



**Northern Ireland
Needle and Syringe
Exchange
Quarterly Report**

Title	Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Quarterly Report. 1 Jan 2023- 31 March 2023
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Target Audience	Needle and syringe exchange providers, drug treatment services, pharmacy staff, health professionals working in substance use
Publication Date	July 2023

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Section 1: Background

The Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme (NSES) is vital to the health and wellbeing of the entire community, helping to reduce the potential of drug-related litter, lowering the risk of HIV and Hepatitis B and C within the wider population, and putting those who use the service in direct contact with a health professional who can help them in engaging with treatment services to address their drug misuse. Thirty-four needle exchange services are commissioned across Northern Ireland based in areas where there is an existing pattern of people who inject, but help protect everyone in the community. Anyone who injects substances can use a needle exchange service, and this includes people who inject opioids, steroids, tanning agents or stimulants.

Throughout 2022 PHA fully implemented a new online database to record needle exchange activity alongside anonymous, non-identifiable client data. This database is called the Neo360 Harm Reduction Information System and became fully operational across all NSES sites on 1 December 2022. This database permits live data to be accessed which in turn will allow for a timely and effective public health response to any detected trends. As this system is new, this report will include information on 'new' clients, they may not be new to needle exchange but it is their first time using the service since the new recording system came into use.

This report summarises data that has been collated by Neo360 within the three-month period between 1 January 2023 and 31 March 2023. Needle exchange activity was recorded in 27 active sites throughout this period. Seven additional NSES sites did not record any NSES transactions during this period.

Within this reporting period 2,277 new clients registered to use the service, bringing the overall total of clients registered (since the online database was first phased into use on 11 July 2022) to 3,637 clients.

In terms of unique client usage for the reporting period, there was a total of 3,036 unique clients across Northern Ireland. When this report is run per Trust area (as reported in individual trust reports below) this totals 3,328 unique service users which implies that 292 clients are crossing Trust boundaries to access multiple needle exchange services.

It is also a consideration that existing clients are re-registering as new clients each time rather than re-using their client ID. Providers are asked to ensure that regular clients are re-using their unique ID code and not re-registering unnecessarily.

This report includes the regional data across Northern Ireland, followed by a breakdown per trust, **correct as of 1 April 2023**. The following information is collated:

- Total number of transactions;
- Transaction by provider type;
- Transaction by trust location;
- Age of client at registration;
- Gender of client at registration;
- Recorded substance/s used.

Needle and Syringe Exchange Service providers

Between 1 January 2023 and 31 March 2023 the Public Health Agency funded the Scheme through the following providers:

Table 1: Participating Service Provider by Trust Area in reporting period

Trust Area	Provider	Provider Type
Belfast	Chemist Connect	Pharmacy
	Maguires	Pharmacy
	Extern	Community-based
	Belfast Health Inclusion Service	Statutory Provider
	Belfast Drug Outreach team	Low Threshold Service
	The Welcome Organisation	Community based
South Eastern	Clear Pharmacy, Bangor	Pharmacy
	Gordons, Lisburn	Pharmacy
	Gordons, Downpatrick	Pharmacy
	Gordons, Newtownards	Pharmacy
	Simon Community, Bangor	Low Threshold Service
Northern	Boots, Ballymena Health Centre	Low Threshold Service
	Boots, Newtownabbey	Pharmacy
	Boots, Queen's Street Ballymena	Pharmacy
	Boots, Coleraine	Pharmacy
	Boots, Antrim	Pharmacy
	Boots, Cookstown	Pharmacy
	Extern	Low Threshold Service
Western	Bradleys, Derry/Londonderry	Pharmacy
	Bradleys, Enniskillen	Pharmacy
	Mournes, Strabane	Pharmacy
	Gordons, Limavady	Pharmacy
	Superdrug, Derry/Londonderry	Pharmacy
Southern	Northern Pharmacies, Craigavon	Pharmacy
	Boots, Armagh	Pharmacy
	McKeagneys, Newry	Pharmacy
	Extern	Low Threshold Service

Section 2: Regional NSES Data Review

NSES Transactions

From January – March 2023 there were a total of **8,797 NSES transactions** carried out across Northern Ireland.

Figure 1: Number of NSES transactions by Provider Type

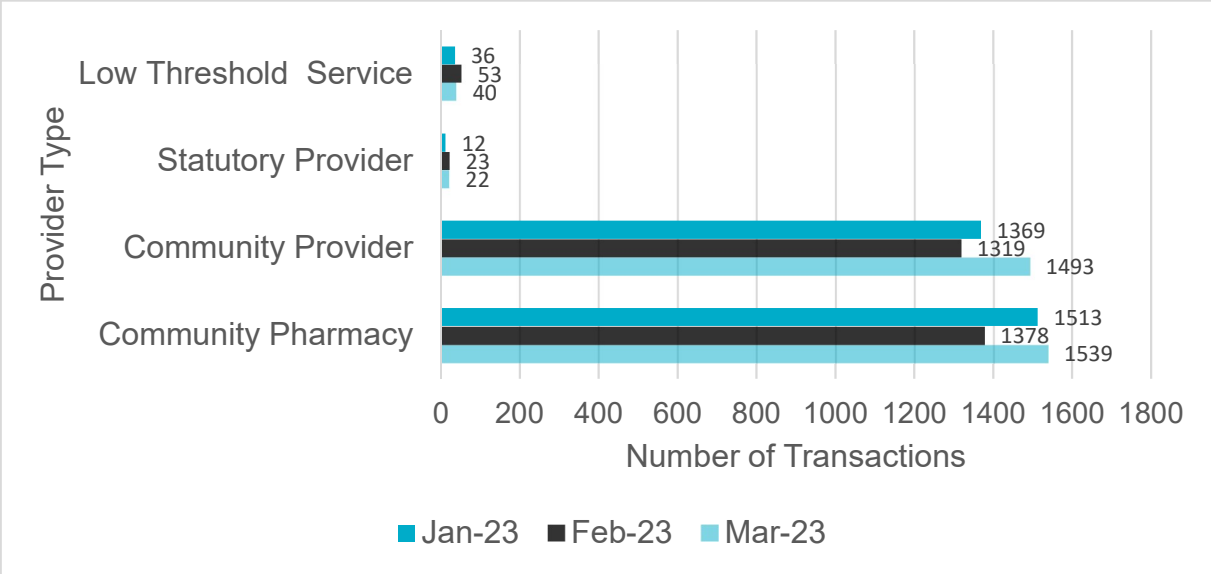
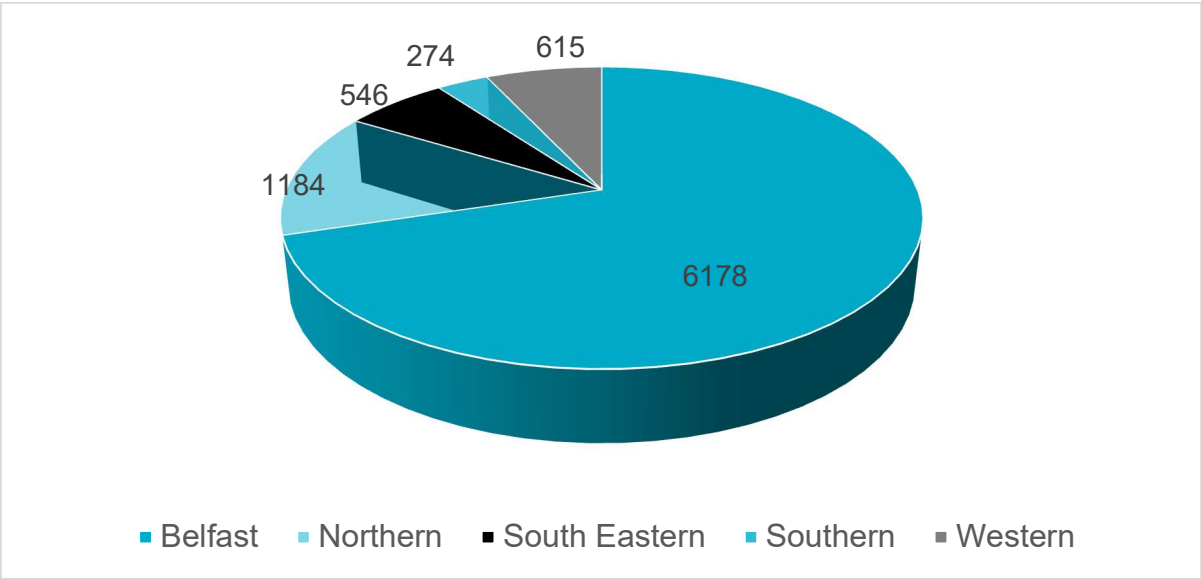


Figure 1 reflects that the Community-based Providers completed 47.5% of the transactions for the period whilst the 20 community pharmacy sites completed over 50.3% of the transactions.

