



Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum Bulletin September 2026

Overview

Welcome to the fourth in our series of regular bulletins on Recovery in Aberdeenshire and the events affecting folk with lived and living experience and their families at a local, regional and national level.

In this bulletin:

- Support for Families
- Recovery Month Duff House Fun Day 26th September
- Aberdeenshire Community Recovery News
- A Visit to Inverclyde
- ALISS – Where are there groups?

National and Regional News

- ADP News
- Drug Deaths Rise Nationally
- Levels of Referral and First Treatment Starts Remain Stable but Residential Rehabs Down
- First Aberdeenshire MAT Thematic Analysis Report

We hope this bulletin informs and inspires community members to get involved, share their views and help us all make a difference.

Support for Families

It is not only the user of drugs or alcohol who experience harm and stigma but a wider circle of partners, parents, children, siblings, carers and friends around them. Whether biological family or family-of-choice, it is widely recognised that family members have their own recovery journeys as they support themselves as well as supporting their loved ones.

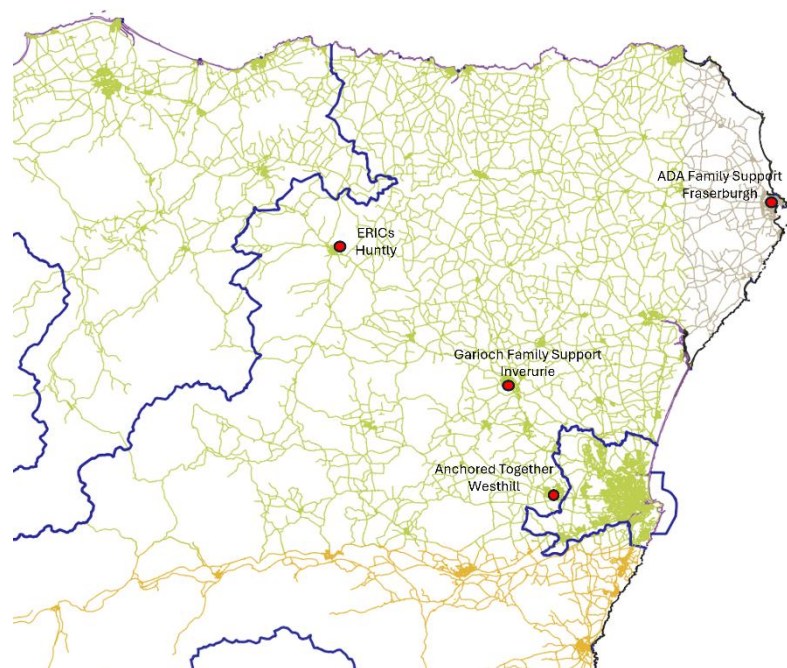
The effectiveness of peer-led family support with lived experience input is recognised as reflected, for example, in the Scottish Governments [Families Affected by Drug and Alcohol Use in Scotland : A Framework for Holistic Whole Family Approaches and Family Inclusive Practice](#).

As reported in our last bulletin, the previous 12 months have seen changes in the framework for family support in Aberdeenshire but, with the persistence of long established groups such as the Garioch Family Support Group and the formation of new groups or online spaces such as Anchored Together Aberdeenshire, ERICs and those recently established by Alcohol and Drugs Action, help is out there.

Groups Old and New

The long established **Garioch Family Support Group** continues to thrive with several new members joining over the past few months. The group provides information and support in a welcoming environment and encourages members to participate in any local events relevant to their needs. Occasionally, they invite speakers for part of the meeting. One of the local Community Psychiatric Nurses (CPNs) will talk to the group about their work and answer questions in the near future.

Anchored Together Aberdeenshire Family Support (ATAF) provides a safe, confidential, and compassionate space for families and friends affected by a loved one's addictive or compulsive behaviours through weekly peer-support meetings in Westhill and one-to-one support. The group focusses on helping people feel heard, understood, and less alone. Their work focuses on reducing stigma, improving communication between services, and ensuring families have access to the right support at the right time.



According to Nikki Knox and Shona Will, ATAF “bring[s] lived experience to the forefront, we help create stronger connections between communities, primary care, and third-sector organisations.” Nikki and Shona are encouraged by the “growing recognition of the vital role families play in recovery and wellbeing. More professionals and services are acknowledging the importance of peer-led support, lived experience, and early intervention. There is increasing

openness to collaboration, and more conversations about whole-person, community-based approaches.” Together, these developments give them hope that families will become more visible and better supported across Aberdeenshire.

ERICs (Engagement and Resilience in the Community), based in Aberdeenshire Community Recovery’s (ACR) Wellbeing Hub in Huntly, provide a safe space where those indirectly affected can find mutual support, share their experiences, and find a way forward together. The group organiser, Lindsay Tait, says “We know that when someone is struggling with problematic substance use or mental health challenges, their family, friends, and loved ones feel the impact deeply.”

ERICs recently received a generous grant from Granite Heart, a charity dedicated to supporting vital health and wellbeing projects across Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire. The funds will enable the group to “make sure that any family member, partner, or friend in Aberdeenshire who is looking for support knows about the group and can get in touch.” They are focussing on local grassroots outreach, including getting posters and leaflets out to GP surgeries and community halls within a 20-mile radius of Huntly.

ADA Family Support

As we reported in our previous bulletin, the new Aberdeenshire wide contract for Family Support Services commenced on 1st April 2026 with Alcohol & Drugs Action (ADA) taking over the remit from the previous incumbent, Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs (SFAD).

