



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

**1 July 2023 – September 2023**

Title	Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Quarterly Report.  1 July 2023 - 30 September 2023
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Directorate	Public Health Directorate, Health and Social Wellbeing Improvement, Public Health Agency
Target Audience	Needle and syringe exchange providers, drug treatment services, pharmacy staff, health professionals working in substance use
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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-two 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.

This report summarises data that has been collated by Neo360 within the three-month period between 1 July 2023 and 30 September 2023. Needle exchange activity was recorded in 30 active sites throughout this period. Two additional NSES sites did not record any transactions during this period. Foyle Haven, a Low Threshold Service in the Western Trust area opened a needle exchange this quarter.

Within this reporting period 1,407 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 6,731 clients. This number is understood to be inflated due to the number of clients re-registering on the system due to fears regarding their anonymity, providers continually work with clients to try to keep this figure accurate.

In terms of unique client usage for the reporting period, there was a total of 3,109 unique clients across Northern Ireland. When this report is run per Trust area this totals 3,318 unique service users which implies that 209 clients are crossing Trust boundaries to access multiple needle exchange services.

This report includes the regional data across Northern Ireland, followed by a breakdown per trust, **correct as of 1 October 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 July 2023 and 30 September 2023 the Public Health Agency had the following sites providing active NSES

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

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

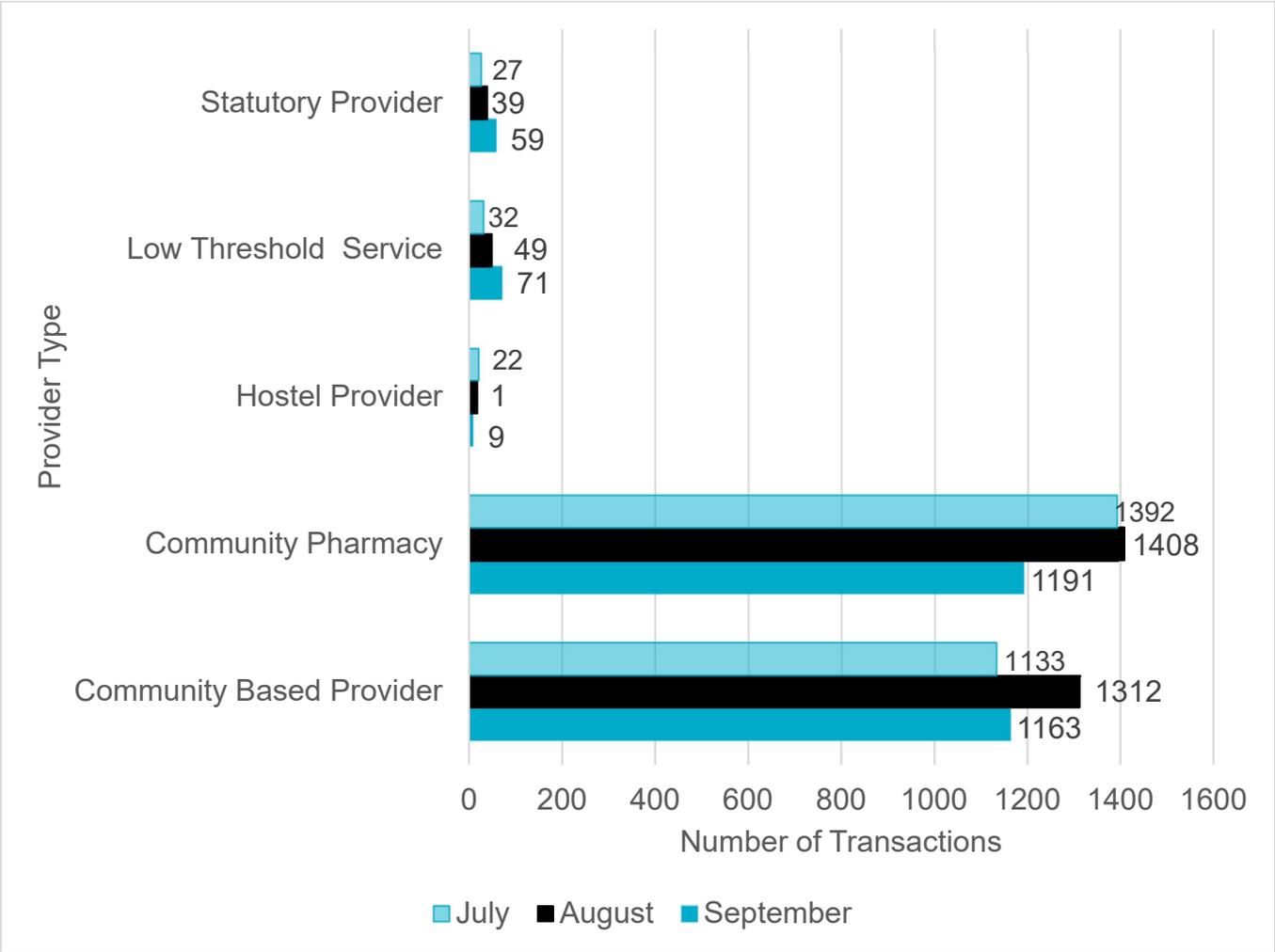
## Section 2: Regional NSES Data Review

### NSES Transactions

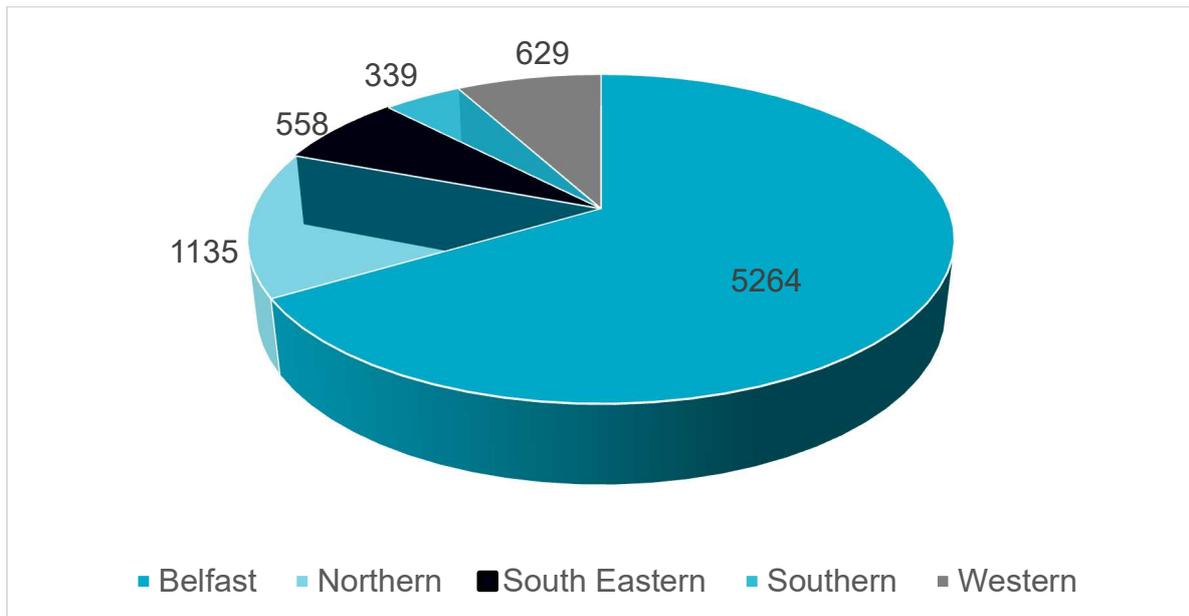
From July to September 2023 there were a total of **7,925 NSES transactions** carried out across Northern Ireland. The first quarter (January to March 2023) reported 8,797 transactions, the second quarter (April to June 2023) reported 8,180 transactions. Transactions have reduced each quarter this year however the amount of needles dispensed continues to increase each quarter.

**Figure 1: Number of NSES transactions by Provider Type**

Figure 1 reflects that the community pharmacies completed 50.3% of the transactions for the reporting period. The community-based providers transactions have decreased slightly from the previous quarter, although they still completed over 45.5% of the total transactions.



