

## **UK Drug Policy Commission Consensus Group Developing a vision of recovery - a work in progress**

### **The key features of recovery from problematic substance use identified in our discussions**

- Recovery is about building a satisfying and meaningful life, as defined by the person themselves, not simply about ceasing problem substance use.
- Recovery involves the accrual of positive benefits as well as the reduction of harms.
- Recovery includes a movement away from uncontrolled substance use and the associated problems towards health, wellbeing and participation in society.
- Recovery is a process, not a single event, and may take time to achieve and effort to maintain.
- The process of recovery and the time required will vary between individuals. It may be achieved without any formal external help or may, for other people, be associated with a number of different types of support and interventions, including medical treatment. No 'one size fits all'.
- Aspirations and hope, both from the individual drug user, their families and those providing services and support, are vital to recovery.
- Recovery must be voluntarily-sustained in order to be lasting, although it may sometimes be initiated or assisted by 'coerced' or 'mandated' interventions within the criminal justice system.
- Control over substance use is a key part of recovery, but is not sufficient on its own. Positive health and well-being and participation in society are also central to recovery.
- Control over substance use means a comfortable and sustained freedom from compulsion to use, which in many cases may require abstinence from the problem substance or all substances, but may also encompass consistently moderated use and abstinence supported by prescribed medication, peer groups and families.
- Positive health and well-being encompasses both physical and mental good health as far as they may be attained for a person, as well as a satisfactory social environment.
- People do not recover in isolation. Recovery embraces inclusion, or a re-entry into society, the improved self-identity that comes with a productive and meaningful role, and also the idea of 'giving back' to society and others, such as family members, who may have been adversely affected by the individual's substance use.
- Recovery-oriented services need to support the aspirations of each individual to assist individuals build recovery across all the above domains.

# Draft statement of the process of recovery from problematic substance use

## Recovery . . .

... is about the accrual of positive benefits as well as, and perhaps more importantly than, simply the reduction or removal of harms. This feature was considered central to recovery.

... must be voluntarily sustained, for recovery to be personally 'owned' and for it to be capable of being lasting, although it may sometimes be initiated or assisted by 'coerced' or 'mandated' interventions within the criminal justice system.

... maximises health and well-being. Health and well-being encompasses both physical and mental good health, as far as those may be attained for a person, as well as a satisfactory social environment. The use of the term 'maximises' reflects the need for hope and aspirations to ensure that users in treatment are enabled to move on and achieve lives that are as fulfilling as possible.

The process of recovery from problematic substance use is characterised by voluntarily sustained control over substance use which maximises health and well-being, and participation in the rights, roles and responsibilities of society

... is a process, which implies that a period of time is required, that it is not accomplished in a single event (for example the attainment of complete abstinence) and takes effort to maintain.

... requires control over substance use. Control means a comfortable and sustained freedom from compulsion to use, which in many cases may require abstinence from the problem substance or all substances, but may also encompass consistently moderate use and abstinence supported by prescribed medication, peer groups and families. However, control over substance use alone is not sufficient for recovery, so neither the effortful struggle to restrict use, to the detriment of well-being and social functioning, sometimes described as 'white-knuckle' abstinence, nor an unwelcome dependence on substitute prescribing, constitute recovery, although both of these might be part of the process.

... involves participation in the rights, roles and responsibilities of society. This embraces inclusion, or a re-entry into society and the improved self-identity that comes with a productive and meaningful life and the establishment of healthy relationships with family and friends. It also encompasses the idea of 'giving back' to society and others, such as family members, who may have been adversely affected by the individual's substance use, that many people in recovery value highly. The term 'rights' here is included in recognition of the stigma that is often associated with problematic substance use and the discrimination they may experience and which may inhibit recovery.