Figure 2: Number of transactions by each Health and Social Care Trust area

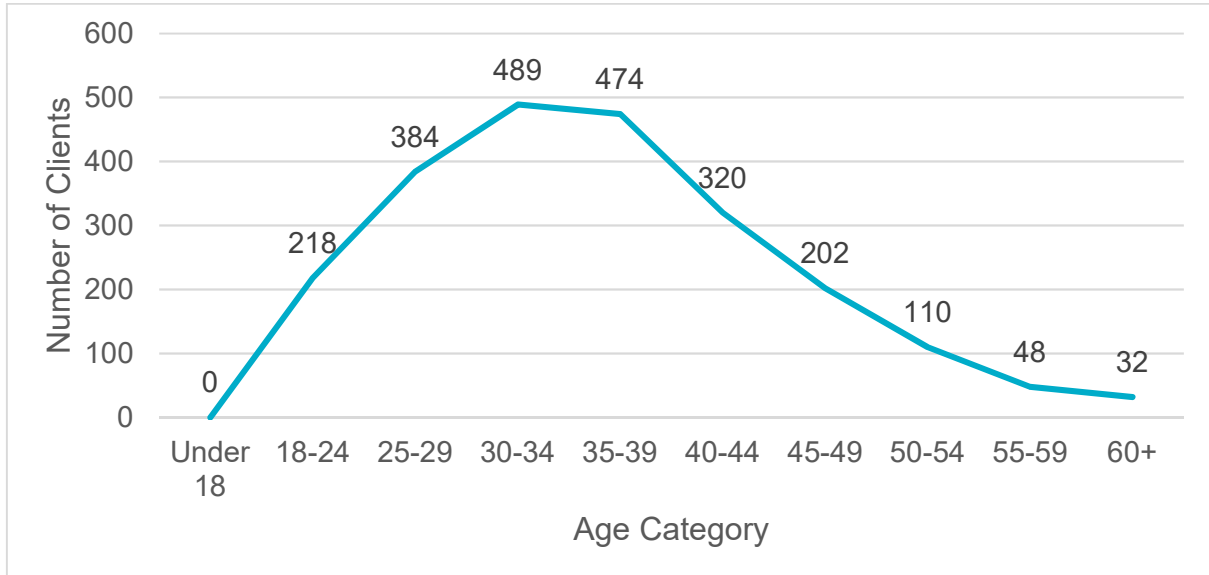


The highest number of overall transactions took place in BHSCCT area (70.2%) and the lowest percentage of transactions taking place in the SHSCT area (3.1%).

NSES User Profile

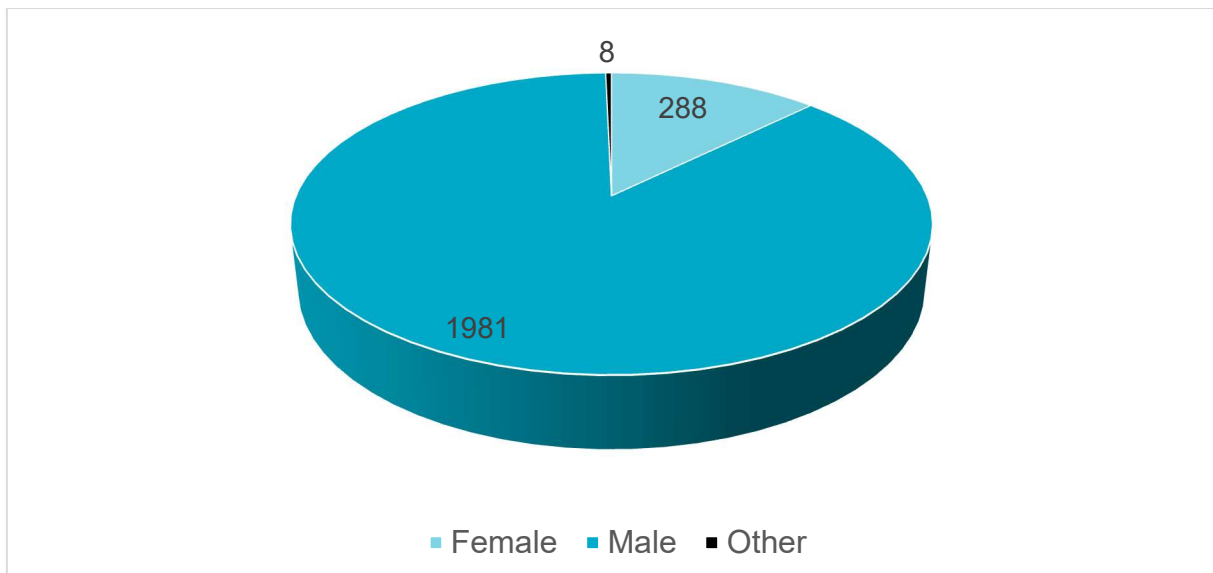
The age and gender profile of the 2,277 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Current Age of new Clients registered in reporting period



The most common age category for new clients was 30-34 years, closely followed by those aged 35-39.

Figure 4: Gender of Clients at registration



This pie chart reflects that the NSES is used primarily by males with 87% of registered clients in this quarter being male.

Figure 5: Gender (%) of clients by Trust area



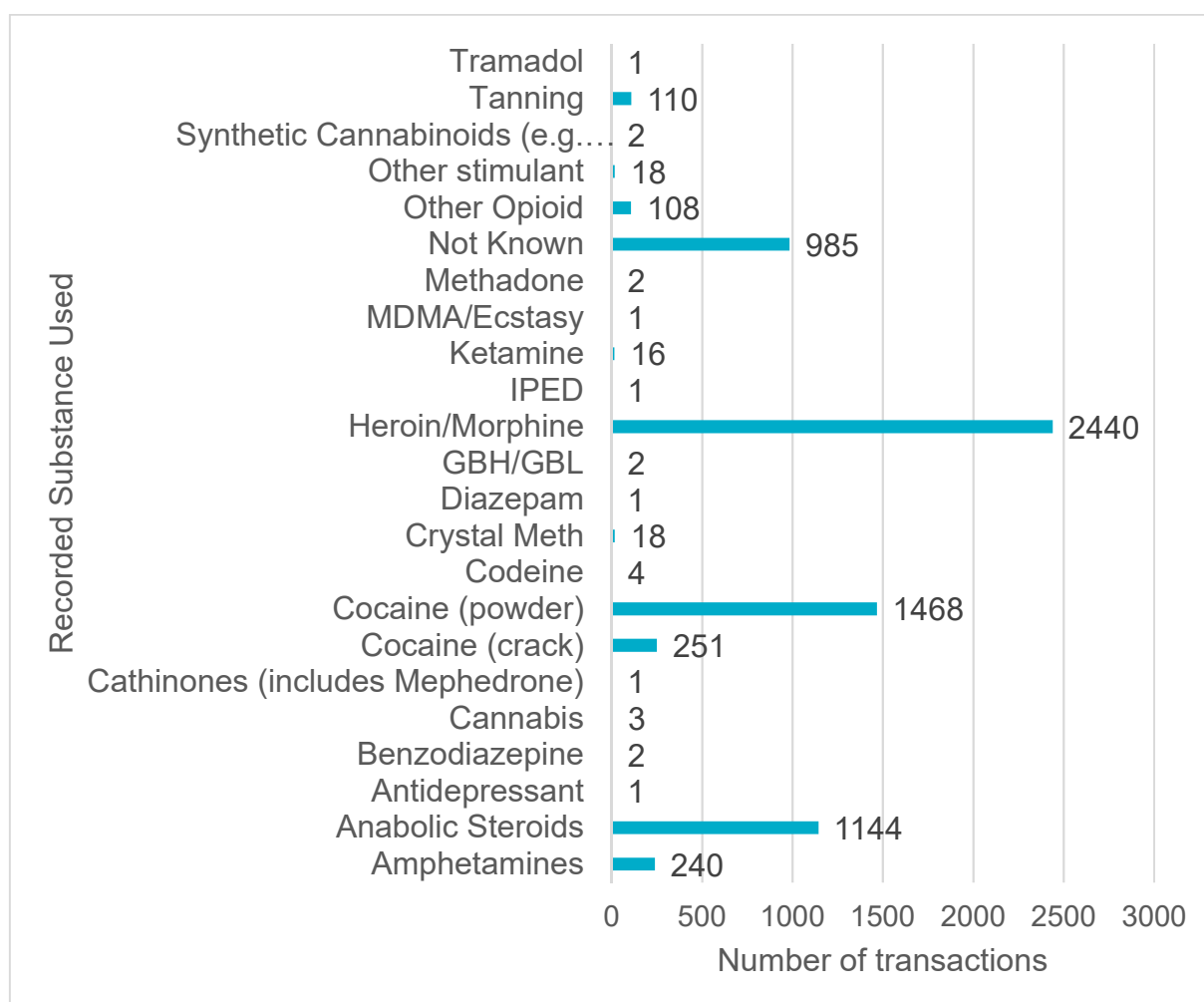
Recorded Substance Used

The graph below reflects the reported substances used by clients for each transaction. Clients may report more than one substance in response to this.

Please note the substance used mechanism was not fully implemented on Neo360 until 1 February 2023, therefore, this graph represents the revised timeframe within the reporting period.

Figure 6 reflects that of the 5,867 transactions in this reduced reporting period, 6,819 reports of substance used were recorded across 22 substances/categories.

Figure 6: Reported Substances Used by transaction from 1 February 2023 to 31 March 2023



Heroin/morphine has the largest reported usage within needle exchange clients. Cocaine powder and anabolic steroids are the second and third most reported substances respectively, across the region. A ‘not known’ category has been included for those clients who do not wish to disclose this information, this was recorded 985 times.

Table 2: Number of clients using most reported substances from 1 February 2023 to 31 March 2023

Substance	Number of NSES unique clients using
Anabolic Steroids	829
Heroin/Morphine	513
Cocaine (powder)	278

Although heroin/morphine were mentioned most frequently during transactions, the number of unique clients using anabolic steroids by far exceeded those using heroin/morphine or cocaine.