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

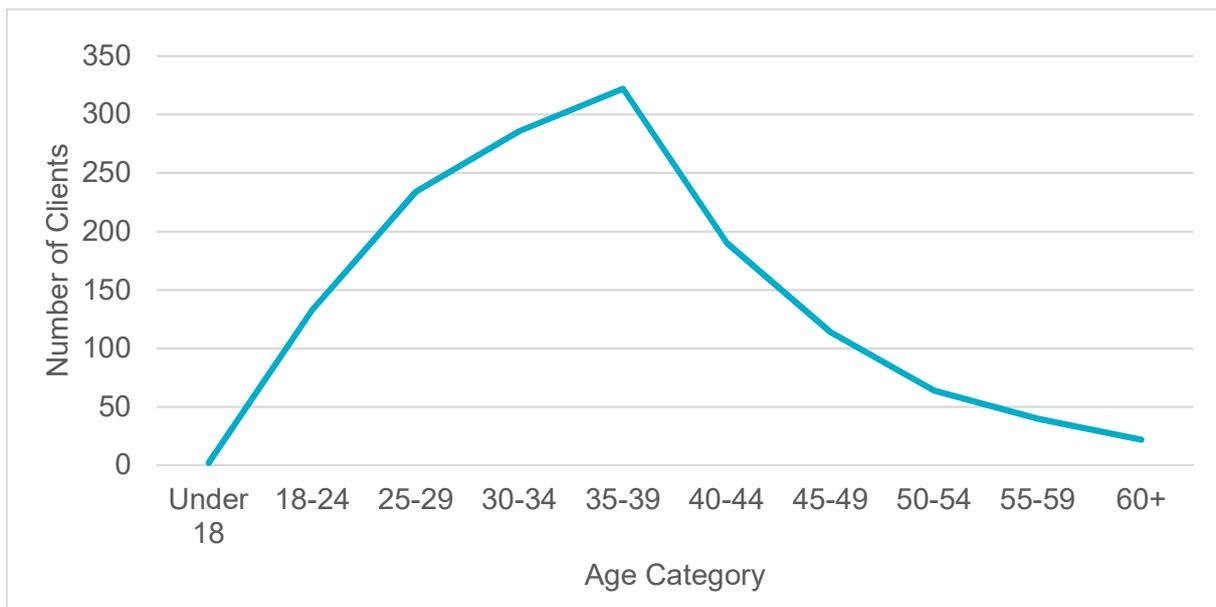


The highest number of overall transactions continue to take place in BHSCT area (66.4%) and the lowest percentage of transactions continue to take place in the SHSCT area (4.3%).

**NSES User Profile**

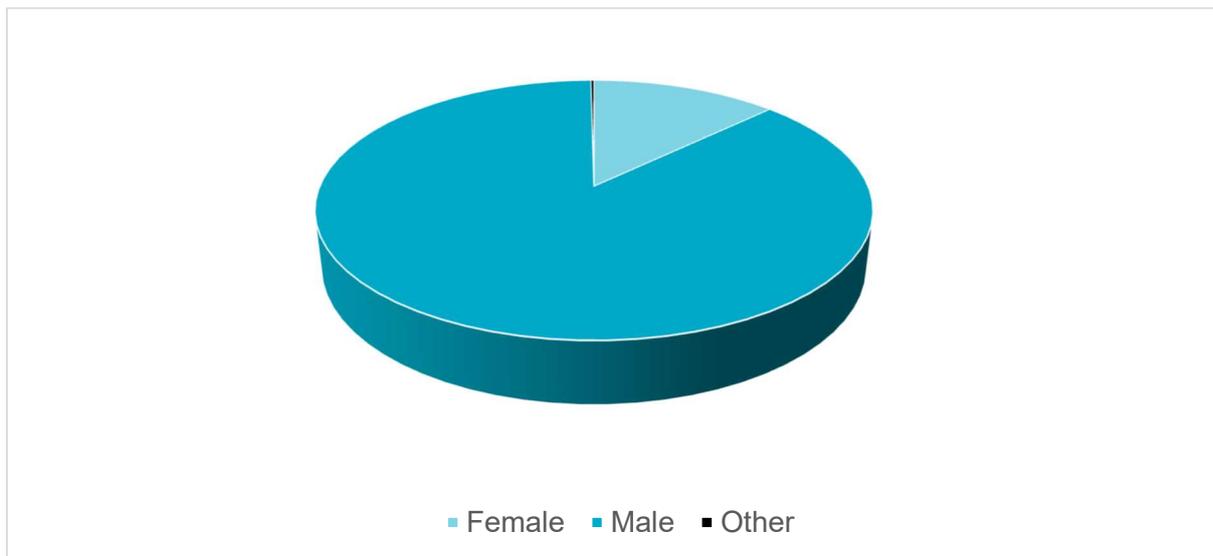
The age and gender profile of the 1,407 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 3 and 4.

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



The most common age category for new clients remains the same as previous the quarter at 35-39 years, followed by those aged 30-34.

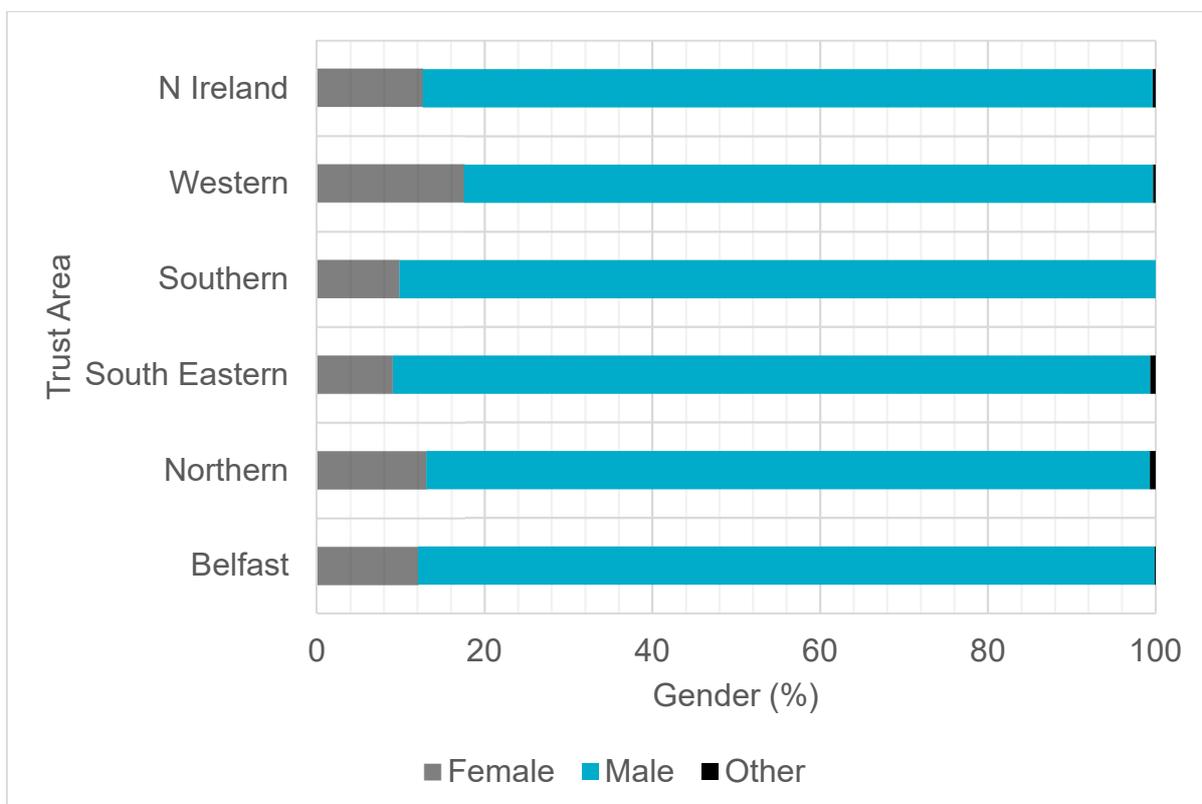
**Figure 4: Gender of Clients at registration**



This pie chart reflects that the NSES is used primarily by males (86.9%).

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

Figure 5 shows the gender breakdown by trust of clients registering for needle exchange this quarter. Western Trust area continues to reflect the largest number of female clients however overall this remains a male dominated service.