The service aims to provide:

- One-to-one and group-based emotional and practical support for family members affected by alcohol and/or drug use
- Information, advocacy and navigation of wider service
- Practical support and advice on how best to support a family member’s recovery whilst taking care of yourself
- Support to reduce isolation, improve wellbeing and build resilience

Following on from a programme of conversation cafes, in various locations and online, ADA offer support to family members, friends and carers of anyone with problematic substance use, whether they are in treatment or not. One-to-one support is delivered via phone, video or face to face contact at a time and place that suits you.

They continue to support the regular group meeting in Fraserburgh every second Tuesday from 10.30 am to 12.30 pm. On 6th October they are launching a new online support group which runs to the beginning of December, with a second cycle commencing early in the new year.

ONLINE FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP
SUPPORT • INFORMATION • CONNECTION

A welcoming space for anyone affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use.

UPCOMING SESSIONS

Date	Topic
6 TH OCTOBER	Introducing the Aberdeenshire Family Support Service
20 TH OCTOBER	Intro to Drug and Alcohol services
3 RD NOVEMBER	Naloxone Information session
17 TH NOVEMBER	How to talk to your loved one: Positive communication
1 ST DECEMBER	Self care and keeping safe
15 TH DECEMBER	Christmas Craft Session

JOIN US ON ZOOM AT 7PM

You are not alone. We're here to support you.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
EMAIL: AFS@alcoholanddrugsection.org.uk

We welcome everyone. You belong here.

Support without borders. Love without judgement.

Alcohol & Drugs Partnership Investment in Families and Young People

The Aberdeenshire Alcohol & Drugs Partnership (ADP) is providing funding to Aberdeenshire Children's Services to commission research into the harms experienced by young people, helping to better understand needs and map existing service provision. According to the ADP Project Manager, Claire Johnston, they are also working with the Whole Family Fund, to develop a new young people's service. An initial pilot, on a 'test of change' basis, will be delivered within a number of Aberdeenshire schools to provide direct drug and alcohol support for young people while ensuring strong links to wider support services.

Progress Required

Despite these positive developments at the community and services levels, it's clear that we still have work to do in improving the landscape for family members. According to group facilitators and service managers, families continue to face significant barriers. Stigma remains a major issue, causing many people to hide their experiences and delaying access to help. Signposting is inconsistent, meaning families often struggle to navigate complex systems alone. Services can still operate in isolation, with limited communication or coordination, which leads to gaps in care and missed opportunities for early support. There is still confusion around who is responsible for what whilst the cost of accommodation and/or a facilitator's time requires a large amount of work on funding applications within community groups.

Although ADA's Family Support Service is seeing more referrals coming from the Step In service now that the family support is more integrated within the Drug and Alcohol Service, there remains "a significant gap is in support for young people affected by parental or sibling substance use. The closure of the *Grow Your Own Routes* programme in North Aberdeenshire, which supported those age 12-25, has left many young people with no support"

The Aberdeenshire Thematic Analysis of Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) Experiential Feedback 2025–2026, presented to the ADP committee in June and obtained through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request, summarises the experiences of 5 family members interviewed in the course of the preceding 12 months.

The report states that "[Drug and Alcohol] services are often experienced as compassionate and reassuring, particularly where first contact is positive and communication is respectful." But "experiences remain inconsistent, with variable inclusion in care, unclear communication during periods of crisis, limited proactive support, and insufficient recognition of the emotional burden carried by families."

In response to these findings, the report recommends:

- 1) clearer information, check-ins and stronger links to family-specific support such as Scottish Families.
- 2) strengthened crisis response and feedback pathways so family members know their concerns have been heard and understand, where possible, what will happen next.
- 3) provision of harm reduction information and support to family members and nominated persons routinely rather than only when requested.

Family support is available through the Step-In centres located in Aberdeenshire as well as the various peer-led community groups highlighted early in this article. Together we share the

challenges of reducing stigma, providing consistent, compassionate support and more effective referral and signposting across the wider support available in the community.

Recovery Month Events and Duff House Fun Day

Sheila and Charlie Brodie and Kevin Campbell of Bridge Café have organised a Family Fun Day at Duff House outside Banff for Saturday 26th September with funding from Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum and support from Diane Ord of Aberdeenshire Community Recovery.

As community members will recall, in the past few years the Forums organised 3 summer events each year. Following the great success of the Bennachie Family Fun Day organised by Aberdeenshire Community Recovery in July, the Bridge Café team were inspired to organise this second event, open to the whole Aberdeenshire Community.

The Bennachie event on 26th July was a fantastic success with 72 community members meeting for a family picnic, ranger-led activities and, for those with the stamina, the traditional climb to the Mither Tap. People came from all across the shire including a contingent from Aberdeen in Recovery (AiR) from the city with transport support organised by Aberdeenshire Community Recovery and funded by Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum. The event reinforced the importance of connection, sharing and fun in our individual and family recovery journeys.



As well as the inspiration of the Bennachie Event, the Bridge Café group were prompted by news of the cancellation of this year's national Recovery Walk. A regular feature of Recovery Month for the last 5 years, this year's national get together was cancelled due to an inability to agree funding and the fact that no ADP or local authority was willing to host or support the event.

For many in the Aberdeenshire Community, the Recovery Walk has been an important milestone in the annual calendar. The event has always been inspiring, connecting and

sustained a shared hope for recovery. Marching together, free of stigma but conscious of our shared lived experience has been a powerful way of promoting and celebrating recovery.



In response to the cancellation of the Recovery Walk, local recovery groups have organised their own events for Recovery Month up and down the length of Scotland. The Family Fun Day at Duff House is Aberdeenshire's contribution to the collective celebration.

The Scottish Recovery Consortium are also currently airing a series of testimonials to the importance of the Recovery Walk on their Facebook page. See here for more info: [Scottish Recovery Consortium](#)

As well as celebrating recovery, September is also a time when the community remembers those who have been lost, however. Overdose Awareness Day on 31st August was marked by events in Fraserburgh and Stonehaven, offering communities an opportunity to remember those of us who have been lost to drug and alcohol harms over the years.