Table 3: Quantity of Needles Dispensed

Please see below a breakdown of the needles dispensed across all needle exchange sites for the reporting period. A total of 259,046 needles were dispensed across needle exchange in Northern Ireland.

Category	Item	Total
Needles	16mm [5/8 inch] orange	3,846
Needles	25mm [1 inch] blue	2,948
Needles	25mm [1 inch] orange	4,257
Needles	30mm [1 1/4 inch] blue	35,315
Needles	38mm [1 1/2 inch] black	1,460
Needles	40mm [1 1/2 inch] green	33,768
NSES Packs	1ml Standard Pack	36,220
NSES Packs	1ml Starter Pack	3,310
NSES Packs	Single Injection Kit	100
NSES Packs	Steroid pack	61,020
Pack Items	1ml 29G fixed needle filter syringe (In a Pack)	100
Syringes	0.5ml Fixed Syringe	32,830
Syringes	1 ml 30G Unisharp fixed	43,872
Total Needles Dispensed		259,046

Basic principles are that the shorter needles are used for surface vein injecting (arms, hand, feet etc), and the longer ones for deeper veins (legs and groin) and steroids which are intramuscular injections.

The 0.5ml and the 1ml Unisharp are the mainstay of all injecting equipment, they are the shortest and thinnest needles and also the lowest dead space syringes. It is positive from a harm reduction perspective these are being used the most with 116,232 (44.8%) in total dispensed in the reporting period.

NSES dispenses a 2ml starter and standard pack also (14,460 dispensed in reporting period), however, these do not contain needles. Clients then select needles separately, accounting for the high number of single coloured needles dispensed. The highest dispensed single needles are blue (30mm) and green (40mm) these are the largest needles and are used for groin injecting. Steroid injectors may take these as additional needles alongside the pack.

Use of Foils

In promoting harm reduction, staff within needle exchange sites are encouraged to dispense foils which will support smoking, thus, reducing the harm caused through injecting. Twenty sites are currently dispensing foils with the highest dispensing rate at 3,599 packets (20 per pack). Currently 7 active sites are not dispensing foils.

Returns

13,121 exchange bins were recorded as returned within this reporting period. All clients are encouraged to return used needles as part of the service and each exchange includes a sharps bin. This aims to ensure that injecting equipment is safely disposed of and reduces the number of discarded needles.

Section 3: Western Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the Western Health and Social Care Trust Area (WHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

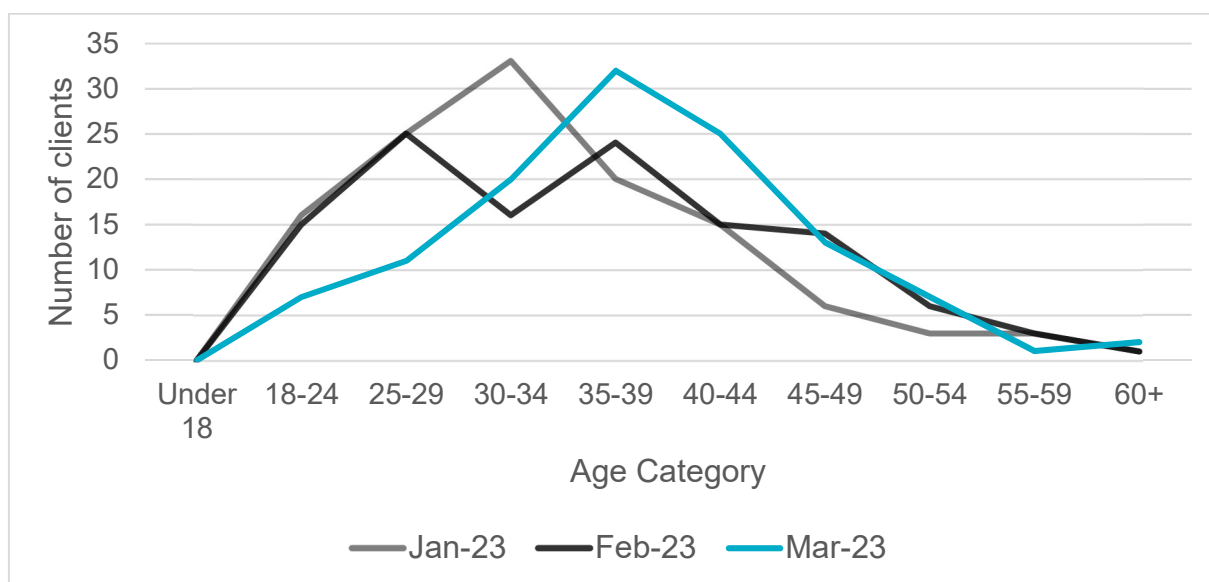
- 615 NSES transactions completed;
- 446 unique clients using NSES;
- 359 new clients registered for NSES;
- 61 anonymous transactions completed.

All of these transactions were completed by Community Pharmacies.

NSES User Profile

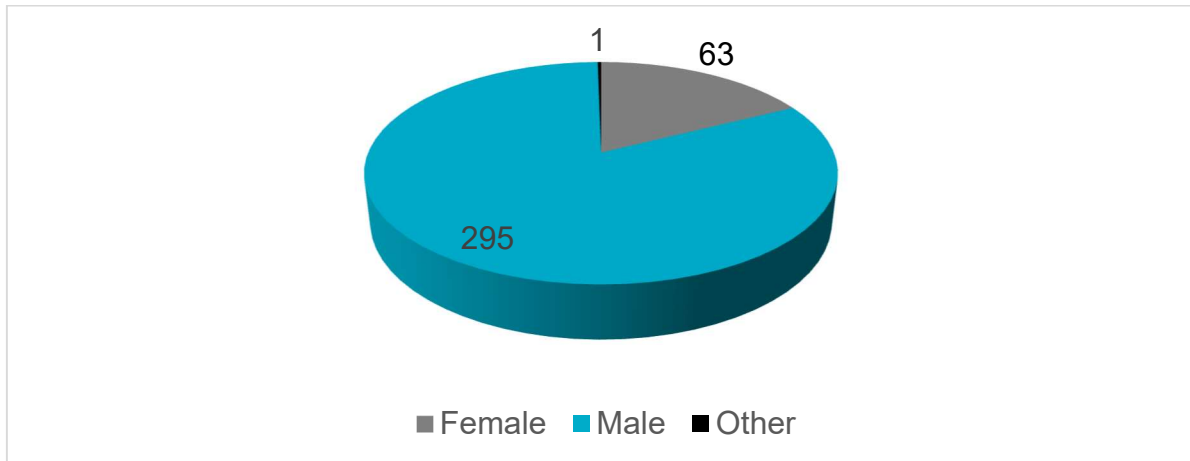
The age and gender profile of the 359 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 7 and 8.

Figure 7: Current Age of Clients in WHSCT registered in reporting period



Overall the most common age category in the WHSCT area was 35-39 years.

Figure 8: Gender of new Clients at registration in WHSCT



The majority of clients were male (82%) within the WHSCT area.

Figure 9: Recorded Substance Used by transaction from 1 February 2023 to 31 March 2023 in WHSCT area

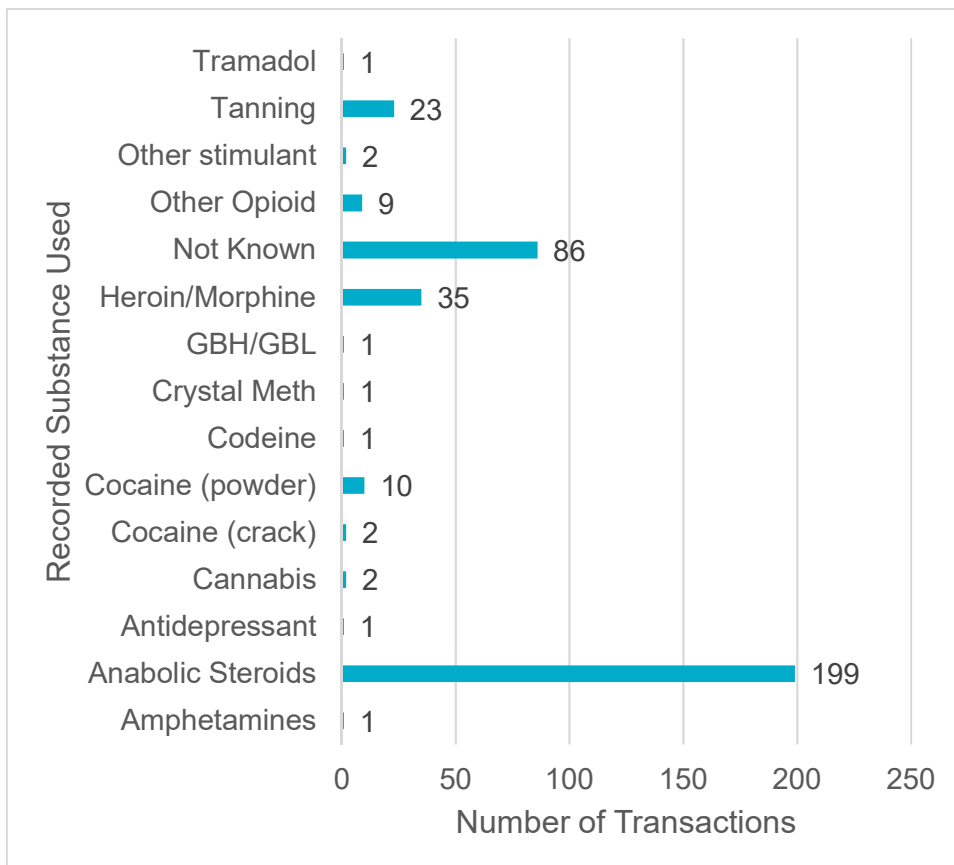


Figure 9 reflects that of the 377 transactions in this reduced reporting period, 374 reports of substance used were recorded with 22 substances/categories.

