

## Snowballing – Heroin and Crack Cocaine use

There has been a noted local increase in ‘snowballing’ which is using heroin and crack cocaine at the same time. This has caused concern particularly within hostels due to the wide ranging impacts.

Heroin and crack can be taken at the same time through injecting or smoking. Both pose risks but injecting is generally more risky. Using both drugs together intensifies the experience of the drugs and often leads to a psychological “compulsion” to use in addition to the physical dependence.

Crack will cause an initial intense high and heroin will ease the comedown with relaxing effects, user’s can remain alert enough to experience the pleasurable effects. Heroin is a depressant drug and cocaine is a stimulant drug, which means they have opposing effects on the central nervous system which can lead to unpredictable effects and a greater strain on the body.

### Risks

Many of these risks are not unique to snowballing but user’s who are mixing heroin and crack may be at increased risk.

- **Overdose** - user’s may have a delayed opioid overdose as cocaine counteracts the effects of heroin, they may not be aware they’ve taken lethal heroin dose until the crack has worn off, also amounts of heroin used can significantly increase when used with cocaine
- **Increased injecting** - since the high from crack is short lived user’s may inject more frequently and therefore need access to more clean equipment
- **Vein damage & abscesses** - crack has an anaesthetic effects which means user’s might not be able to feel if they’re doing damage while finding a vein, also stronger compulsion to use
- **Blood borne viruses** - sharing any injecting equipment (including spoons, water, filters) puts you at risk of contracting BBV’s such as hepatitis B, C and HIV
- **Lung damage** - smoking any substance can irritate and damage the lungs
- **Financial strain** - both heroin and crack are expensive and cumulatively can cost over £100 a day which means user’s are more likely to turn to alternative and potentially criminal forms of income such as begging, sex work, burglary each of which have their own risks involved
- **Psychological health** – anxiety and paranoia are not uncommon and withdrawal and / or cravings for either drug are unpleasant so experiencing both at the same time is even more extreme, extended use of cocaine carries a high risk of stimulant induced psychosis (often in form of a belief of infestations of the skin- believing that there are “bugs” under the skin)

### Medical emergencies

As overdose risk is increased with snowballing it’s important to be familiar with the signs.

#### Signs of an opioid overdose

Unresponsive / can’t be woken

Shallow or stopped breathing

Snoring or gurgling sounds

Blue / grey lips or finger tips

Floppy arms and legs

#### Signs of a stimulant overdose

Hot, flushed & heavy sweating

Chest pain and / or difficulty breathing

Rigid muscles, tremors or spasms

Uncontrolled movements or seizures

Agitation or panic

[‘International Overdose Awareness Day’](#) have some great resources (fact sheets & posters) you can refer to or display.



**If you suspect someone is overdosing from heroin or cocaine then an ambulance should be called. Prenoxad should be administered if the individual is showing signs of opiate overdose.**

**Prenoxad can be issued to anyone currently engaged with Pavilions including our Needle Exchange and anyone engaging with Equinox outreach support.**

## Harm reduction

Any drug use involves risk, here are tips to stay safer...

- Smoking rather than injecting lessens the risk of overdose and avoids the added risk of blood borne virus', vein damage and abscesses.
- If you choose to inject always use new equipment and don't share any of it- free equipment is available from [Pavilions Needle Exchange](#) and from [pharmacies](#) across the city.
- If you've put yourself at risk of hepatitis B, C or HIV have a test- they only take 5 minutes to do!
- Use support from Pavilions to assist with reducing and / or limiting the risk of continued use.
- Take regular breaks from using- if that sounds difficult start by taking a day off and build yourself up to longer periods.
- Often injecting related wounds are overlooked- signs of infection include: redness, pain, heat, swelling. If you suspect an infection speak to your GP urgently, if left untreated this will often result in hospital admission.
- Budgeting income is important to ensure that priorities such as food and rent are being met before spending money on drugs. Try to pay for all the essentials on pay day or reduce your access to funds by locking your card away overnight.
- Keep track of important appointments such as GP and hospital appointments to help you stay well. Keep reminders and plan your use around them.

## Treatment options

### Medical support



There is no substitute prescribing available for crack cocaine like there is for opiates or alcohol. If someone was using both heroin and crack they could have a medical assessment and be prescribed opiate substitution therapy if necessary. Once in structured treatment with Pavilions we could make a referral into residential rehab if this was a suitable option.

Crack cocaine is psychologically addictive rather than causing a physical dependence so the support on offer is about managing cravings, dealing with triggers and meeting recovery goals. There also need to be a desire from the individual to wish to reduce their use.

## **Mutual Aid**

[Cocaine Anonymous](#): 12 steps based fellowship offering support in the community to “anyone who wants to stop using cocaine and all other mind-altering substances (including alcohol and other drugs) is welcome.” *For our clients only: Mondays 1:30-2:30pm at Richmond House.*

[Drug Addicts Anonymous](#): 12 steps based fellowship offering support in the community and *for our clients only on Wednesdays 12:30-1:30pm at Richmond House.*

[Narcotics Anonymous](#): 12 steps based fellowship offering support in the community.

[SMART](#): Science-based programme to help people manage their recovery from any type of addictive behaviour. Wednesday 3-4:30pm at Richmond House, Friday 3-4:30pm at 9 The Drive. *You do NOT need to be in treatment with Pavilions to attend these meetings.*

## **Pavilions groups**

Please see the full list of Pavilions group work on our [website](#).

[Springboard](#): a rolling five day programme designed to introduce service users to the potential and tools of recovery, as well as an introduction to the visible recovery community in Brighton and Hove.

[Mindfulness](#): Mindfulness is simply present moment awareness, and an open and friendly willingness to what is going on within and around you. We have a weekly drop-in and a more committed 8 week Mindfulness Based Relapse Prevention Programme (MBRP).

[Acupuncture](#): low cost and free ear acupuncture, helpful for people experiencing stress-related symptoms including insomnia, restlessness, agitation and anxiety, as well as other emotional difficulties.

[Peer mentors](#): service user’s can be matched to mentors who can support them in meeting their recovery goals. Peer mentors also regularly attend Phase One for in-reach support.

## **Resources**

Harm Reduction Works provide free access to the leaflet [‘Crack + Speedballing’](#).

Pavilions have produced a harm reduction postcard with suggestions for how to keep user’s safe.