Aberdeenshire Community Recovery Update

Aberdeenshire Community Recovery (ACR) continues to grow and develop further partnerships.



ACR Partner with Anchored Together Aberdeenshire Family Support (ATAFS)

ACR has recently partnered with Anchored Together Aberdeenshire Family Support (ATAFS) in Westhill. This offers an additional grass roots group adding another family support group to complement the existing two that we partner with at ACR, Garioch Family Support Group in Inverurie and ERiCs in Huntly. See the related article on Family Support for further details.

Growth in the network of SMART groups in Aberdeenshire

The Inverurie SMART group has recently seen an influx of new members due to a publicity run. Stonehaven SMART has also seen an increase of members with new people joining and has recently moved to a weekly face-to-face meeting at Stonehaven Community Centre. SMART Banchory will be moving the timings of the group slightly and possibly the day to try to reach more participants in the coming weeks.

In parallel, ACR are investing in increased capability to enable these groups to meet more effectively on a hybrid basis.



Positive Outcomes from the Huntly Community Job Club

After successful evaluation of the initial pilot, the Huntly Community Job Club continues to meet every second Thursday. The Community Job Club, partnered with the Local Learning Community Partnership in Huntly, has had really positive outcomes with two people moving into employment and one enrolling in a university degree course.

As described in this newsletter's article on Recovery Month activities, Stonehaven Monday group hosted a special event for International Overdose Awareness Day. Both the Stonehaven Monday group and the Huntly Friday Brunch continue well and have recently had several new members.

Multi-year National Lottery Funding Allows Expansion of ACR's Community Development Capabilities

In July, ACR were awarded generous multi-year funding from the National Lottery Fairer Lives fund to support and expand their Community Development capacity. The funding enables ACR to double their capacity to a full week basis with Lynne Hastie joining Laura McAllister on the team from 20th July as one of our Community Development Officers (CDO).



Lynne has settled into her CDO role nicely and is already taking the lead on certain aspects of our development plan. She has commenced her SVQ3 with the Scottish Drugs Forum which has further strengthened our partnership with the SDF.

ACR's Community Development Officers (CDOs) will also offer support to build capacity of newly partnered groups such as ATAFS and offer any additional support to group members where required and, of course, enable access to all the training that ACR offer.

Diane and volunteers, with the support from the CDO's are also developing 'The Deeside Blethers'. These will initially be one per month reaching areas across Deeside during the winter months, working closely with the Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum. Dates will be advertised as soon as we can confirm venues.

ACR's Training Programme Continues to Develop

Ongoing training has continued with a food hygiene course delivered from Garioch Community Kitchen to key group leaders from Stonehaven, Inverurie, Banchory and Banff.

ACR is developing a training programme for key group leaders and lead facilitators which will not only benefit group growth but enhance personal development of group leaders to better prepare them for employment or further education if that is the route they wish to take.

On the back of ACR's increased Community Development capacity, Laura McAllister will also be offering regular DART training on Fridays and dates and areas for the year ahead will soon be available. The first DART training will commence in Inverurie on Friday 9th October, running until 27th November, from 11 am until 3 pm.

Drop-in sessions will be the week before and further information can be obtained from Laura, email lmcallister@alcoholanddrugsaction.org.uk.

Our friends at Creative Recovery in Inverclyde

As outlined in Jill Dow's article, Creative Recovery Inverclyde welcomed two ACR volunteers, Jill Dow and John Bolland, to their recent events. These visits further strengthen our relationships between Your Voice Inverclyde and Aberdeenshire recovery members. Jill's report within the news bulletin is a fantastic read on her visit to Greenock to meet up with the recovery community involved in Creative Recovery Inverclyde.

Community Events

The Bennachie summer gathering was a huge success and ACR would like to thank everyone who came along and joined in the fun. Extra special thanks to Alison from the Garioch Rangers for the activities and information she provided.

Meanwhile, plans are in place for ACR's Annual Halloween party. The event will be on Halloween, Saturday 31st of October, from 12 noon until 4 pm, at the Aberdeenshire Wellbeing Hub in Huntly. Advertising will be populated soon.

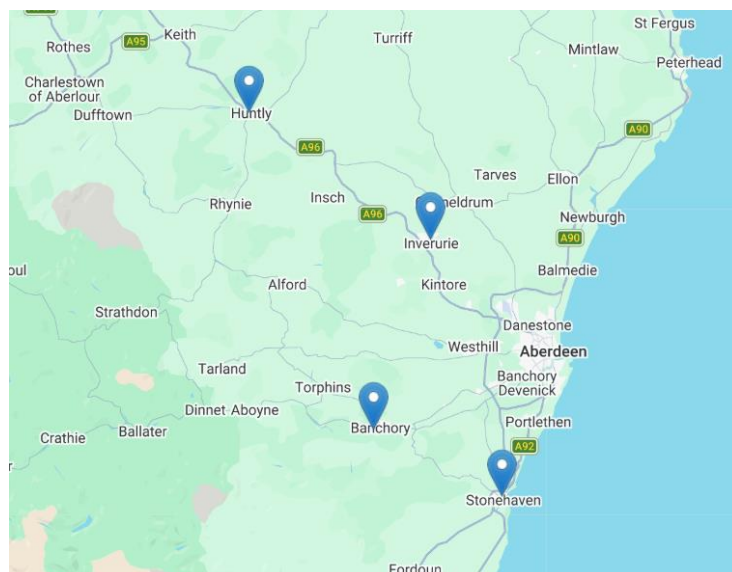


New Website and Email Addresses in the Pipeline

ACR will have new email addresses soon and this information will be widely distributed in due course. A new website has also been developed and will soon be launched.

