% transactions reported.

Section 4: Northern Health and Social Care Trust Area (NHSCT)

In the NHSCT area within the reporting period there were:

- 4,419 NSES transactions completed;
- 2,068 unique clients using NSES;
- 924 new clients registered for NSES;
- 10 anonymous transactions completed.

Figure 13: Number of Transactions per Provider Type in NHSCT

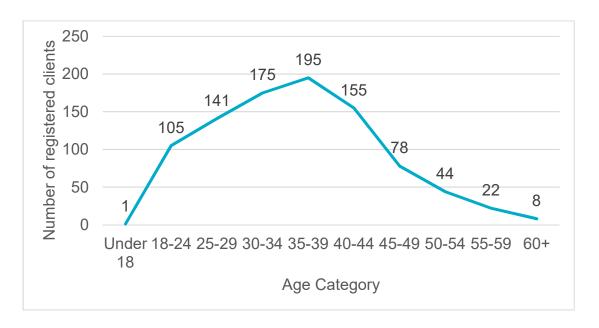


In 2024-25, approximately 96% of transactions took place in a community pharmacy setting.

NSES User Profile

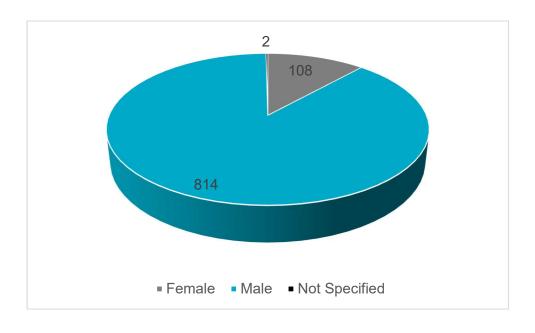
The age and gender profile of the 924 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 14 and 15.

Figure 14: Current Age of Clients in NHSCT registered in reporting period

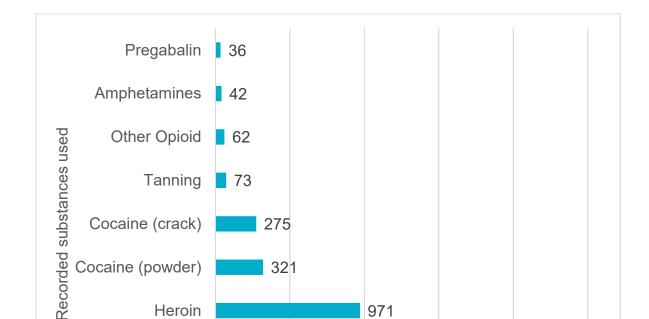


In 2024-25, of the 924 registered users, 21% were aged 35-39 years old.

Figure 15: Gender of Clients at registration in NHSCT



For 2024-25, the majority of newly registered clients were male 88%.



971

1000

Number of transactions

1523

1500

2134

2500

2000

Figure 16: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in NHSCT

Heroin

0

Not Known

Anabolic Steroids

Figure 16 reflects that of the 4,419 transactions in this reporting period, 5,626 reports of substance used were recorded across 27 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category at 27%.

500

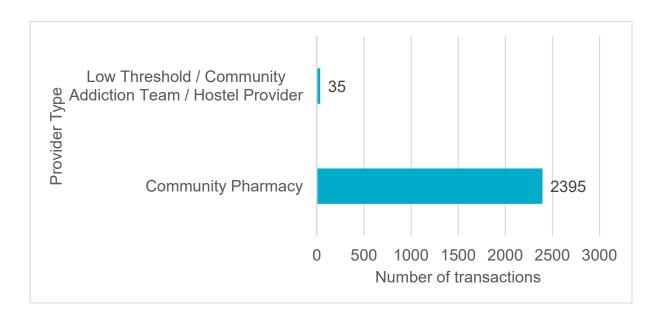
The recorded substance used has remained relatively consistent within NHSCT area as anabolic steroids is recorded in approximately 38% of transactions followed by heroin (17%) and cocaine powder (6%).

Section 5: South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Area (SEHSCT)

In the SHSCT area within the reporting period there were:

- 2,430 NSES transactions completed;
- 1,138 unique clients using NSES;
- 2,416 new clients registered for NSES;
- 26 anonymous transactions completed.