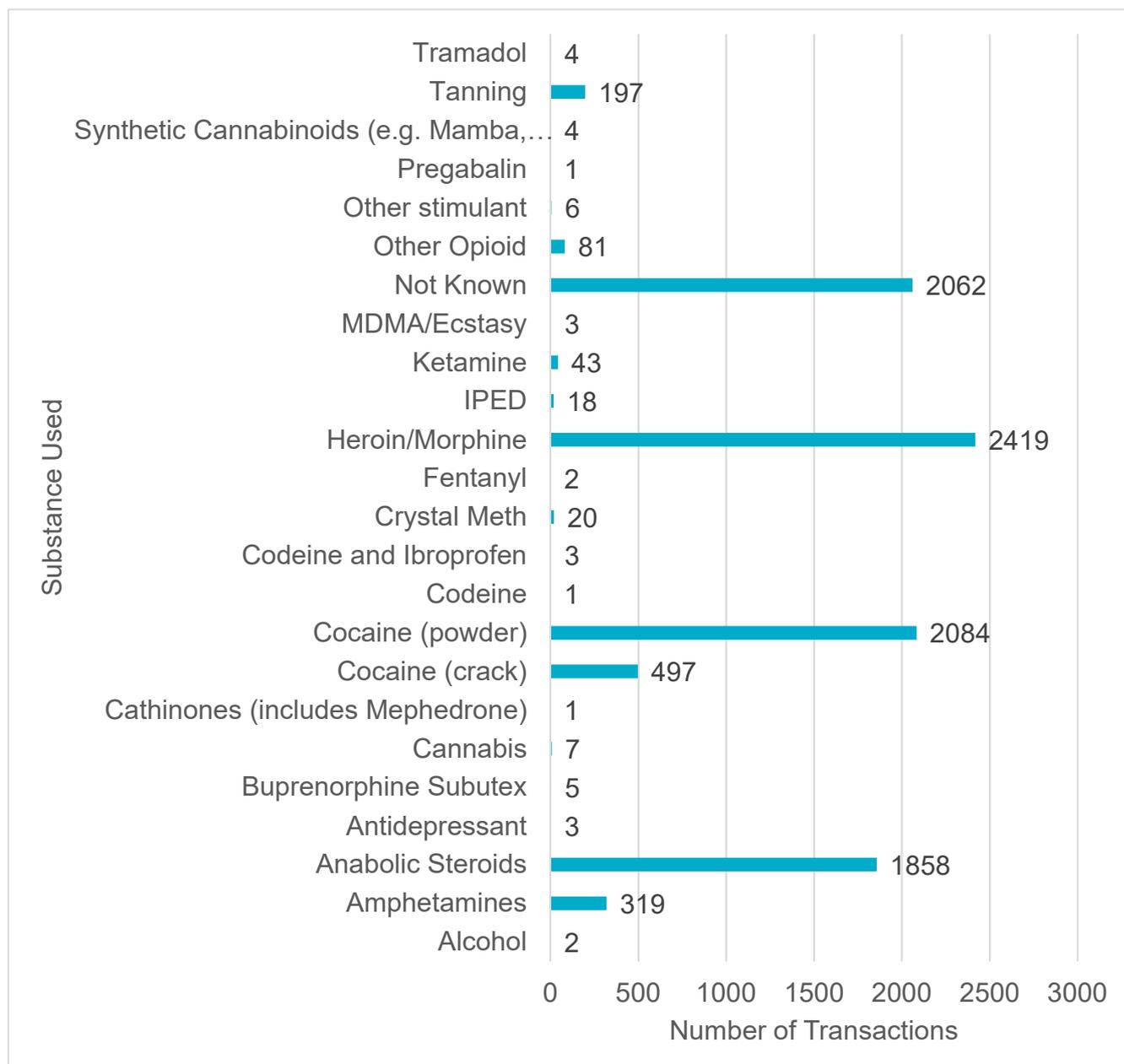


## Recorded Substance Used

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

Figure 6 reflects that of the 7,925 transactions in this reporting period, 9,640 reports of substance used were recorded across 23 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which remain high at 2062 (21.4%) and this increased by 152 transactions this quarter.

**Figure 6: Reported Substances Used by Transaction**



Heroin/morphine (2,419) has the largest reported usage within needle exchange clients. Cocaine powder (2,084) and anabolic steroids (1,858) are the second and third most reported substances respectively, across the region.

**Table 2: Number of clients using most reported substances from 1 July 2023 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023.**

Substance	Number of NSES unique clients using
Anabolic Steroids	1,224
Heroin/Morphine	470
Cocaine (powder)	367

Although heroin/morphine were reported 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 179,161 needles and syringes combined were dispensed across needle exchange in Northern Ireland.

Category	Item	Total
Needles	16mm [ 5/8 inch ] orange	3,672
Needles	25mm [ 1 inch ] blue	2,248
Needles	25mm [ 1 inch ] orange	3,972
Needles	30mm [ 1 1/4 inch ] blue	42,167
Needles	38mm [ 1 1/2 inch ] black	1,126
Needles	40mm [ 1 1/2 inch ] green	39,738
Syringes	0.5ml Fixed Syringe	40,860
Syringes	1 ml 30G Unisharp fixed	45,378
<b>Total Needles Dispensed</b>		<b>179,161</b>

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 continue to be used frequently within needle exchange with 86,238 (48%) in total dispensed in the reporting period.

NSES dispenses a 2ml starter pack and 2ml standard pack, 1,392 were dispensed in the 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) 42,167 dispensed and green (40mm) 39,738 dispensed with a total of 81,905 (45.7%) dispensed in the reporting period. These are the largest needles and are used for both groin injecting and also for steroid injecting.

The number of needles dispensed continues to increase each quarter. From January to March 2023 158,296 needles were dispensed, April to June 2023 161,024 were dispensed and from July to September 2023 179,161 were dispensed. The total needles dispensed in this calendar year thus far is 498,491.

### 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. Sixteen sites dispensed 1,296 packets (20 per pack).

### Returns

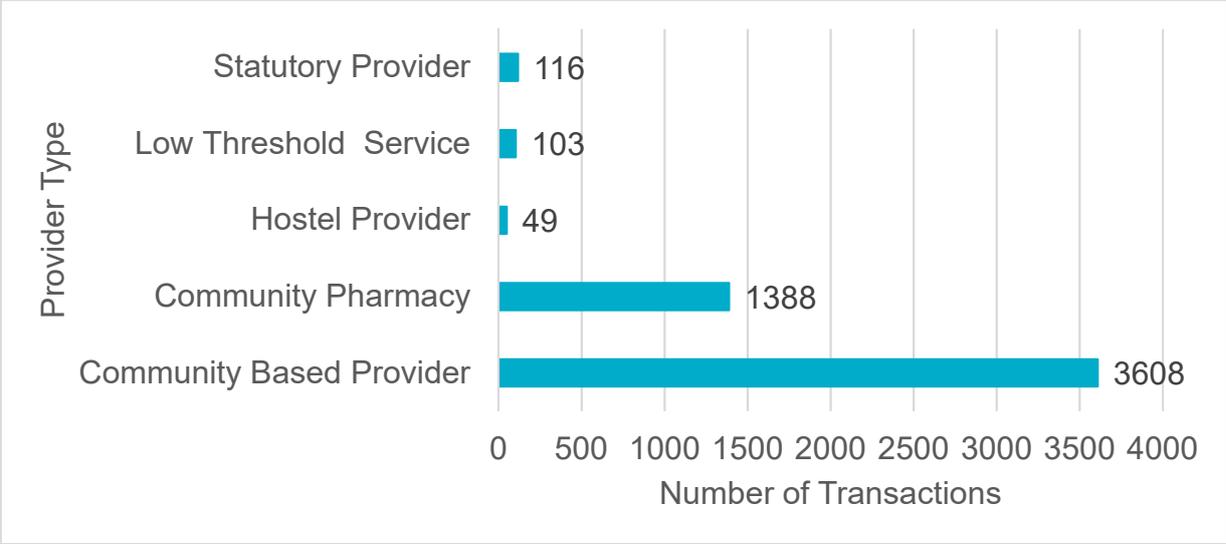
We have amended the system to record estimated needles returned as opposed to number of bins. This quarter 23,336 estimated needles were returned within exchanges. This is a return rate of 13%. This is a large increase from last quarter (8,948 recorded last quarter). This could be down to further clarity regarding recording returns on the system as well as some known larger interventions coordinated through low threshold services which included assistance with returns.

### Section 3: 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:

- 5,264 NSES transactions completed;
- 1,524 unique clients using NSES;
- 525 new clients registered for NSES;
- 150 anonymous transactions completed.

**Figure 7: Number of Transactions per Provider Type in BHSCT**

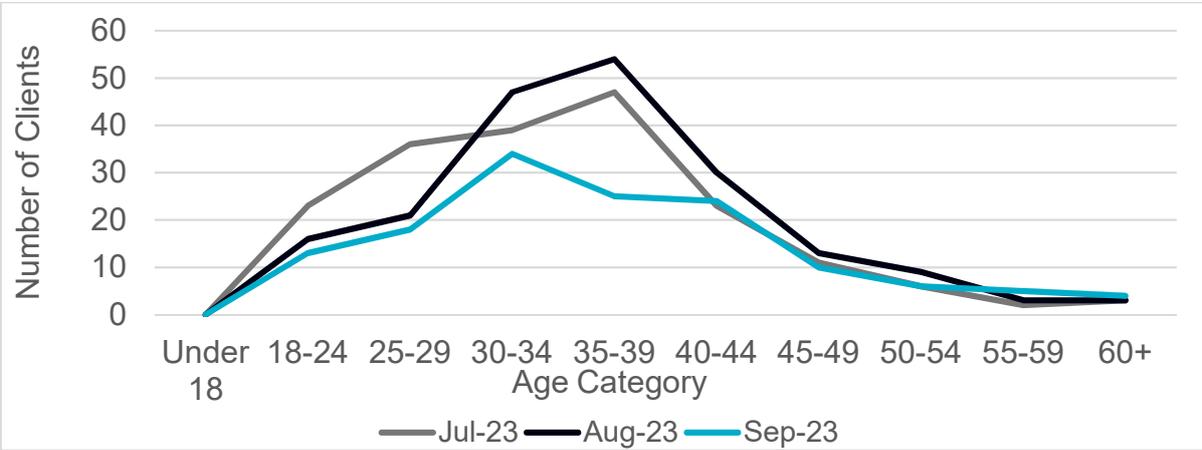


Community based providers remain to be completing the highest volume of transactions (68.5%) for the BHSCT.