Links, locations and timings of ACR affiliated groups are available via ALISS using this link :

[Aberdeenshire Community Recovery SCIO | ALISS](#)

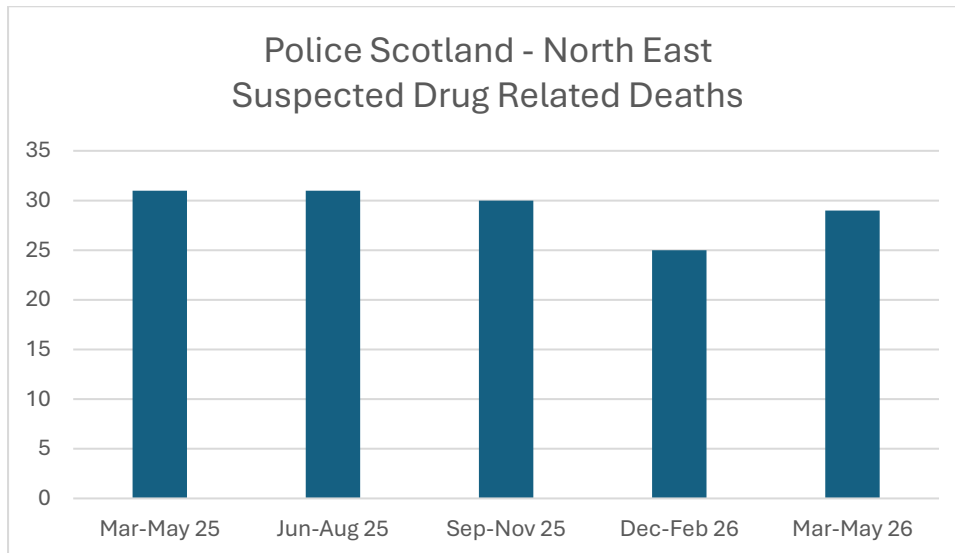


Compiled by Diane L. Ord



Suspected Drug Deaths in the North East

Police Scotland North East reported a slight increase in the number of suspected drug related deaths in their area between March and May though the numbers are very slightly lower than in the same quarter last calendar year.



These figures continue to conceal 29 individual tragedies experienced by individuals, families, friends and communities across the North East. According to RADAR, there have been 115 suspected drug deaths in the North East over the last 12 months – that is two deaths every week.

Although these figures are not definitive – no definitive figures have been published since 2024 – direct discussions with the RADAR team have confirmed that these figures are reliable with the final figures only changing by a few percent (e.g. 4.5% in 2024).

At a national level, the reported suspected drugs deaths remained stable but, at 320, at a level far higher than any other European country. At a recent briefing to the SRC's LERO Leadership Network by the RADAR team, the team described concerns over the pollution of 'natural' opioids with synthetics such as nitizine and the spread of new street benzos.

The Scottish RADAR report for the last available quarter advised that

- Public health alerts for [nitazene-type opioids](#), [new benzodiazepines](#) and [medetomidine](#) highlight ongoing and evolving risks from a contaminated and unpredictable drug supply.
- Almost half of Scottish samples submitted to [Welsh Emerging Drugs and Identification of Novel Substances \(WEDINOS\)](#) did not solely contain the intended purchase.
- The majority of harms involved the use of more than one substance.
- Cocaine continued to be the most commonly reported main drug in [specialist drug treatment](#) assessments, [post-mortem toxicology](#), [ASSIST hospital toxicology](#) and NHS Lothian and NHS Tayside [drug treatment testing](#).
- Bromazolam detections increased and it was the most commonly detected street benzodiazepine in [post-mortem toxicology](#) and [ASSIST hospital toxicology](#) whilst novel benzodiazepines, including ethylbromazolam, clobromazolam and clonazolam continued to be detected.

- There are continuing reports of counterfeit drugs, most commonly benzodiazepines and pregabalin. These are made to look like medicines in legitimate looking packaging, but contamination is common and they may contain different ingredients and concentrations than stated.

More detail on RADAR's extensive reporting can be found using the links below:

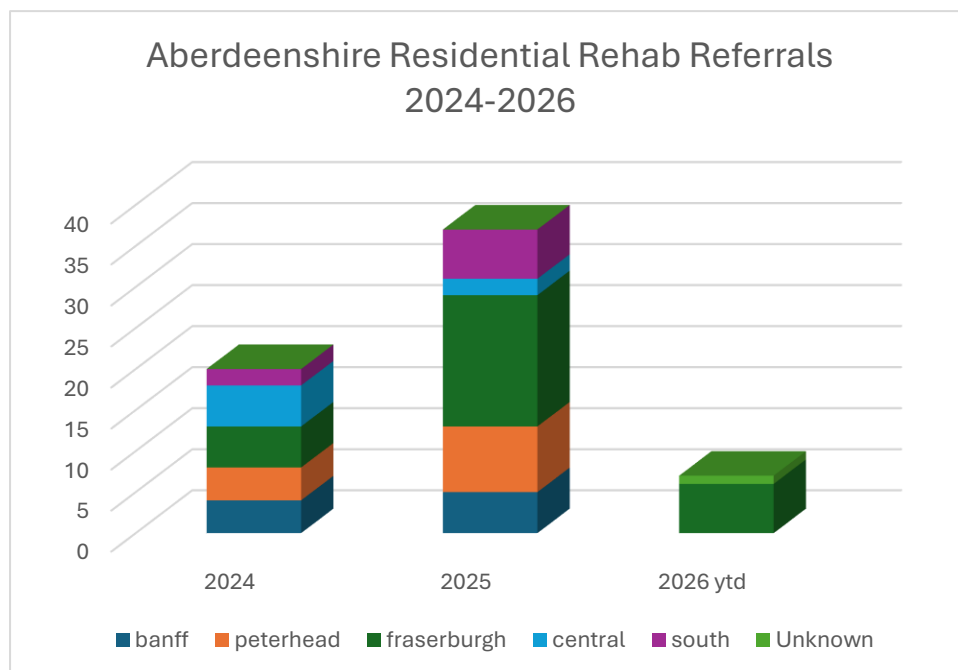
- RADAR report: [Main points - Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response \(RADAR\) quarterly report - July 2026 - Rapid Ac...](#)
- Dashboard (includes local data and intel reports): <https://scotland.shinyapps.io/phs-drugs-radar-dashboard/>
- Alerts: [RADAR alerts - Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response \(RADAR\) - Surveillance - Drugs - Improving Scot...](#)

How Many Drug and Alcohol Death Reviews are being carried out in this area?