Figure 17: Number of Transactions per provider type for SEHSCT

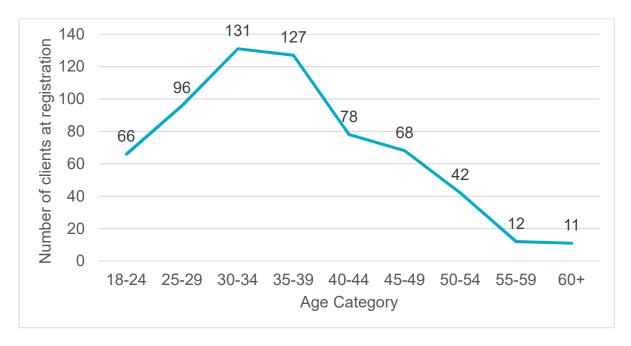


Approximately 99% of transactions took place in community pharmacy. This remains consistent with data from previous years.

NSES User Profile

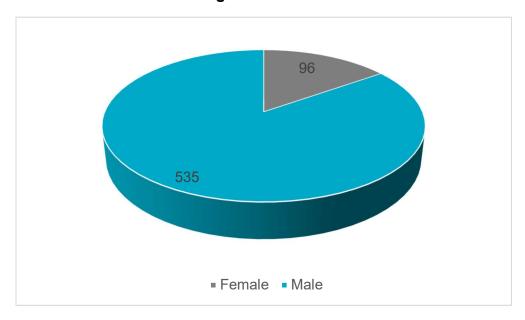
The age and gender profile of the 631 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 18 and 19.

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



The most common overall age group of clients in SEHSCT was age 30-34 years (21%) followed by those aged 35-39 years old (20%).

Figure 19: Gender of Clients at registration in SEHSCT



In 2024-25, the majority of new clients registered were male (85%).

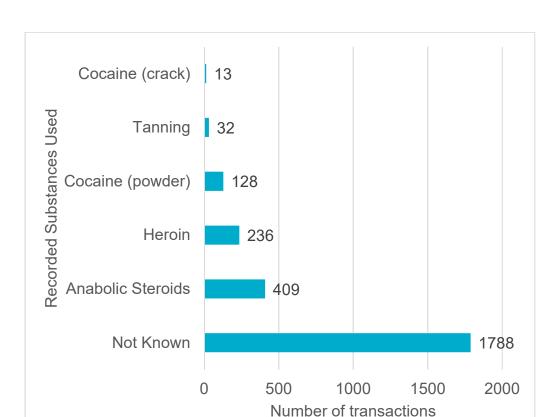


Figure 20: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in SEHSCT

Figure 20 reflects that of the 2,430 transactions in this reporting period, 2,628 reports of substance used were recorded across 15 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which was 1,788 times (68%).

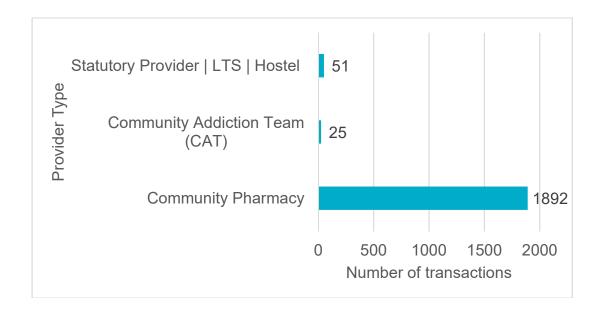
Of those who did report, anabolic steroids (16%) was the most reported substance followed by heroin (9%), followed by cocaine (5%).

Section 6: Southern Health and Social Care Trust Area (SHSCT)

In the SHSCT area within the reporting period there were:

- 1,968 NSES transactions completed
- 767 unique clients using NSES
- 332 new clients registered for NSES
- 64 anonymous transactions completed

Figure 21: Number of Transactions per Provider type in NSES for SHSCT area

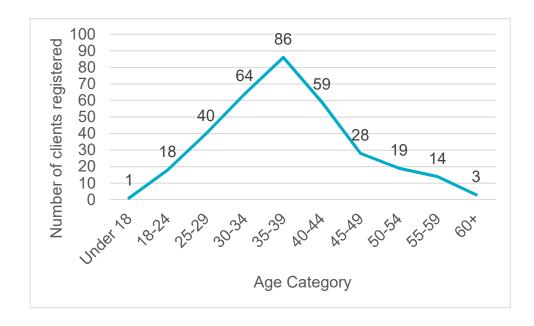


Approximately 96% of all NSES transactions took place in community pharmacy.