#### NSES User Profile

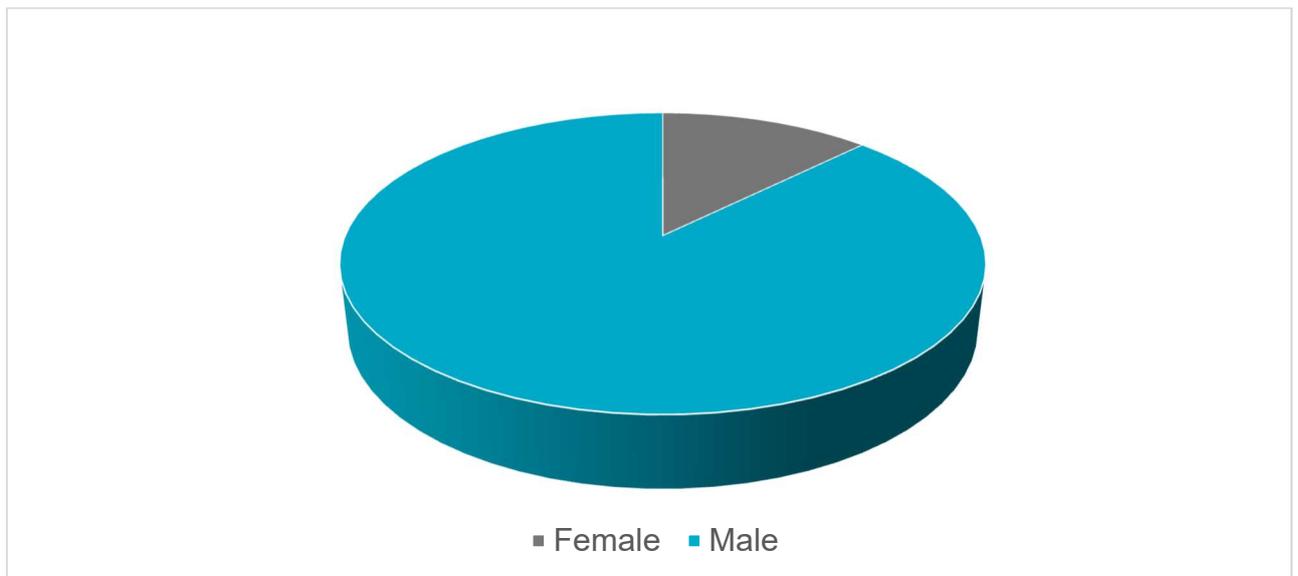
The age and gender profile of the 525 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 8 and 9

**Figure 8: Age of Clients at registration in BHSCT**



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

**Figure 9: Gender of Clients at registration in BHSCT**



The majority of new clients registered were male (87%).

**Figure 10: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in BHSCT**

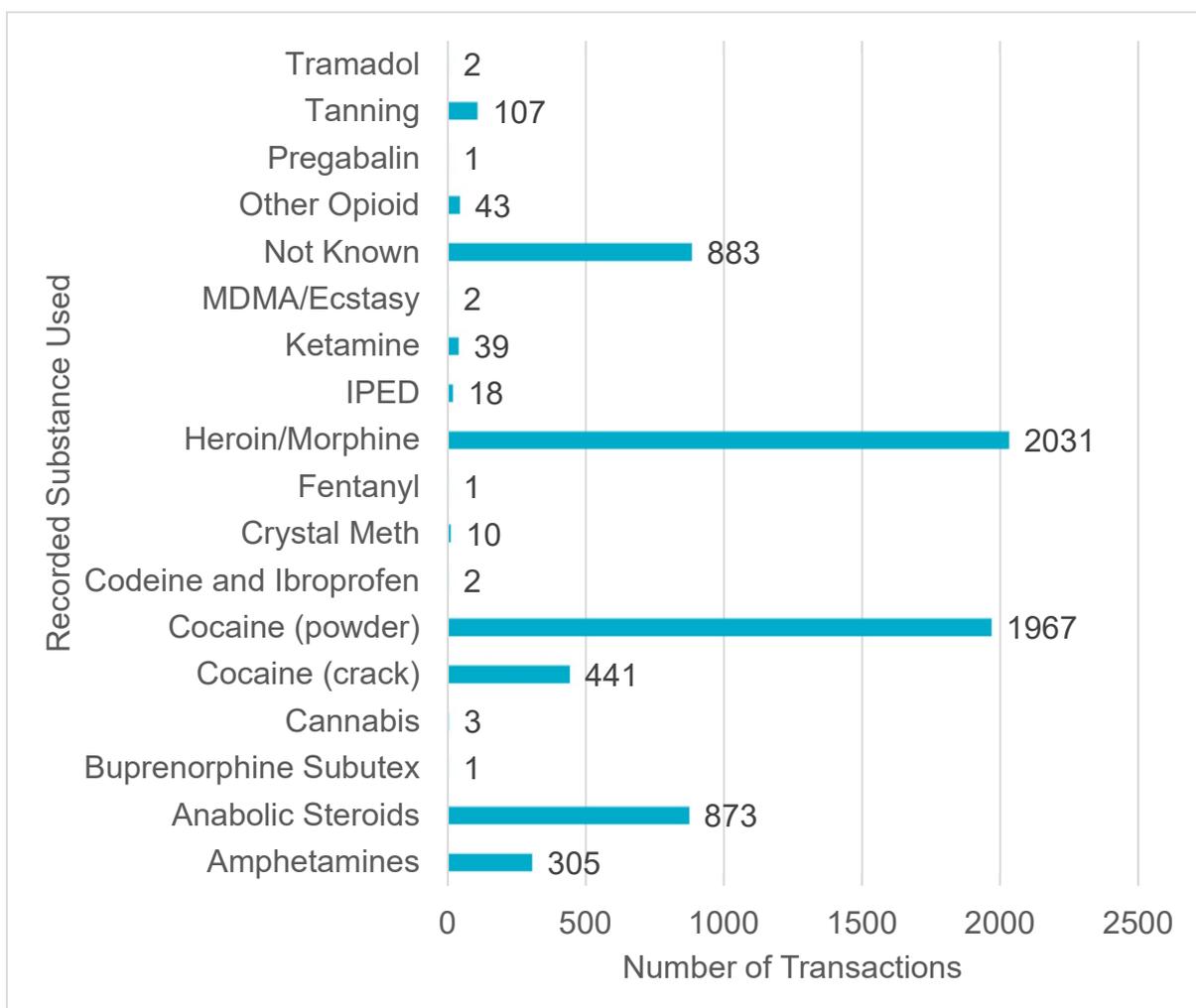


Figure 10 reflects that of the 5,264 transactions in this reporting period, 6,729 reports of substance used were recorded across 17 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which was 883 (13.1%).

The largest recorded substance used in needle exchange was heroin/morphine (2,031) followed by cocaine powder (1,967) and anabolic steroids (873).

## Section 4: 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:

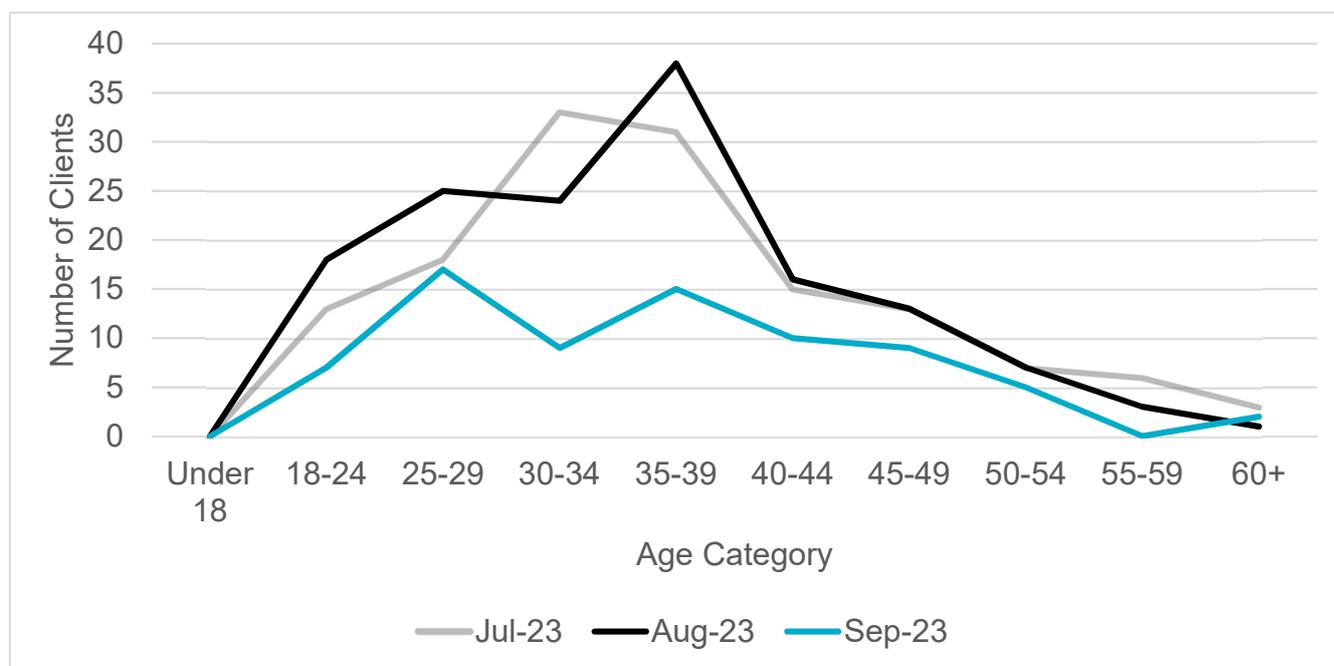
- 1,135 NSES transactions completed;
- 724 Unique clients using NSES;
- 359 new clients registered for NSES;
- 11 anonymous transactions completed.