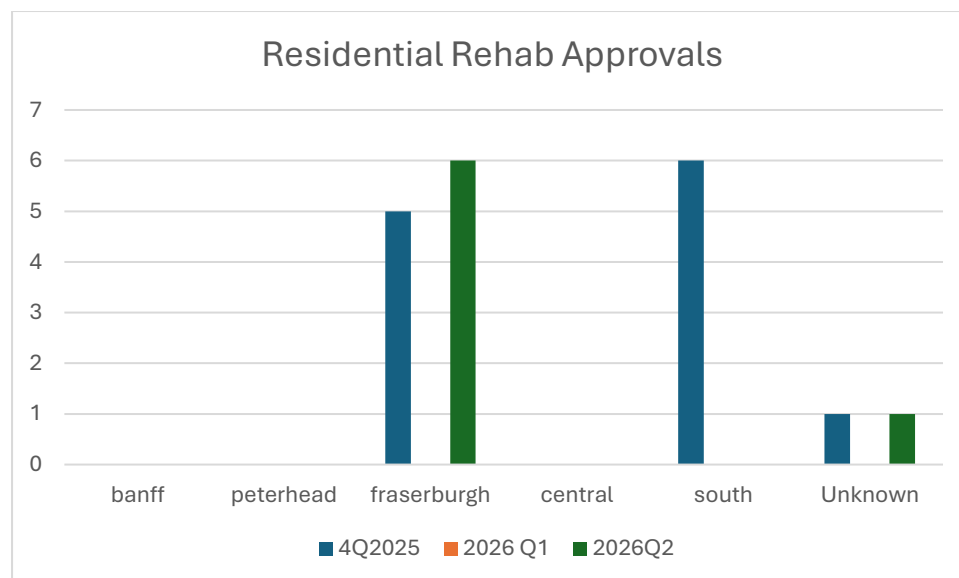
In response to Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum's Freedom of Information requests, Aberdeenshire HSCP (Health and Social Care Partnership) has informed us that during the period April to June 2026, Aberdeenshire HSCP participated in less than three drug related death reviews (DRDs) and less than three Alcohol Related Death Reviews. It is unclear why the HSCP cannot provide precise figures.

We understand that the ADP has created a Harms sub-group led by Police Scotland. Given that Police Scotland North East reported 29 Suspected Drug Deaths around this period (including Aberdeen City and Moray), it remains unclear why the HSCP's recorded participation remains so low.

Rehab Approvals far below 2025-26 levels



As we reported in the previous issue, the number of people accessing residential rehab facilities funded by the Scottish Government or local funds in 2025 had almost doubled compared to the previous year and it was hoped, given funding was still available, that this trend would be sustained. This does not appear to have been the case.



Less than 3 referrals (0 to 3 inclusive) were reported from any of the Step-In teams in the first quarter of 2026. During the same quarter, HSCP reports that less than 3 **applications** for rehab were received, consistent with this figure.

With the beginning of the new financial year, approvals rose to 7 (based on 9 applications) predominantly through the Fraserburgh team. This represents only 7 known approvals in the first six months of this year: in the previous full year the number of approvals was 37.

Figures provided by the HSCP also suggest the number of onward referrals from Drug and Alcohol Services to Psychotherapeutic Support is also close to zero (consistent with the previous quarter).

Creative Recovery in Inverclyde

Jill Dow reports on her visit to Greenock to meet up with the recovery community involved in Creative Recovery Inverclyde.

As we reported in the last bulletin, Aberdeenshire Community Recovery hosted our fellow recovery group - Creative Recovery Inverclyde - In March this year. The group visited to share with us how Inverclyde does creative recovery in their community. Seven members of Inverclyde community came up to the Wellbeing Hub in Huntly.

In early September, Jill Dow and John Bolland returned their visit. Jill writes:

John and I went down to Greenock to a couple of events that Creative Recovery Inverclyde and Your Voice Inverclyde were putting on in their 5th annual event for Recovery Month.

We arrived on the Thursday afternoon and were invited to dinner at the Steak house. We arrived early, but it wasn't long before Martita and Dana came along, then Billy, and lastly Dawn. It was really good to catch up with the guys, and the evening went brilliantly. Lots of chat and laughter. We had had a long day travelling so we were glad when it was time to go to sleep, with our minds boggling what tomorrow would bring!

The next morning, we went along to the Wyllieum, and were met by Martita and the rest of the gang. We then went to the cinema which was only next door on the waterfront. There was a big turnout of people from the community as well as from Inverclyde Council, the Beacon Theatre and Creative Scotland who funded the Creative Recovery project.

After a short speech from Elina Bry, their artist-in-residence, we were told to close our eyes and listen to a radio piece called *Welcome to Greenock, Paradise on Earth*. This was in several languages including German and Polish and I didn't quite get the gist of it, but John assured me it was good. After that, there was a film that was made by the group and directed by Elina, called *Sonata da Camera*. I really enjoyed the film, it was thought provoking and very powerful.