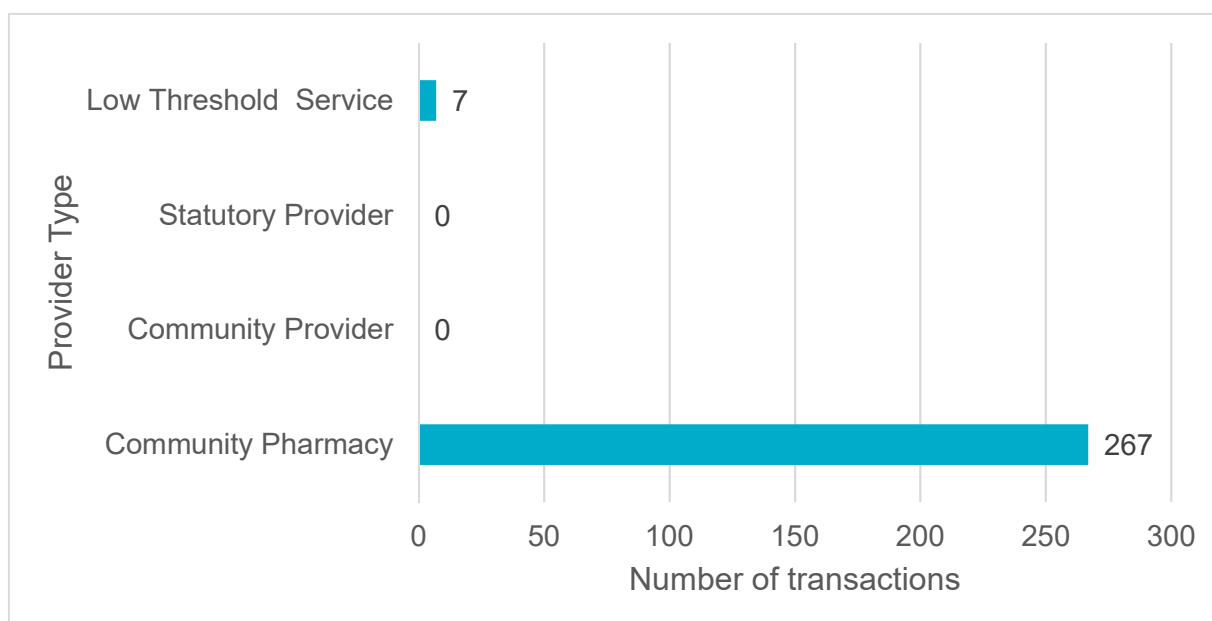
The largest recorded substance usage in needle exchange was anabolic steroids followed by 'not known' and heroin/morphine.

Section 4: Southern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the Southern Health and Social Care Trust Area (SHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

- 274 NSES transactions completed;
- 178 unique clients using NSES;
- 142 new clients registered for NSES;
- 14 anonymous transactions completed.

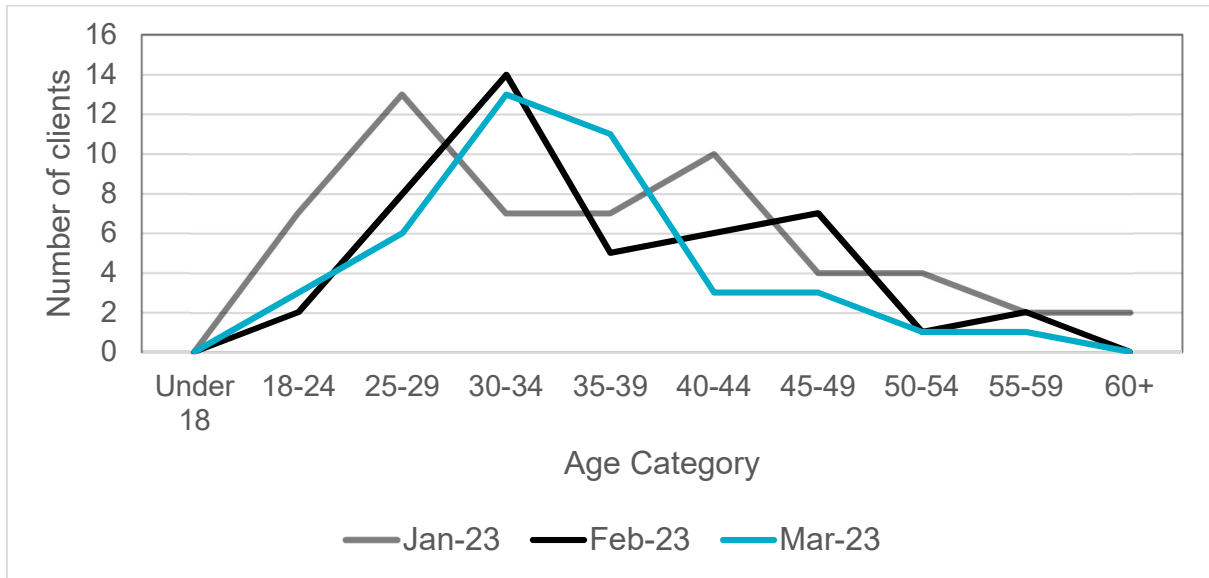
Figure 10: Number of Transactions per Provider type in NSES for SHSCT area



NSES User Profile

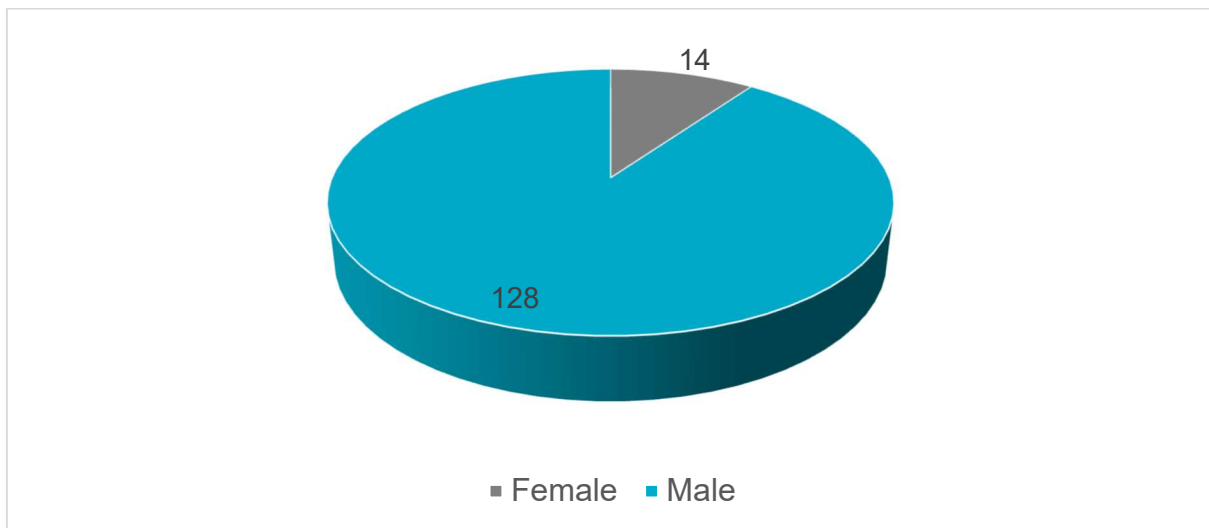
The age and gender profile of the 142 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 11 and 12.

Figure 11: Current Age of Clients in SHSCT registered in reporting period



The most common overall age group of client in SHSCT was age 30-34 years.

Figure 12: Gender of Clients at registration in SHSCT



The majority of new clients registered were male (90%).

Figure 13: Recorded Substance Used by transaction from 1 February 2023 to 31 March 2023 in SHSCT