All transactions within the NHSCT area were carried out by Community Pharmacy.

### NSES User Profile

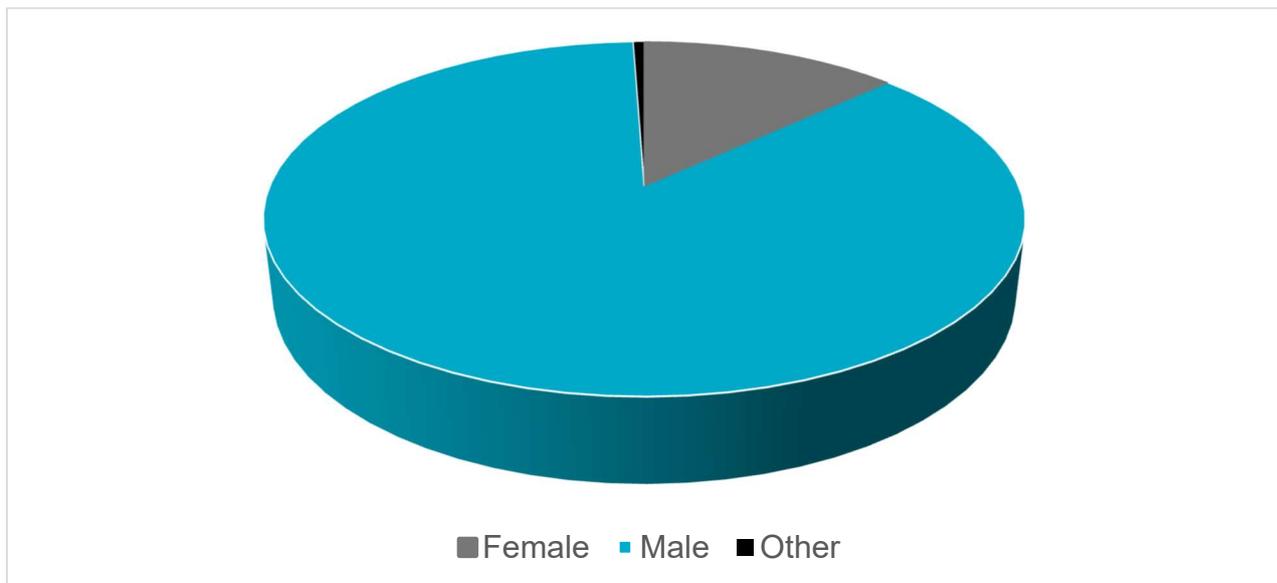
The age and gender profile of the 359 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 11 and 12.

**Figure 11: Current Age of Clients in NHSCT registered in reporting period**



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

**Figure 12: Gender of Clients at registration in NHSCT**



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

**Figure 13: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in NHSCT**

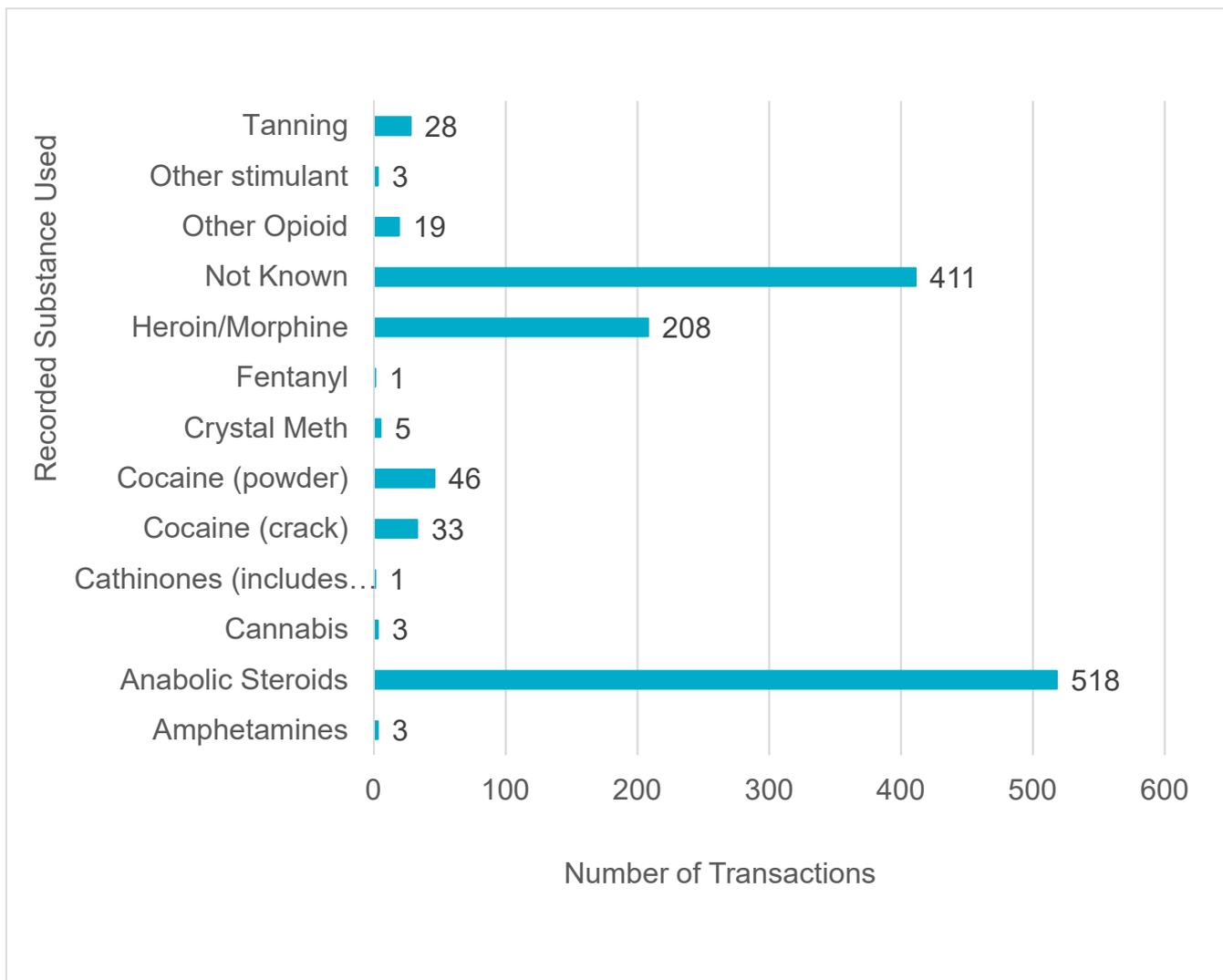


Figure 13 reflects that of the 1,135 transactions in this reporting period, 1,279 reports of substance used were recorded across 12 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which remains very high at 411 (32.1%) of reports.

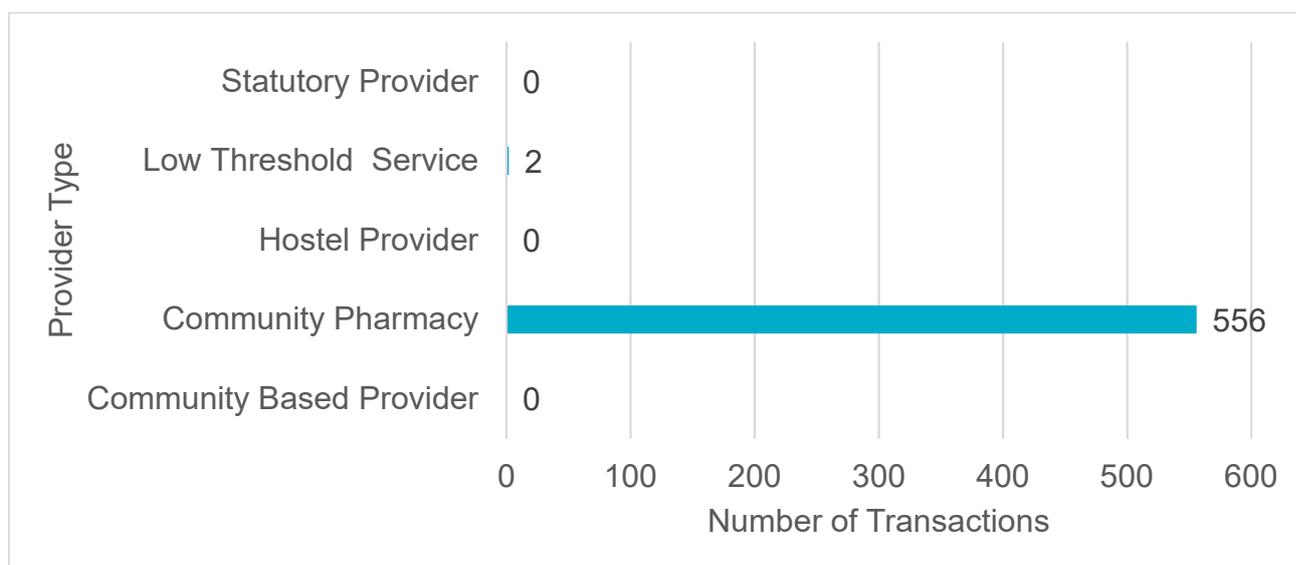
The largest recorded substance used in needle exchange was anabolic steroids (518), followed by heroin/morphine (208), followed by cocaine powder (46). This remains the same from previous quarter.