We then went back to the Wyllieum for a piece of dance and they read poems out of their new book, "It'll be alright with an onion." I picked up a few free copies which will be at the Hub in Huntly if anyone is interested in reading them.

Later on Friday evening, Martita took us to a recovery café in Greenock where there were approximately 10 people. They were all very nice to us and it was interesting to see how other recovery cafes work in other places. They went away to collect surplus food from Gregg's bakery – yum-yums, pizza and steak slices! – and we ate and spoke about different topics in and around the recovery scene.

On Saturday morning, before we left, we went to the Your Voice Recovery community hub, where Dana was on duty with Joe. There were quite an amount of people coming through their hub in the short hour we were there, so was easy to see the need for it. There were many different groups using the hub and its many rooms, which was good to see. There was even a MacMillan Cancer room. They had about 12 E-Bikes that Martita and Joe had carried out training to take people out on them. And there were even disability aids from scooters to zimmer frames that can be hired out for a small charge.



All in all not a bad way to spend 3 days in early September, I'm so glad I decided to go visit their recovery community and it was made clear folk from the Shire would be welcomed back, as we were clear they were always welcome here.

ADP News

Public Consultation on new ADP Strategy and Delivery Plan

After a number of years of effort, the ADP expect to propose an updated Strategy and Delivery Plan to the ADP Strategic Committee in September 2026. The Strategy and Delivery Plan, which has been a formal requirement on ADPs under the Partnership framework, will supersede the *Being Human* Strategy developed by the ADP in 2020.

According to the ADP Project Manager, the new strategy has been developed in the course of several well-attended in-person engagement sessions across involving partners, services and people with lived and living experience of substance use and recovery. Members of the ADP Lived Experience Panels have played a central role in informing and shaping the strategy work to date to ensure it reflects the realities, strengths and needs of people and communities across Aberdeenshire. Since the panel members are subject to fairly strict confidentiality requirements, details of these deliberations have not been shared more widely within the recovery community.

The wider community should have an opportunity to influence the direction and content of the final strategy, however, since the ADP plan to issue the draft strategy for public consultation before a final version is presented to the Integration Joint Board (IJB) for approval. It remains unclear how and when that public consultation will be launched and how the community can finally contribute to the delivery plan.

Still Apparent Underspend on Substance Related Priorities

Finance figures submitted to Aberdeenshire's Integration Joint Board on 2nd September 2026 suggest a continuing underspend of available funds to support people in Aberdeenshire affected by problematic substance use.

The reports submitted to the last Integrated Joint Board meeting indicated that the total budget allocated by the Scottish Government to Aberdeenshire ADP stands at £3.743m. This represents a 12% increase on the previous year.

The accounts report for the first quarter of the current financial year (2026-2027) report that ADP spending was £779k underspent against their forecast for the period of £935k. There is no explanation in the accounts report to explain or justify these figures. Historically, the NHS and Aberdeenshire Council have been slow to reconcile expenditures, especially in the first quarter of the financial year but it was hoped, after previous years, that the ADP's financial management and governance had been brought up to the same standard as other agencies reporting to the IJB

In addition to the ADP budget, Aberdeenshire Drug & Alcohol Services has a budget for this financial year of £2.905m. The service is forecasting a £214k underspend on this figure, however. This forecast is primarily based on the fact that 4.81 whole-time equivalent posts were vacant during the first quarter of the financial year and the service is forecasting on the

basis of these positions remaining vacant for the rest of the year though their note does explicitly caution that this assumption “may prove unrealistic.”

A further element of the underspend arises from a £22k underspend on the drugs’ budget during the first quarter, a pattern they also forecast to continue.

The key takeaway is that the apparent underspend of £214k is not presented as an efficiency saving or reduction in service need; it is largely attributable to vacancies and lower expenditure on drugs.

NHS and Aberdeenshire Council budgets remain under significant pressure and past years have seen underspends in ADP and Drug and Alcohol Service budgets clawed back to fill overspends in other areas of NHS delivery. The lack of transparency (or failure to invest funds effectively) in ADP accounting and the failure of the Drug and Alcohol Service to fill budgeted vacancies in the face of continuing drug and alcohol harms is therefore a cause of continuing concern.

ADP plan to invest in new support posts

The ADP have or intend to increase investment in posts and initiatives to support those affected by problematic substance use.

As well as the investment in family support described above, the ADP have reinstated funding of a post for an Alcohol Liaison Nurse to increase capacity for community alcohol detoxification, strengthen pathways with specialist services at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and explore opportunities for earlier liver screening for people affected by alcohol-related harm.

Funding has also been put in place for an additional nurse within the ARIES Assertive Outreach Team - to increase service capacity and strengthen pathways at key transition points for individuals accessing support – and a Recovery Coordinator to join the ADP Support Team. Recruitment for the latter post should begin in the near future.

The HSCP Drug and Alcohol Service has also secured additional funding from the Scottish Government to increase Blood Borne Virus (BBV) testing across Aberdeenshire. The project will support the identification of people at risk and increase access to sexual health services through a more proactive and integrated approach.

Finally, Aberdeenshire, Moray and Dundee were selected to pilot pathways to reduce digital inequality amongst people affected by substance use. Aberdeenshire's pathways include HMP Grampian/Upside Through Care, Step In, ADA Family Support Service, Housing and Talking Point Community Recovery Group, with support from Communities Wellbeing Partnerships.

This project intends to take a place-based approach, develop an asset map, increase digital confidence and skills amongst people affected by substance use and the workforce, and provide access to training, devices, connectivity and digital support. This is a very new project and more information will be circulated soon on how people can access Digital Lifelines.

New Peer-led Recovery Group in Peterhead

The ADP are increasing Peer led support in services starting in Peterhead at a new weekly peer recovery group, every Wednesday at 88 King Street from 11 am to 1 pm, and more details on upcoming peer to peer courses will follow soon.