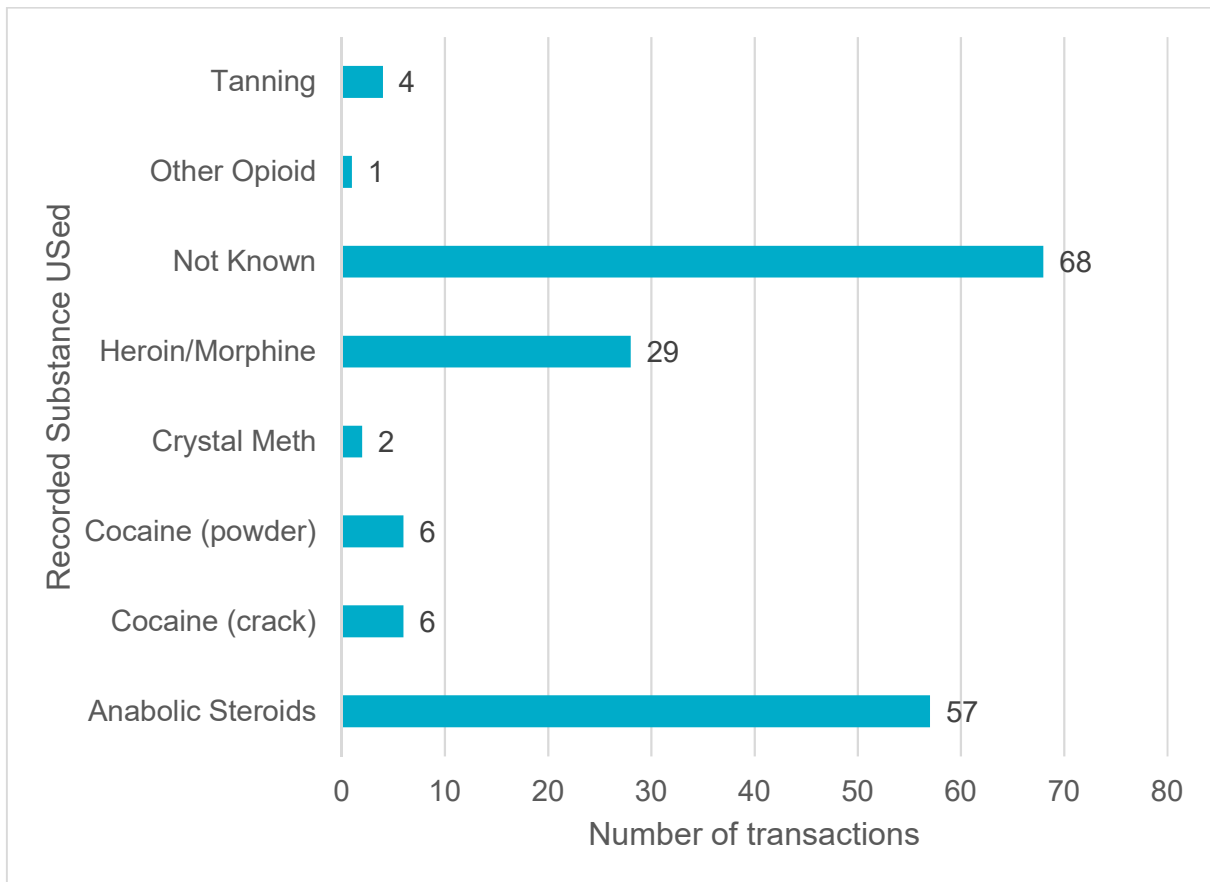


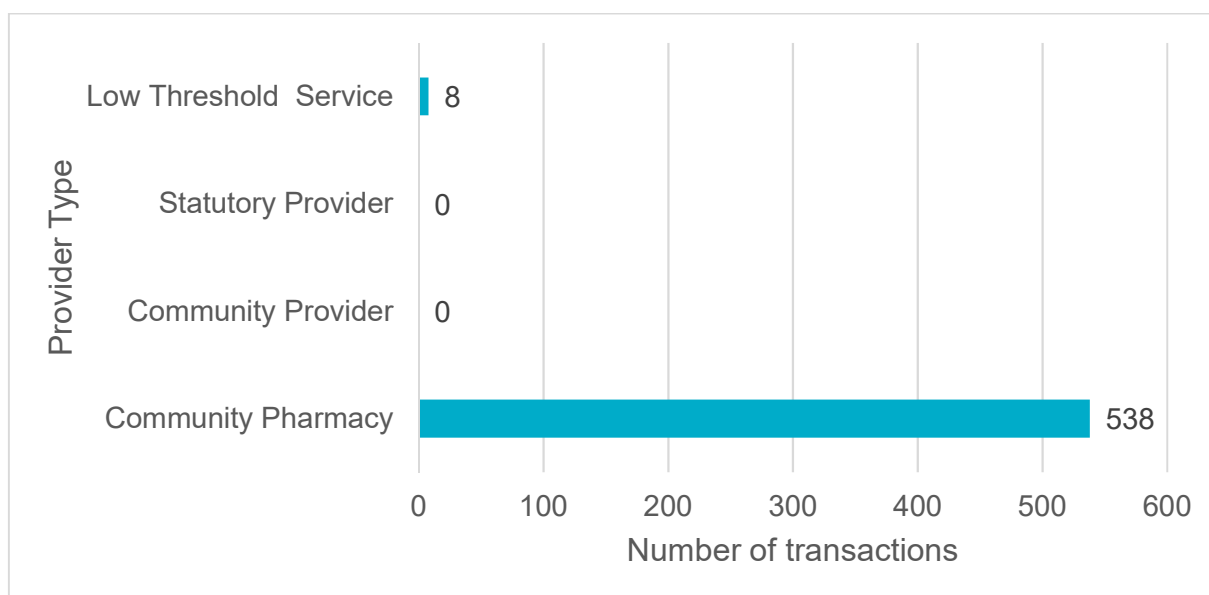
Figure 13 reflects that of the 177 transactions in this reduced reporting period, 173 reports of substance used were recorded with 7 substances/categories. The largest category was 'not known' followed by anabolic steroids (57) and morphine/heroin (29).

Section 5: South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Area (SEHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

- 546 NSES transactions completed;
- 394 unique clients using NSES;
- 319 new clients registered for NSES;
- 4 anonymous transactions completed.

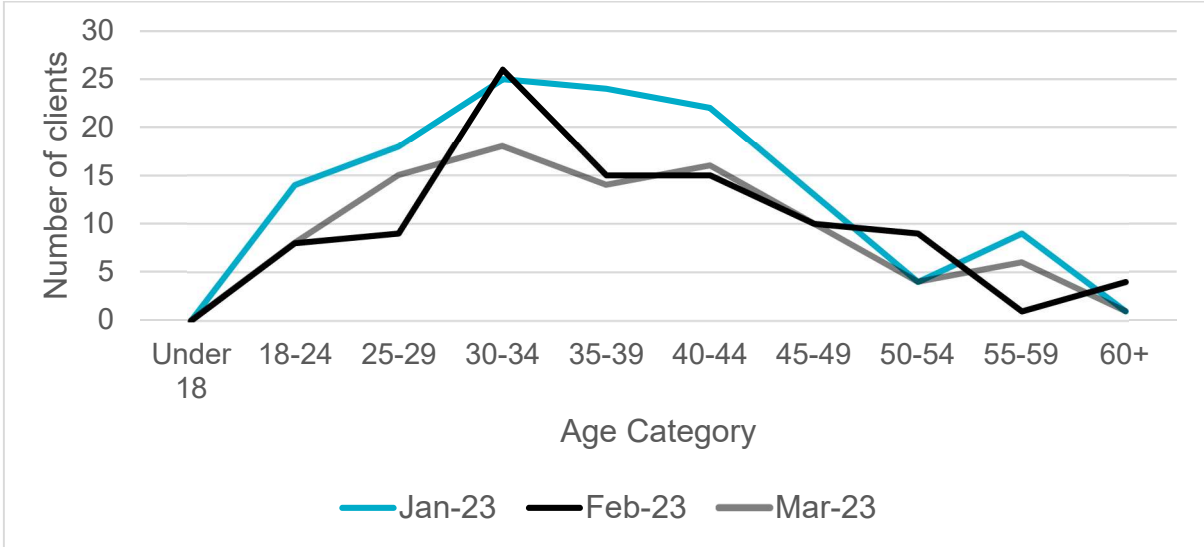
Figure 14: Number of Transactions per provider type for SEHSCT



NSES User Profile

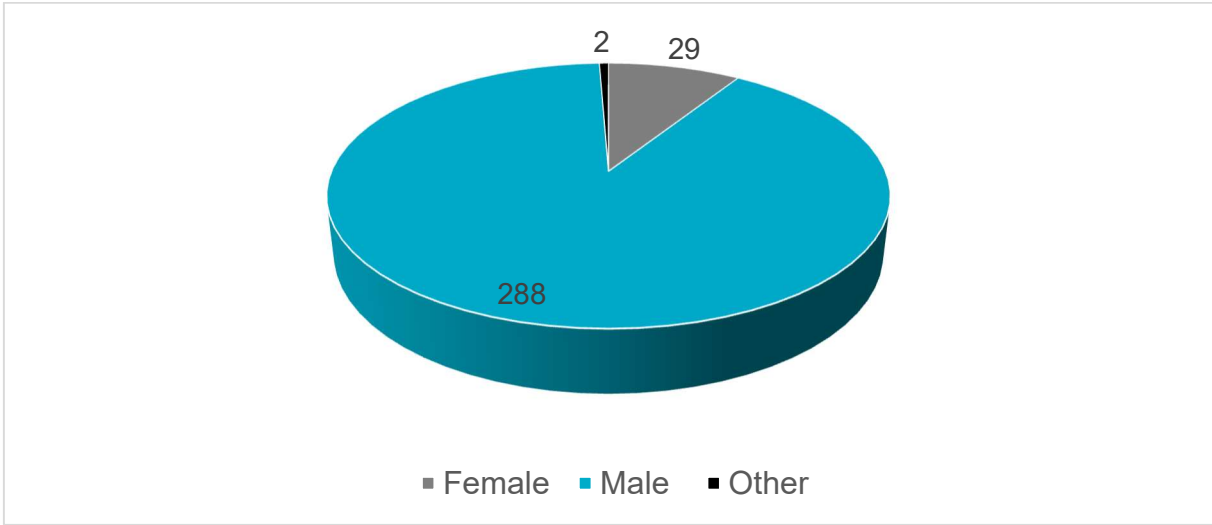
The age and gender profile of the 319 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 15 and 16.

Figure 15: Current Age of Clients in SEHSCT registered in reporting period



The most common overall age group of clients in SEHSCT was age 30-34 years.