NSES User Profile

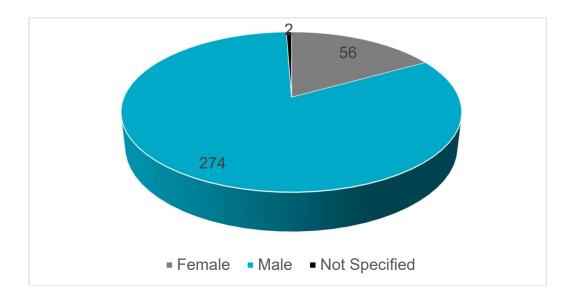
The age and gender profile of the 332 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 22 and 23.

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



In 2024-25, of the 332 new registered users, approximately a quarter (25.9%) of those were aged between 35 - 39 years.

Figure 23: Gender of Clients at registration in SHSCT



In 2024-25, the majority of new clients registered were male (82.5%). Approximately 17% were female.



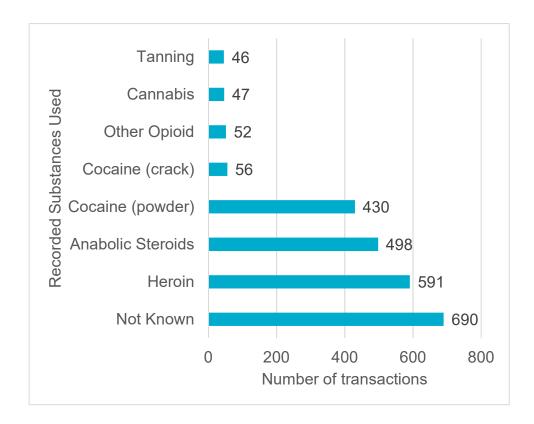


Figure 24 reflects that of the 1,968 transactions in this reporting period, 2,464 reports of substance used were recorded across 24 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which was selected 690 times (28%).

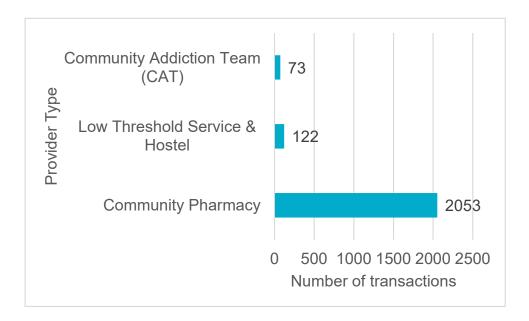
The largest substance recorded was heroin (24%) followed by anabolic steroids (20%) and cocaine powder (17%).

Section 7: Western Health and Social Care Trust Area (WHSCT)

In the WHSCT area within the reporting period there were:

- 2,248 NSES transactions completed;
- 1,278 unique clients using NSES;
- 659 new clients registered for NSES;
- 25 anonymous transactions completed.

Figure 25: Number of Transactions per provider type for WHSCT

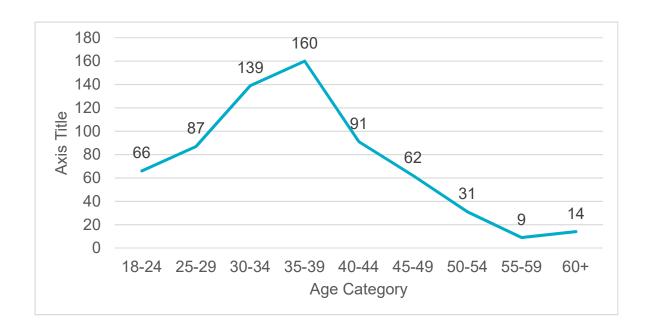


Approximately 91% of all transactions took place in community pharmacy.