Training Opportunities

The ADP has commissioned a range of online and in-person training opportunities to support learning across services, partners and communities. Some of this training will be particularly relevant for the wider workforce and community.

Courses include Learning and Responding to Harms, Everyone Has a Story: Exploring Stigma and Trauma, Enhanced Communication Skills, Stigma and Multiple Risks. Joining links, a brief description of each course and information on who the training is for will be available on the ADP website: <https://www.aberdeenshirealcoholanddrugs.support/training/>

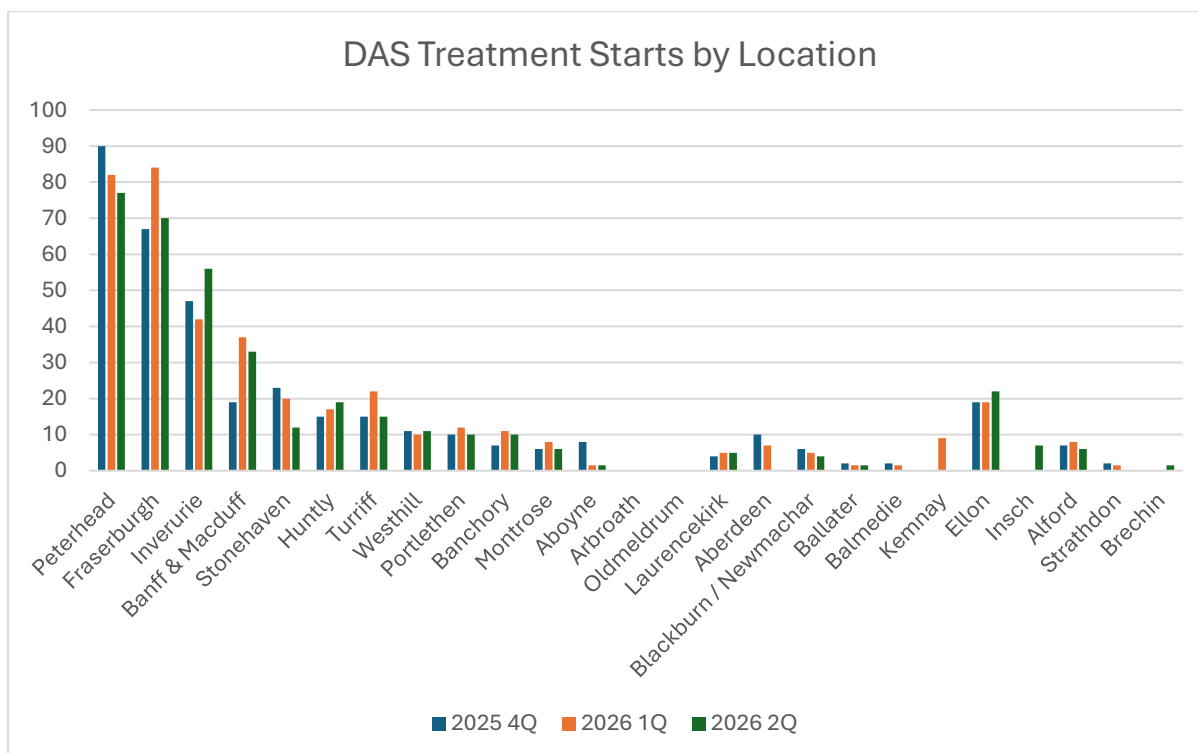
In addition, Public Health Scotland, in collaboration with the three Grampian ADP areas, practitioners and people with lived experience, has developed a range of resources to raise awareness of the risks and harms associated with ketamine use. Printed resources are now available through Public Health or by contacting your local ADP. There is currently a social media campaign targeting young people running across Grampian.

Levels of referral and first treatment by Aberdeenshire Drug and Alcohol Services remain steady.

During the second quarter of 2026, services received 518 initial treatment referrals of which around 75% were converted into new treatment starts. Since the number of open cases has been reducing by around 120 per quarter for the last 4 quarters, this suggests HSCP caseload is somewhat lower than in previous years although 1638 community members remain 'in-service' as of 26th July.

The consistent reduction in the number of open cases (475 in the last year) re-emphasises the need to prioritise clearer open pathways into community and peer-led support in Aberdeenshire.

Locations with Step-In Centres continue to dominate the pattern of initial treatment across Aberdeenshire and the figures in the 2nd quarter of this year reflects the overall trend with slight fall off in initial treatment starts in Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Banff and Stonehaven but an up kick in starts in Inverurie and Ellon.



Drug and Alcohol Services now have Step-In premises established in:

- Banff at Seafeld House
- Inverurie at Lumphart Cottage
- Peterhead at 88 King Street
- Fraserburgh at the Faithlie Centre.

The Step in Centre at Stonehaven, Viewmount, is still not open to the public yet; however, there is a phone number and email address for arrangements to be made to see people at an appropriate venue.

For full contact details:

Aberdeenshire Council Step In Service: <https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/living-independently/drug-and-alcohol-services>

First Thematic Analysis of MAT Delivery in Aberdeenshire

The Aberdeenshire Thematic Analysis of Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) Experiential Feedback 2025–2026 was presented to the ADP committee in June.

Following the current ADP Chair’s decision in March 2026 to suspend publication of ADP documentation and close its meetings to the public, this document has been obtained through a Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

The aim of the report was to “[identify] what is working well, identify gaps and areas for further support, highlight priorities for service improvement, and ensure people’s voices shape future

development”. The report is based on interviews with people involved with Drug and Alcohol Services treatment during 2025-2026.