## 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:

- 558 NSES transactions completed;
- 403 unique clients using NSES;
- 189 new clients registered for NSES;
- 2 anonymous transactions completed.

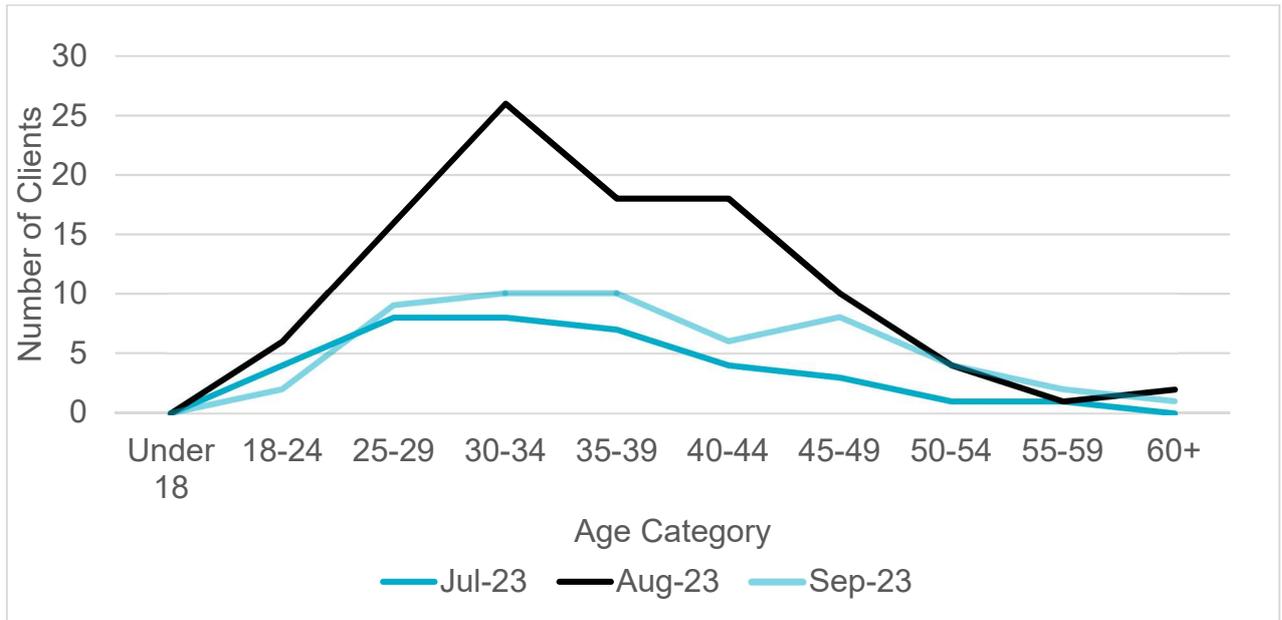
**Figure 14: Number of Transactions per provider type for SEHSCT**



### NSES User Profile

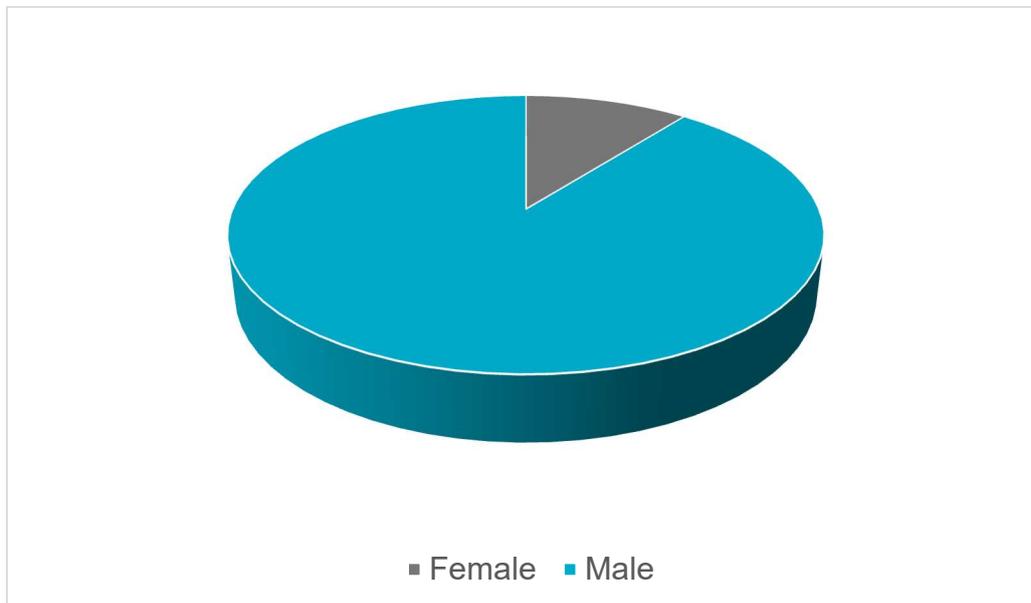
The age and gender profile of the 189 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 15 and 16.

**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 (89%).

**Figure 17: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in SEHSCT**

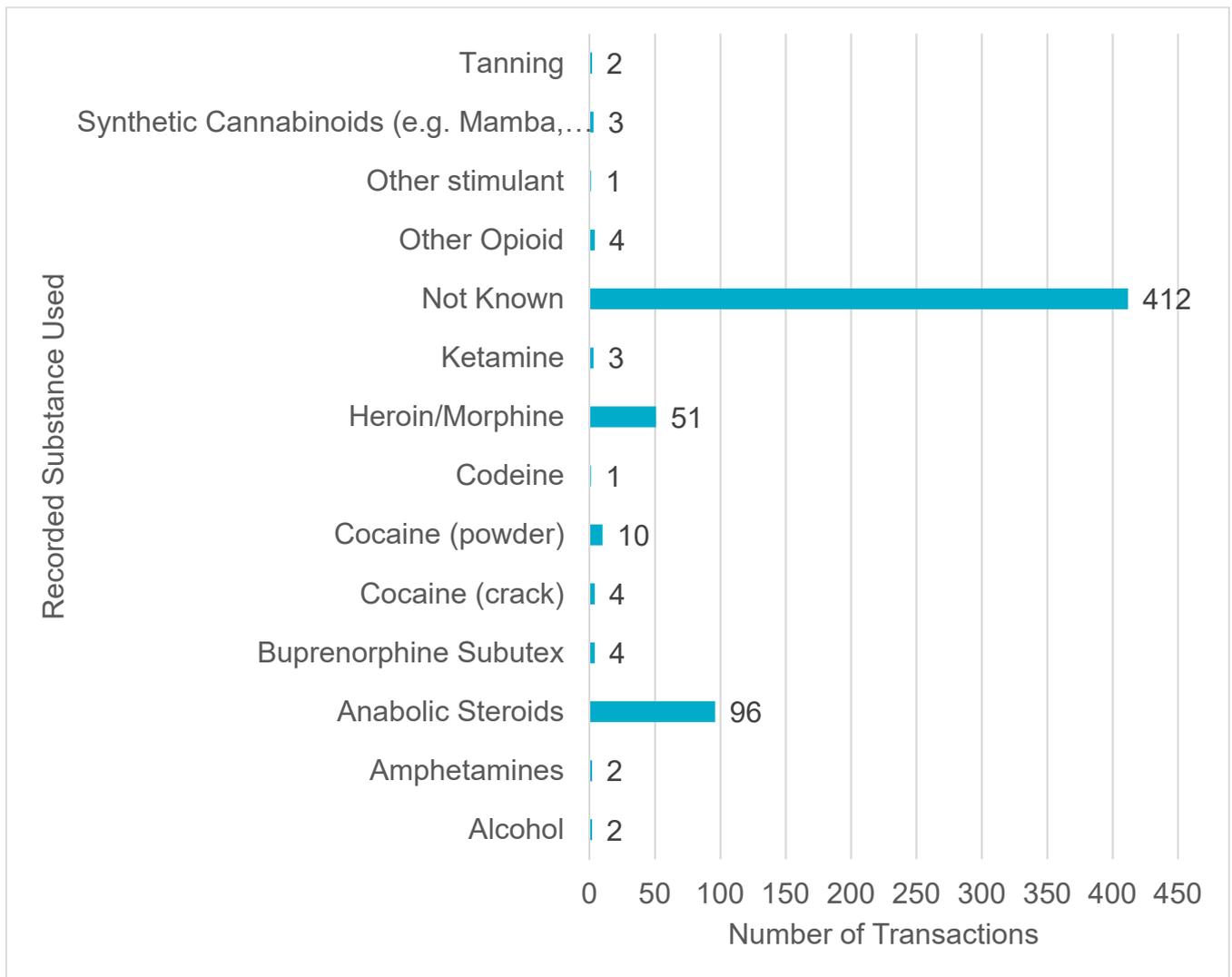


Figure 17 reflects that of the 558 transactions in this reporting period, 595 reports of substance used were recorded across 13 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which was 412 times (74%).

