

Members of the Developing a caring Wales (DACW) consortium are concerned by the potential risk presented by the fentanyl family of synthetic opioids.

Fentanyls – which include the fentanyl, carfentanyl, 3-methylfentanyl, thiofentanyl, 3-methylthiofentanyl, beta-hydroxyfentanyl and acetylfentanyl compounds – have the potential to present a significant threat to vulnerable people throughout Wales.

The consortium – which brings together a number of high-profile voluntary sector agencies in Wales – has agreed six priorities to help tackle use of the substances, which are many times more potent than heroin.

Not currently in widespread use

While official statistics recorded [one death related to fentanyls last year](#) and a [high-profile Cardiff court case has resulted in a guilty plea on international supply charges](#), evidence suggests that these drugs currently have a low rate of penetration within Wales.

Only one Welsh drug sample analysed by the WEDINOS testing programme has revealed traces of fentanyls (Cardiff, September 2014).

Anecdotal evidence

Nonetheless, DACW members have received a number of first-hand accounts of the use and effects of fentanyls. Fentanyls are frequently cut with other substances, leaving users unaware of the strength and composition of the drug they are taking.

One habitual heroin user, from Swansea, told his harm reduction worker that he was left unconscious after snorting a small quantity of white powder “the size of a pin head”. He did not recover consciousness for some time, and reported that he would not like to use what he believed was fentanyl again.

International impact

The human cost of fentanyl use is increasingly being felt across the USA, Canada and in areas of England. In August, the National Crime Agency reported that [at least 60 UK drug deaths were related to fentanyl use](#) during the previous eight months.

Our response

In response, DACW members will:

- remain vigilant over the use of fentanyls in communities across Wales, and recommend that all agencies receive testing strips to identify suspected use locally
- call for a pilot at-home fentanyl urine testing scheme, with training and support for users at risk of exposure to fentanyls
- ensure drug samples are routinely sent to WEDINOS for testing, and encourage police forces and health services to follow suit
- train all frontline members of staff in fentanyl and novel psychoactive substance awareness
- recommend the continuation and extension of the naloxone programme ([as supported by academic research](#)) to include specialist advice for users at risk of exposure to fentanyls
- support access to effective substitute treatment, and back initiatives to ensure there are no waiting lists for drug treatments in Wales

DACW also welcomes the work of the independent Advisory Panel on Substance Misuse and Enhanced Harm Reduction Group in reviewing evidence around safer injection facilities.

Developing a caring Wales (DACW) provides a complete range of services for people affected by alcohol and drug misuse and mental health difficulties. Members include CAIS, Drugaid, Hafal, Kaleidoscope, NewLink Wales, TEDS and WCADA.