The headline conclusions of the survey are that:

- Relationships, compassion and trust are the strongest shared strengths across all three groups.
- Continuity of care, clear communication and follow-up have a major impact on whether people feel safe and able to stay engaged.
- There is a clear opportunity to further strengthen mental health and trauma-informed support.
- Accessibility, privacy, geography and environment continue to affect whether support feels reachable and safe.
- People want more consistent involvement, informed choice, proactive crisis response and clearer longer-term recovery pathways.

The survey interviewed 45 people currently or recently in treatment, 5 family members and 13 staff members. As of 26th July 2026, the open caseload for Aberdeenshire Drug and Alcohol Services was 1638 cases, 50% of who have been in service for more than a year. Whilst it is accepted that many of the number of cases (open treatments) may be greater than the number of individuals in treatment, the figures suggest that the number of individuals in treatment represents only 3% of the total number of people receiving treatment.

The analysis indicated strengths and areas for improvement in the system resulting in a proposal of 5 immediate priorities which, presumably, should be reflected in the forthcoming Aberdeenshire ADP Strategy. These priorities are:

- Protect and strengthen relationship-based, compassionate practice across all services.
- Improve continuity, communication and follow-up so people and families feel informed and supported.
- Strengthen integrated mental health, trauma-informed and psychological support pathways.
- Address barriers linked to privacy, geography, buildings and flexibility of access.
- Develop clearer recovery, aftercare, family support and harm reduction pathways.

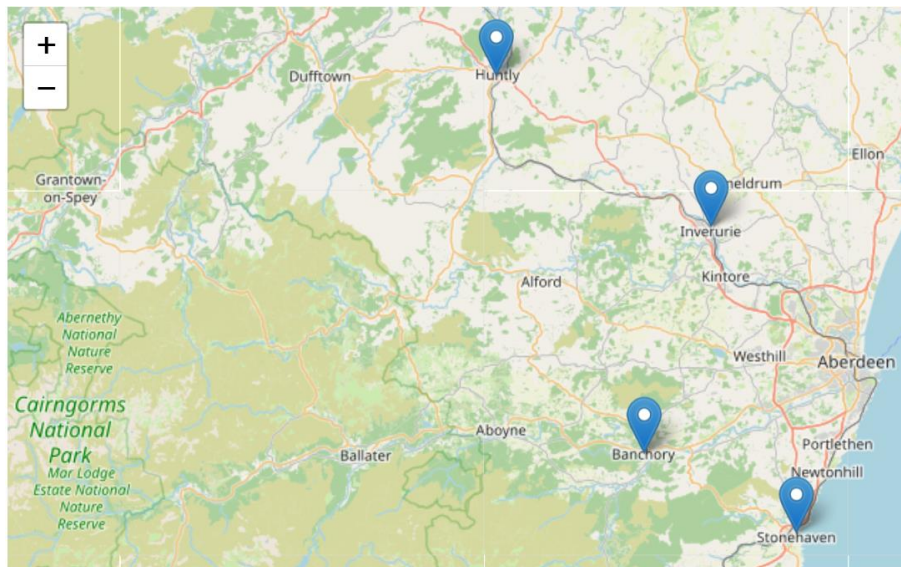
Discussions within the LERO Leadership Network indicate that the fact this programme of interviews and analysis was undertaken is a strength for Aberdeenshire as other ADPs have not undertaken the necessary experiential assessments with the same degree of diligence.

ALISS – Where are there groups?

Aberdeenshire Community Recovery's development officer, Laura McAllister, has updated the ALISS website with times and locations of group meetings across Aberdeenshire. Her aim is to support a more informed and connected Recovery community in Aberdeenshire.

[ALISS - A Local Information System for Scotland | ALISS](#)

ALISS is a national digital programme enabling people and professionals to find and share information on health and wellbeing resources, services, groups, and support in their local communities and online. Its aim is to ensure that everyone in Scotland has the right information, at the right time, about resources that are available to help them live well and stay connected to their community.



As well as listing ACR SMART Groups, Cafés, Job Club and Family Support Groups in Aberdeenshire, ALISS includes times and contact information for AA and NA meetings, Bridge Recovery Café and other health and well-being groups in Aberdeenshire.

Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum Grants

The Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum is now fully functioning with a management committee and administration team. The new forum was created by merging the three Aberdeenshire Community Forums to maintain continuity of support for groups and individuals. Part of the support is funding which can help develop groups or up-skill individuals. This year there are small grants of up to £500 available.

If you have an idea for an activity, event or need to sustain an existing project contact the funding team - email aberdeenshirerecoveryforum@gmail.com

Someone from the team will contact you to discuss your idea and help you with the application form.

Projects that can be funded can be varied but should achieve the following aims:

Prevention and early intervention – Cooperating with other community partners in helping to build resilient communities and in addressing underlying issues at the root of problematic substance use.

Engagement and collaboration - Working with communities and enabling those with lived experience to influence service delivery and community responses. Lived experience in the context of the work of the community forums not only includes own experience of substance use but also the experiences of family members, friends and neighbours affected by another person's substance use.

Tackling inequalities - being the voice of the community in ensuring services and support are person centred and accessible to all who need them.

Recovery – promoting recovery in our communities, helping to develop recovery communities, and supporting people to access local services and support.

Inclusion and Connection – encouraging inclusive communities and influencing change; challenging stigma and judgemental attitude.

Get Involved

Send us your news We welcome good news stories and updates from peer groups to share. Let's CHIME!

- CONNECT with each other
- Give each other HOPE
- Find and love your IDENTITY
- be MINDFUL of yourself and others
- Be EMPOWERED, take control of your destiny

Please forward any suggestions for content to john@acr.scot. We also welcome citizen journalists to get involved, sharing their insights into Recovery, its triumphs and challenges in the region.

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Aberdeenshire Recovery Forum Communications Sub-Group.