Figure 16: Gender of Clients at registration in SEHSCT



The majority of new clients registered were male (90%).

Figure 17: Recorded Substance Used by transaction from 1 February 2023 to 31 March 2023 in SEHSCT

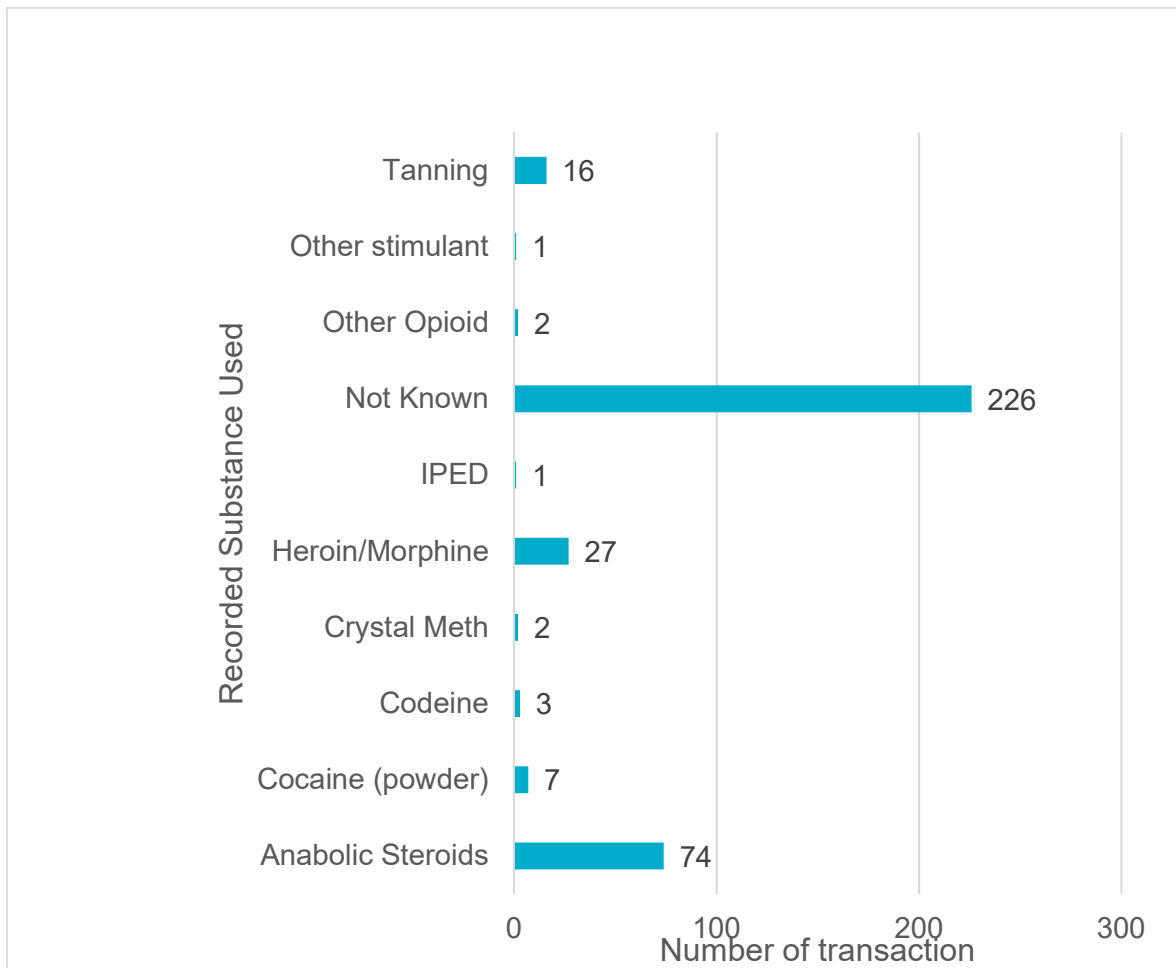


Figure 17 reflects that of the 357 transactions in this reduced reporting period, 359 reports of substance used were recorded with 9 substances/categories.

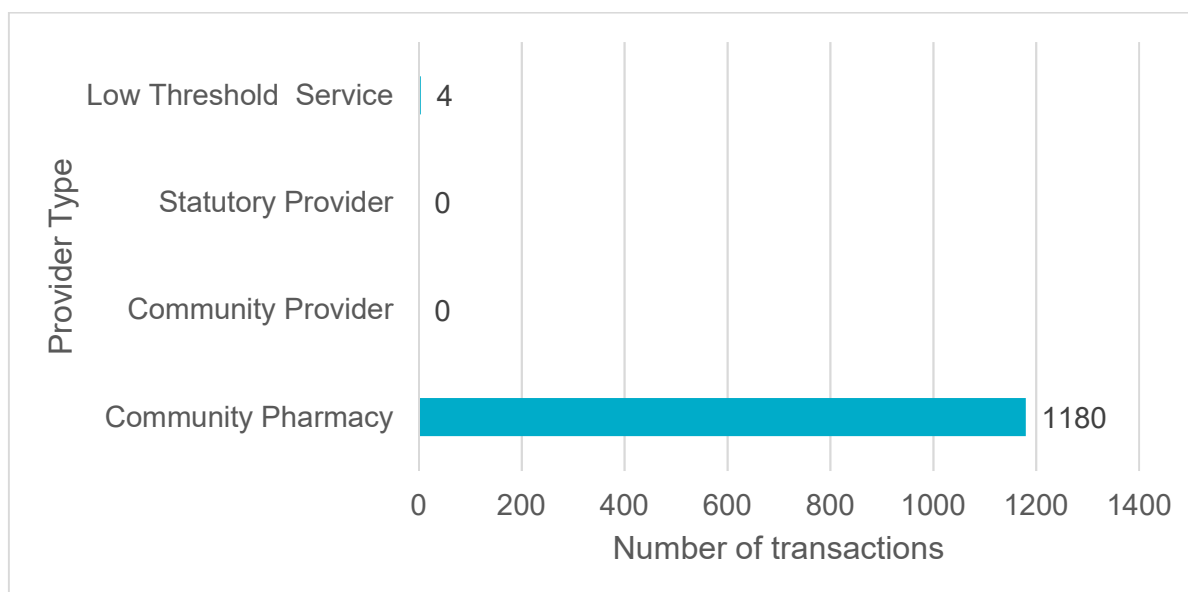
The largest category was ‘not known’ with over 60%; this could be due to the provider not asking the question or due to the client being unwilling to disclose. The second was anabolic steroids followed by morphine/heroin (27).

Section 6: Northern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the Northern Health and Social Care Trust Area (NHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

- 1184 NSES transactions completed;
- 736 Unique clients using NSES;
- 604 new clients registered for NSES;
- 19 anonymous transactions completed.

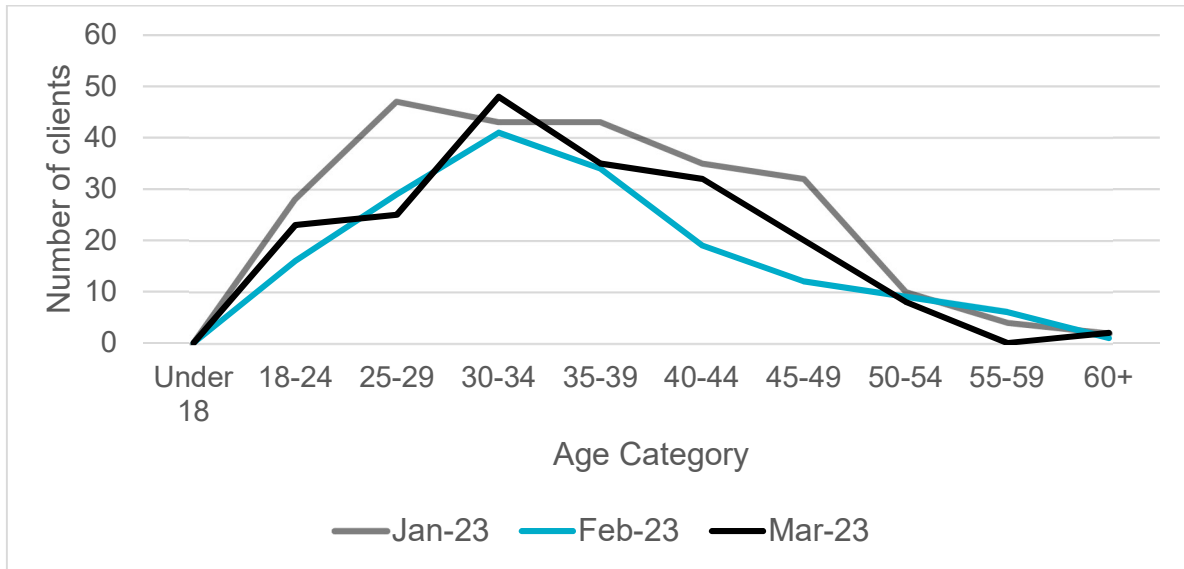
Figure 18: Number of Transactions per provider type for NHSCT