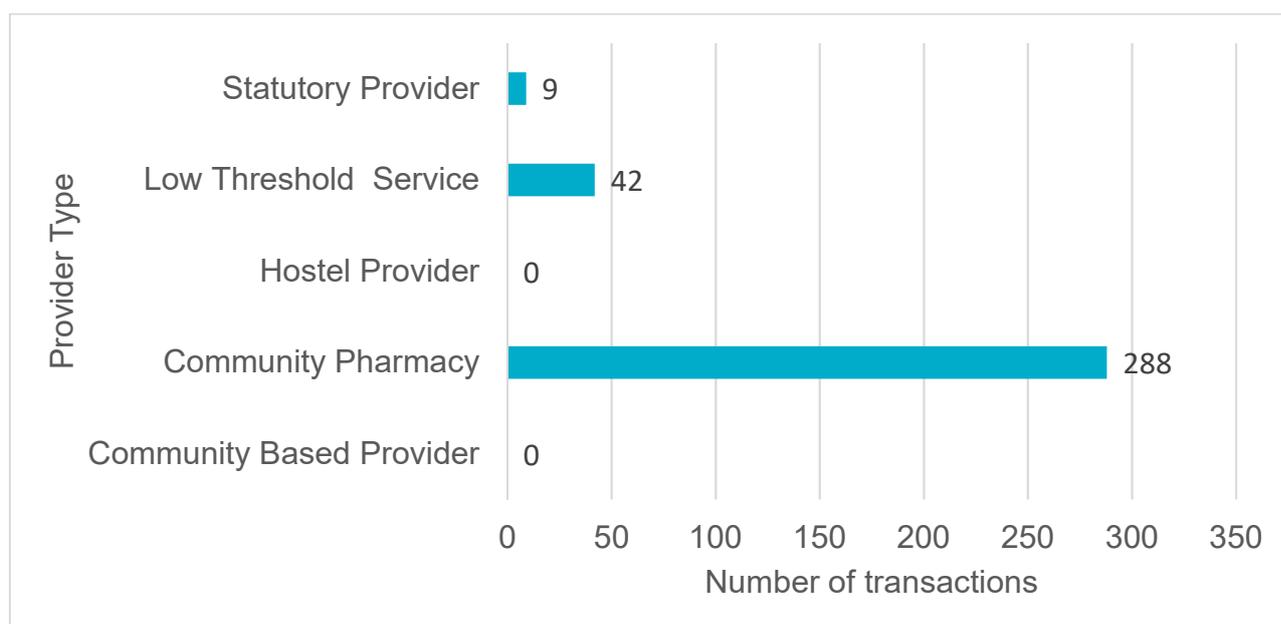
Of those who did report anabolic steroids (96) was the most reported substance followed by morphine/heroin (51), followed by cocaine powder (10).

## Section 6: 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:

- 339 NSES transactions completed;
- 221 unique clients using NSES;
- 123 new clients registered for NSES;
- 9 anonymous transactions completed.

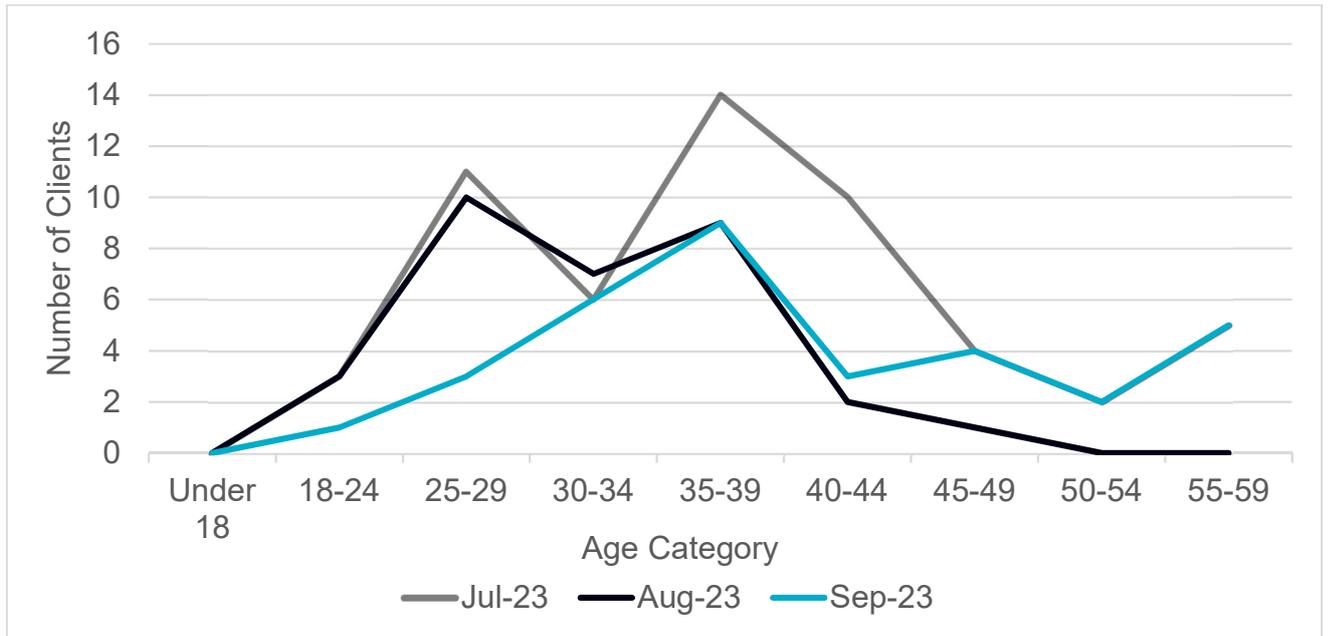
**Figure 18: Number of Transactions per Provider type in NSES for SHSCT area**



### NSES User Profile

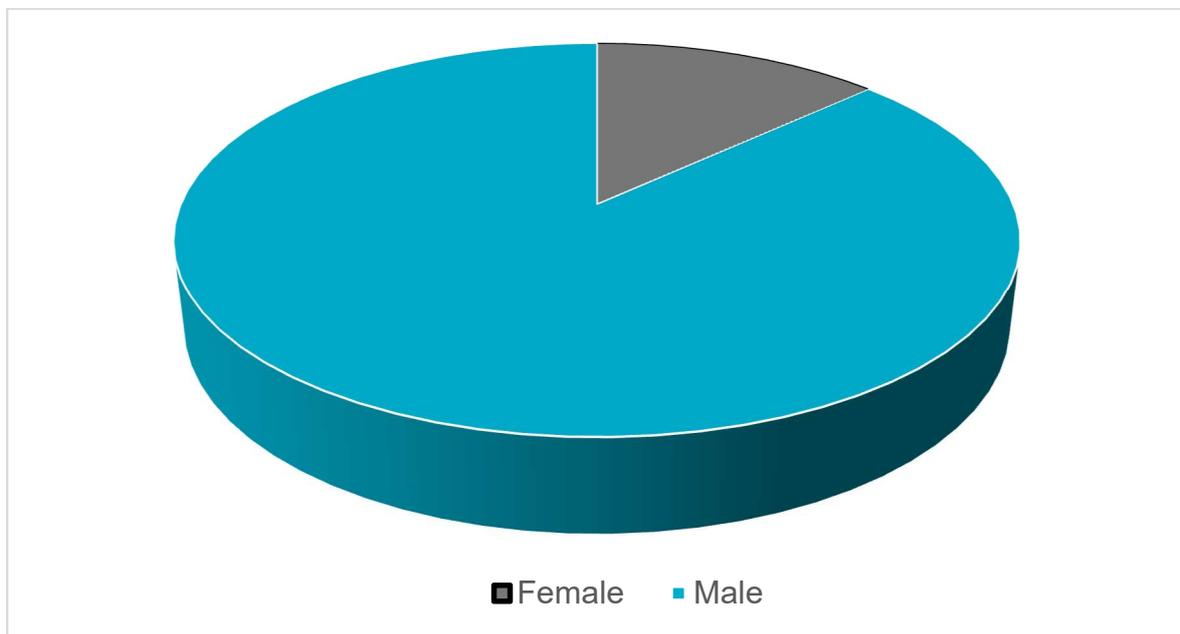
The age and gender profile of the 123 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 19 and 20.