NSES User Profile

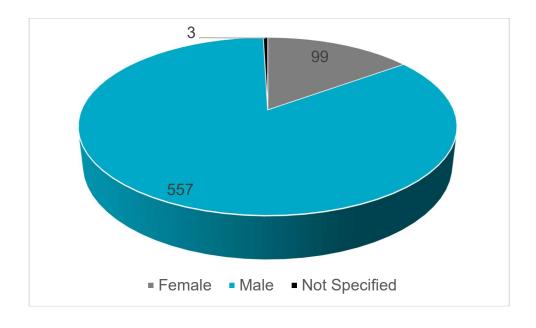
The age and gender profile of the 659 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 26 and 27.

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



Overall the most common age category in the WHSCT area was 35-39 years.

Figure 27: Gender of new Clients at registration in WHSCT



The majority of clients were male (84.5%) within the WHSCT area.

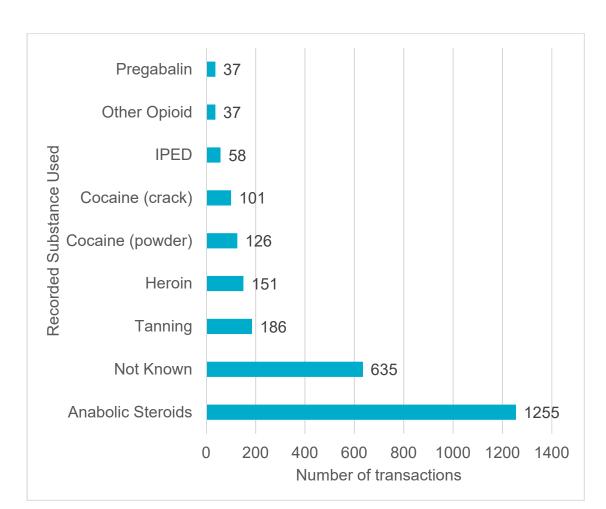


Figure 28: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in WHSCT area

Figure 28 reflects the top 9 substances recorded, included 'unknown.' Of the 2,248 transactions in this reporting period, 2,689 reports of substance used were recorded across 24 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which accounted for 635 reports (24%).

The largest substance recorded was anabolic steroids (47%) followed by tanning (7%) and heroin (6%).

Section 8: Summary of NSES activity by Trust Area



Number of unique clients: 3,952

Percentage male: 86%

Most commonly reported Drugs

- 1. Cocaine Powder
- 2. Heroin
- 3. Anabolic Steroids

Lead Sector: Community Based Providers



Number of unique clients: 2.068

Percentage male: 87%

Most commonly reported Drugs

- 1. Anabolic Steroids
- 2. Heroin
- 3. Cocaine Powder

Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy



Number of unique clients: 1,138

Percentage male: 90%

Most commonly reported Drugs

- 1. Anabolic Steroids
- 2. Heroin
- 3. Cocaine Powder

Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy

Southern HSC Trust



Number of unique clients: 767

Percentage male: 82.5%

Most commonly reported Drugs

- 1. Heroin
- 2. Anabolic Steroids
- 3. Cocaine Powder

Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy

Western HSC Trust



Number of unique clients: 1,268

Percentage male: 84.5%

Most commonly reported Drugs

- 1. Anabolic Steroids
- 2. Tanning
- 3. Heroin

Lead Sector: Community

Pharmacy

Appendix 1: Equipment available through NSES

Description
Description
Naloxone Supply
Prenoxad
Naloxone Pebble
Naloxone Nasal Naloxone
NSES Packs
0.5ml fixed syringe pack
1ml fixed syringe pack (twin)
1ml Starter (ceased on 31 March 2025)
1ml Standard
2ml Starter (ceased on 31 March 2025)
2ml Syringe Pack (Twin)
Steroid Pack
Needle head
16mm Orange
25mm Orange
30mm Orange
38mm black
40mm green
Other items
2ml Water Ampoules
Pre-Injection Swabs
Citric acid sachets
Stericup spoon with filter
Amp snapper
Foil
Regular condoms

Single Use Nitazene Test Strip
Stericup
Vitamin C Sachets
Wound Care Pack
Sharps Containers
Daniels Worx Lockable 0.25l sharps container
Syringes
0.5ml fixed syringe
1ml 30g unisharp fixed
2ml nevershare syringe
Unisharp 31g 0.3 fixed needle syringe



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