NSES User Profile

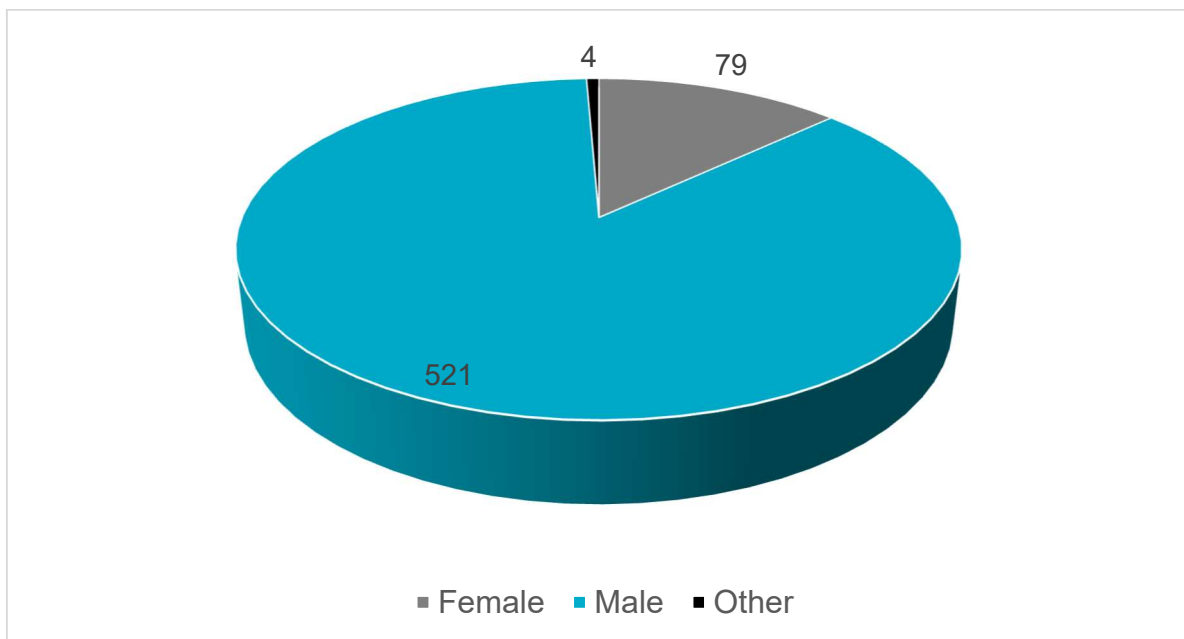
The age and gender profile of the 604 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 19 and 20.

Figure 19: Current Age of Clients in NHSCT registered in reporting period



The most common overall age group of client in NHSCT was age 30-34 years.

Figure 20: Gender of Clients at registration in NHSCT



The majority of new clients registered were male (86%).

Figure 21: Recorded Substance Used by transaction from 1 February 2023 to 31 March 2023 in NHSCT

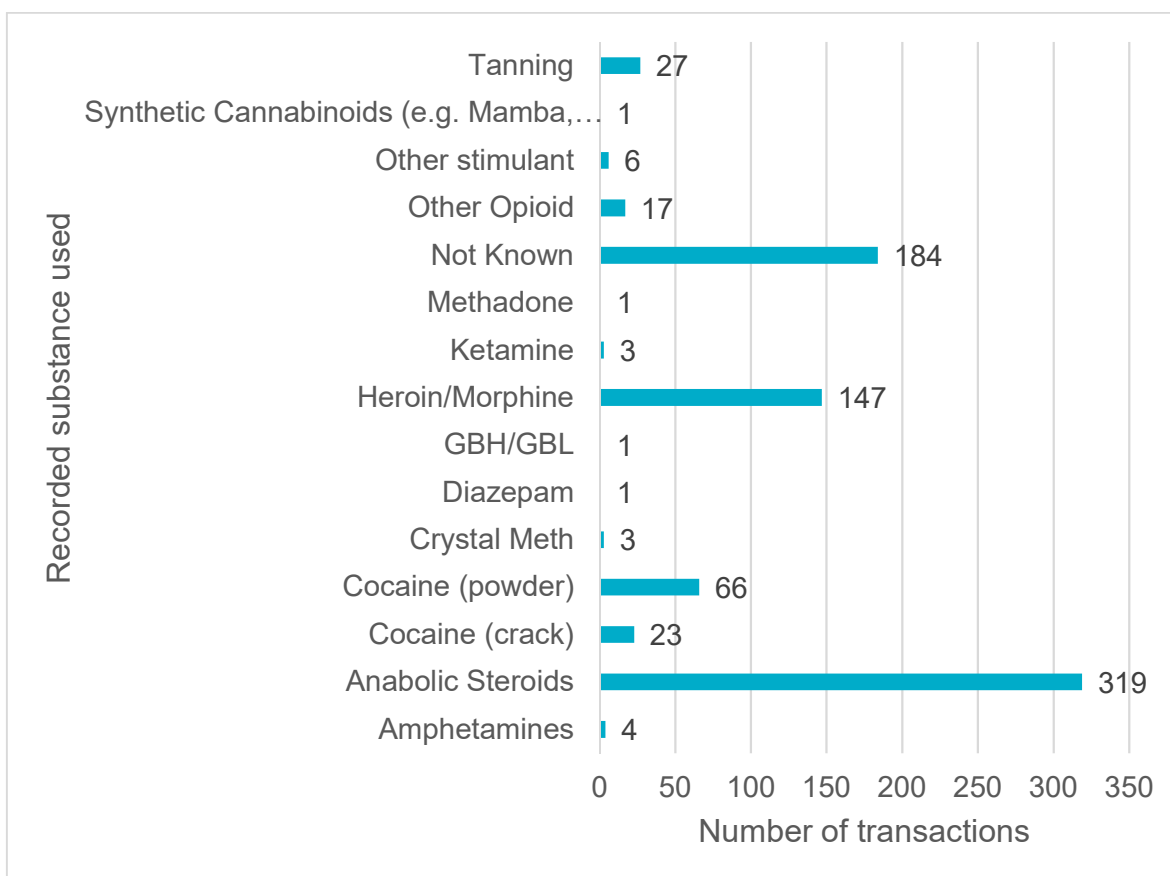


Figure 21 reflects that of the 774 transactions in this reduced reporting period, 803 reports of substance used were recorded with 14 substances/categories.

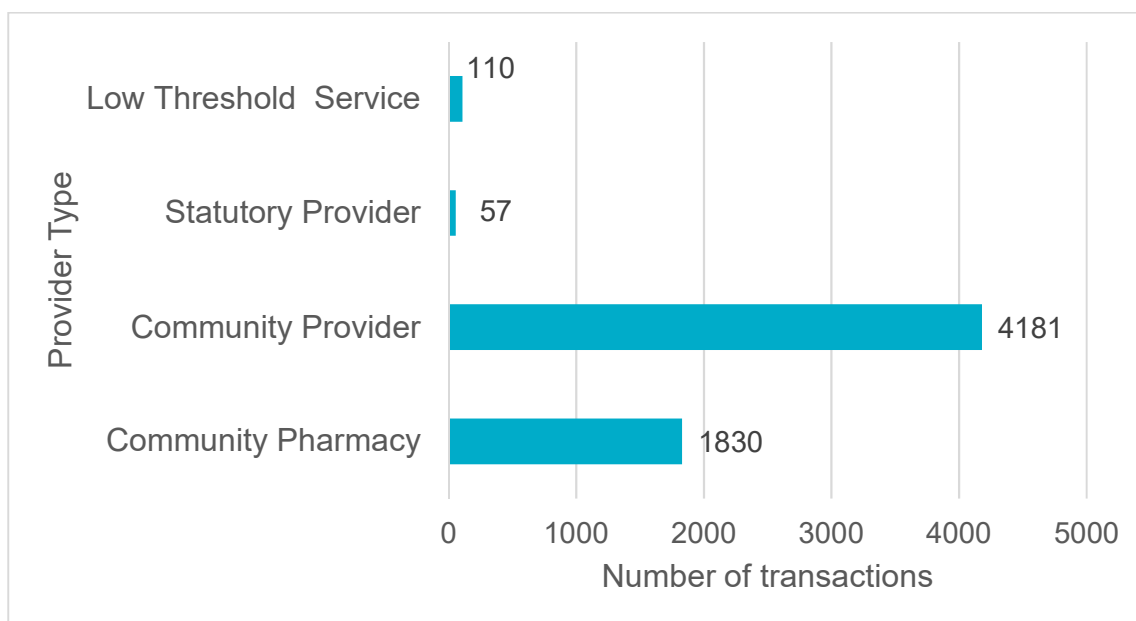
The largest recorded substance used in needle exchange was anabolic steroids, followed by 'not known' followed by heroin/morphine.

Section 7: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

In the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Area (BHSCT) within the reporting period there were:

- 6178 NSES transactions completed;
- 1574 unique clients using NSES;
- 853 new clients registered for NSES;
- 107 anonymous transactions completed.

