

## Picking up the tab

### *Treating drug and alcohol addictions is expensive*

**Health services in the UK spend large amounts dealing with the effects of smoking and excessive drinking.**

A big factor in justifying spending on treatment for addictions is another cost – crime. The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse concentrates on illegal drugs, and estimates that, in England, for every £1 spent on treatment, at least £2.50 is saved on crime and health costs, and that state-funded drug recovery programmes reduce crime costs by £960 million a year.

Private treatment for addiction is beyond the reach of most potential clients – some residential drug treatment centres charge thousands of pounds a week for round-the-clock care.

What about smoking? The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), the public body that vets the costs and benefits of health treatments, recommends that support for smokers trying to quit should be available from GPs, clinics and hospitals. This can include behavioural support and, where necessary, prescribing nicotine replacement patches, gums or nasal sprays, some of which are widely available from shops. There is also a prescription-only pill, Champix (varenicline), that reduces nicotine cravings.

The NHS Stop Smoking service costs £88m a year in England. It helps around 400,000 people give up each year – around half of the total number who had set a date to quit smoking. That works out at roughly £220 per person who stopped. Young people are less likely to use this service than adults, and those that do are less likely to quit using this method than other age groups. The service may be expensive, but the estimated cost to the NHS of treating smoking-related diseases is £2 billion a year – and fewer smokers may result in fewer people who later need treatment for smoking-related diseases.

Who should pay? Some people argue that smokers already contribute to health costs through the tax on tobacco, and have to pay higher health and life insurance premiums.

## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

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## References

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