Figure 22: Number of Transactions per Provider Type in BHSCT

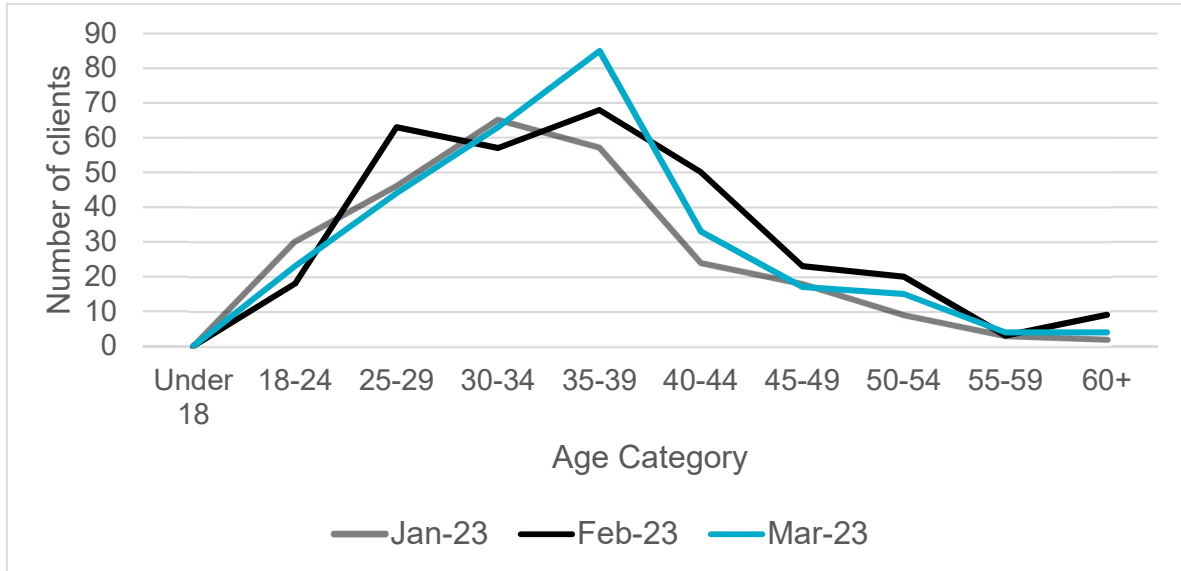


Within the BHSCT area 67.7% of transactions are completed by community providers.

NSES User Profile

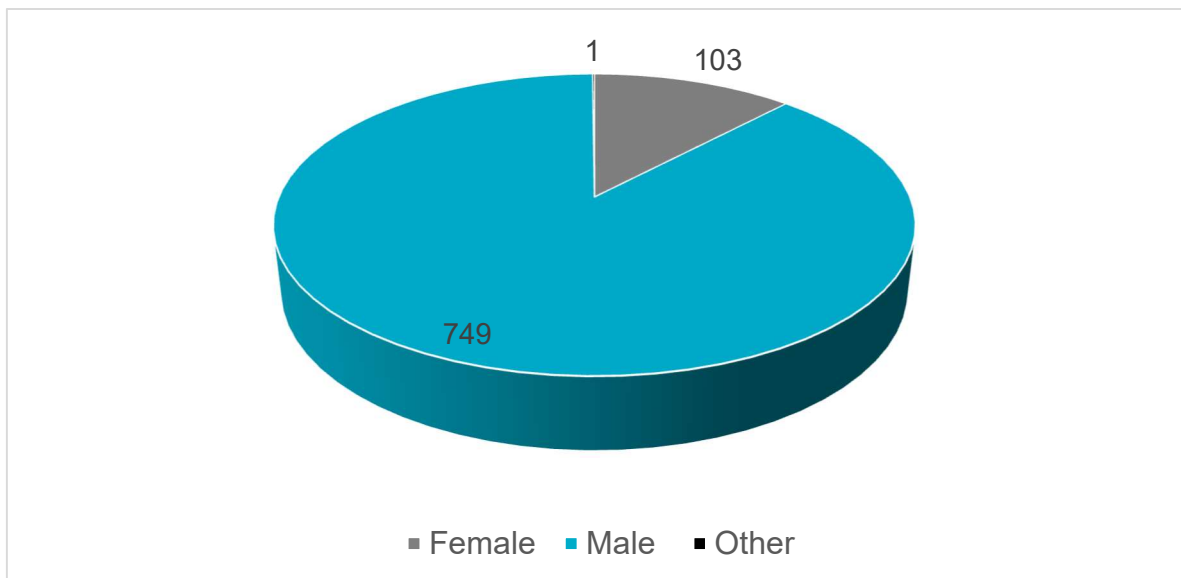
The age and gender profile of the 853 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 23 and 24

Figure 23: Age of Clients at registration in BHSCT



The most common overall age group of new client in BHSCT was age 35-39 years.

Figure 24: Gender of Clients at registration in BHSCT



The majority of new clients registered were male (88%).

Figure 25: Recorded Substance Used by transaction from 1 February 2023 to 31 March 2023 in BHSCT

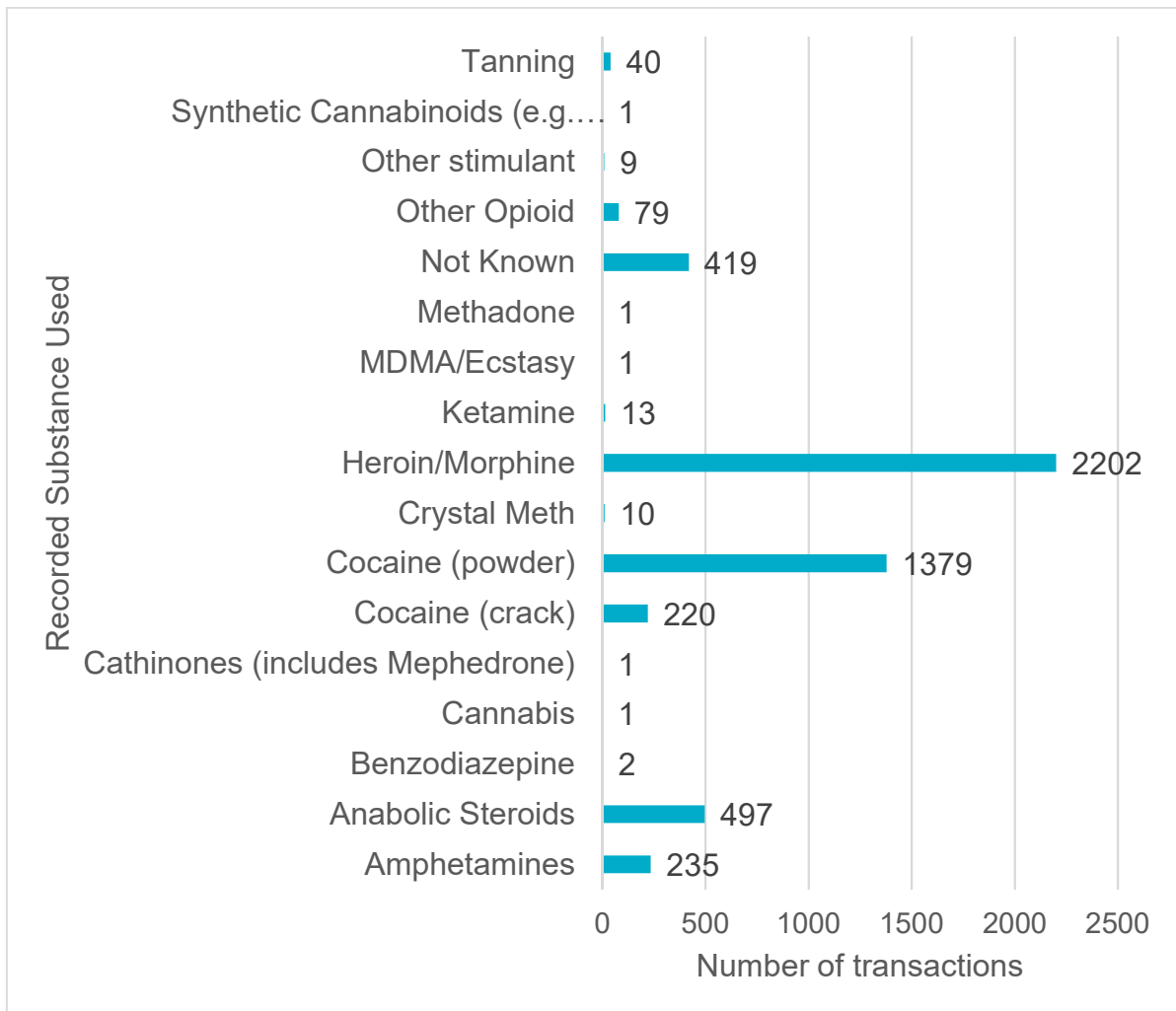


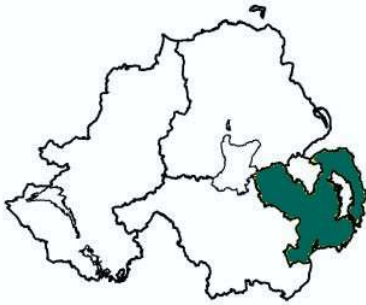


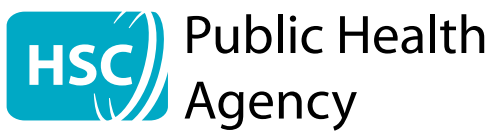


Figure 25 reflects that of the 4182 transactions in this reduced reporting period, 5110 reports of substance used were recorded with 17 substances/categories.

The largest recorded substance used in needle exchange was heroin/morphine followed by cocaine (powder) and anabolic steroids.

Section 8: Summary of NSES activity by Trust Area

<p>Belfast HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 1574 Percentage male: 88%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heroin/Morphine 2. Cocaine powder 3. Anabolic Steroids <p>Lead Sector: Community Providers</p>	<p>Northern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 736 Percentage male: 86%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin/Morphine 3. Cocaine Powder <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	<p>South Eastern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 394 Percentage male: 90%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin/Morphine 3. Tanning Solution <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>
<p>Southern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 178 Percentage male: 90%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin/Morphine 3. Cocaine <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	<p>Western HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 446 Percentage male: 82%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin/Morphine 3. Tanning Solution <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	



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