**Figure 19: Current Age of Clients in SHSCT registered in reporting period**



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

**Figure 20: Gender of Clients at registration in SHSCT**



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

**Figure 21: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in SHSCT**

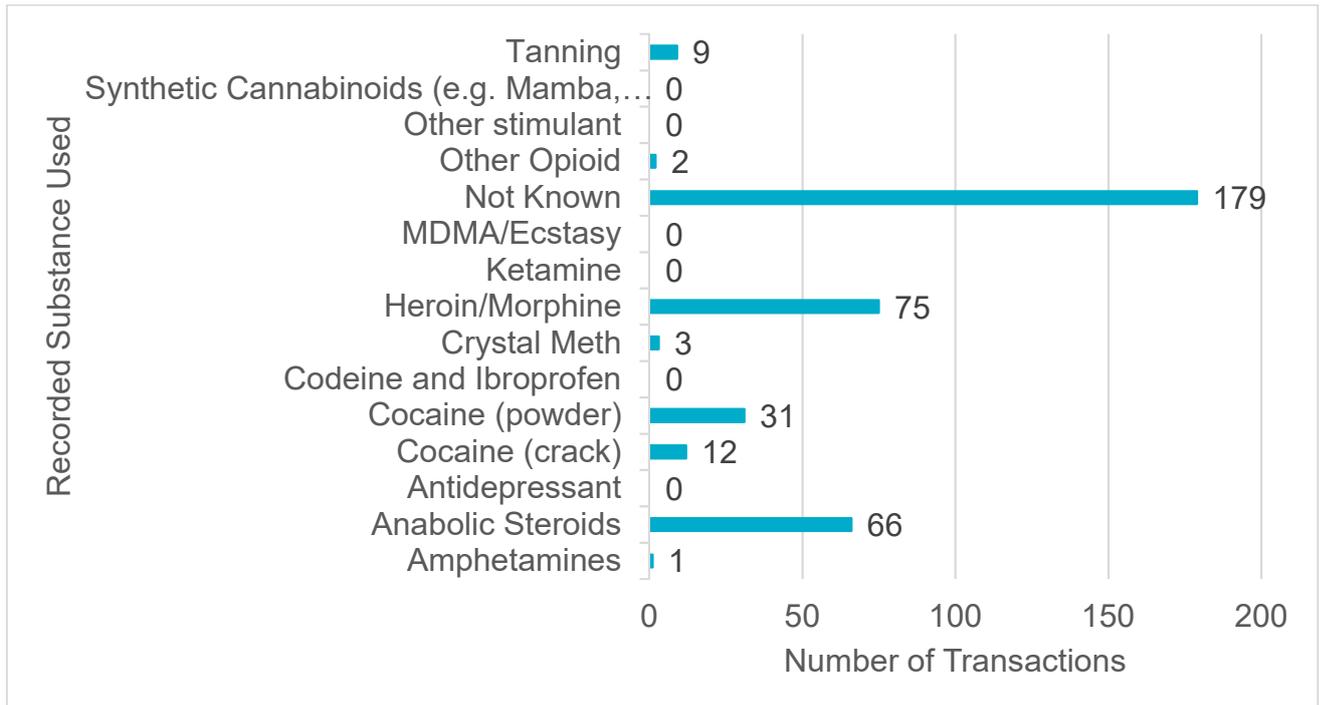


Figure 21 reflects that of the 339 transactions in this reporting period, 378 reports of substance used were recorded across 9 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which was selected 179 times (47.4%).

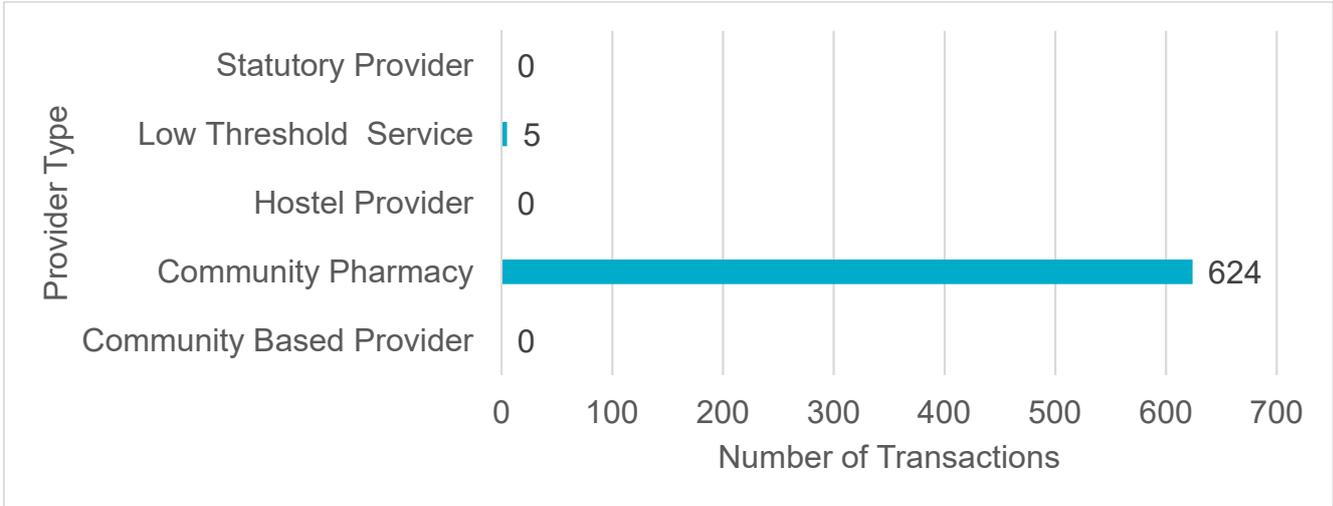
The largest substance recorded was heroin/morphine (66) followed by anabolic steroids (66) and cocaine powder (31).

## Section 7: Western Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data

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

- 629 NSES transactions completed;
- 446 unique clients using NSES;
- 211 new clients registered for NSES;
- 8 anonymous transactions completed.
- 

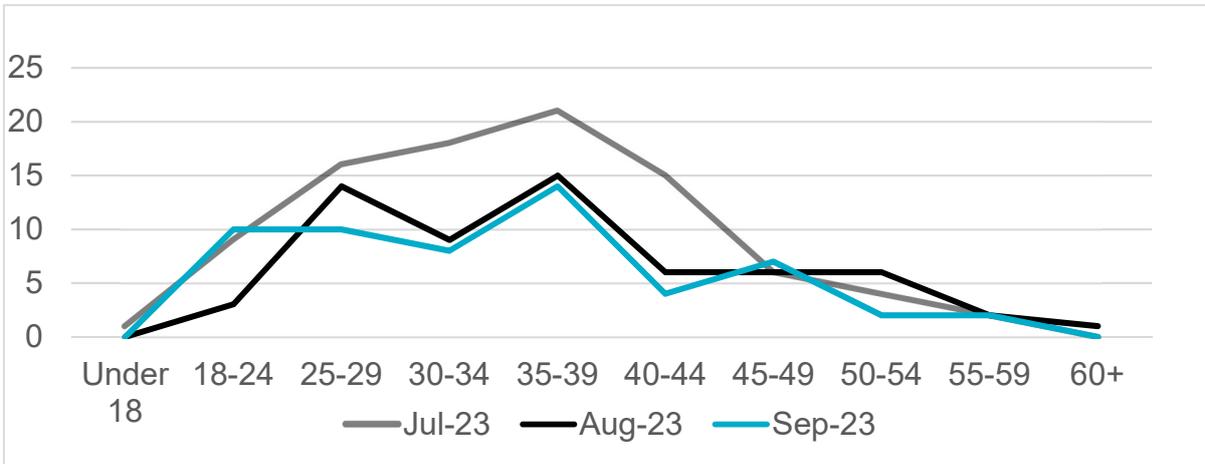
**Figure 22: Number of Transactions per provider type for WHSCT**



### NSES User Profile

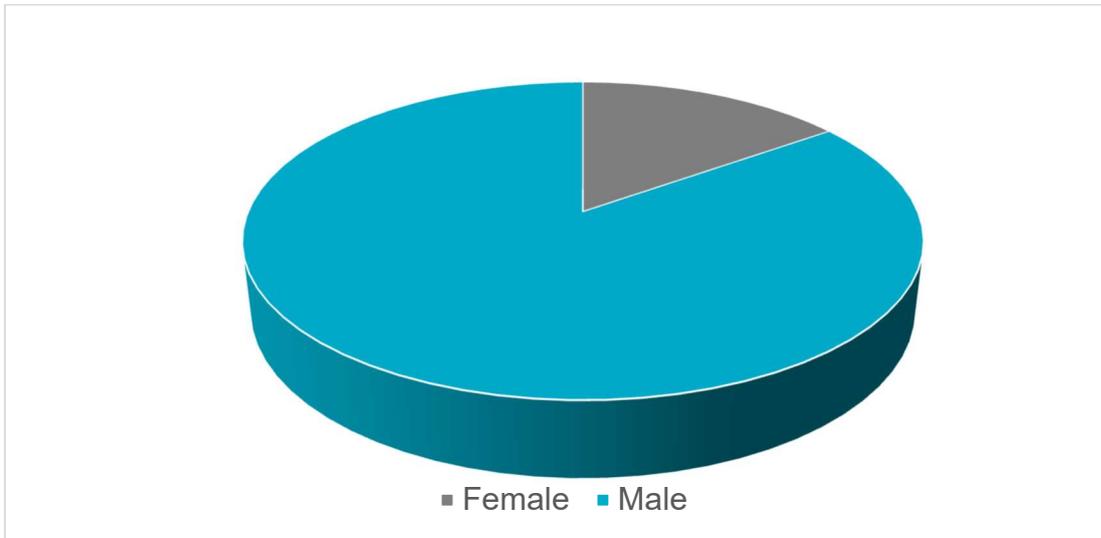
The age and gender profile of the 291 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 23 and 24.

**Figure 23: 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 24: Gender of new Clients at registration in WHSCT**



The majority of clients were male (85%) within the WHSCT area.

**Figure 25: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in WHSCT area**

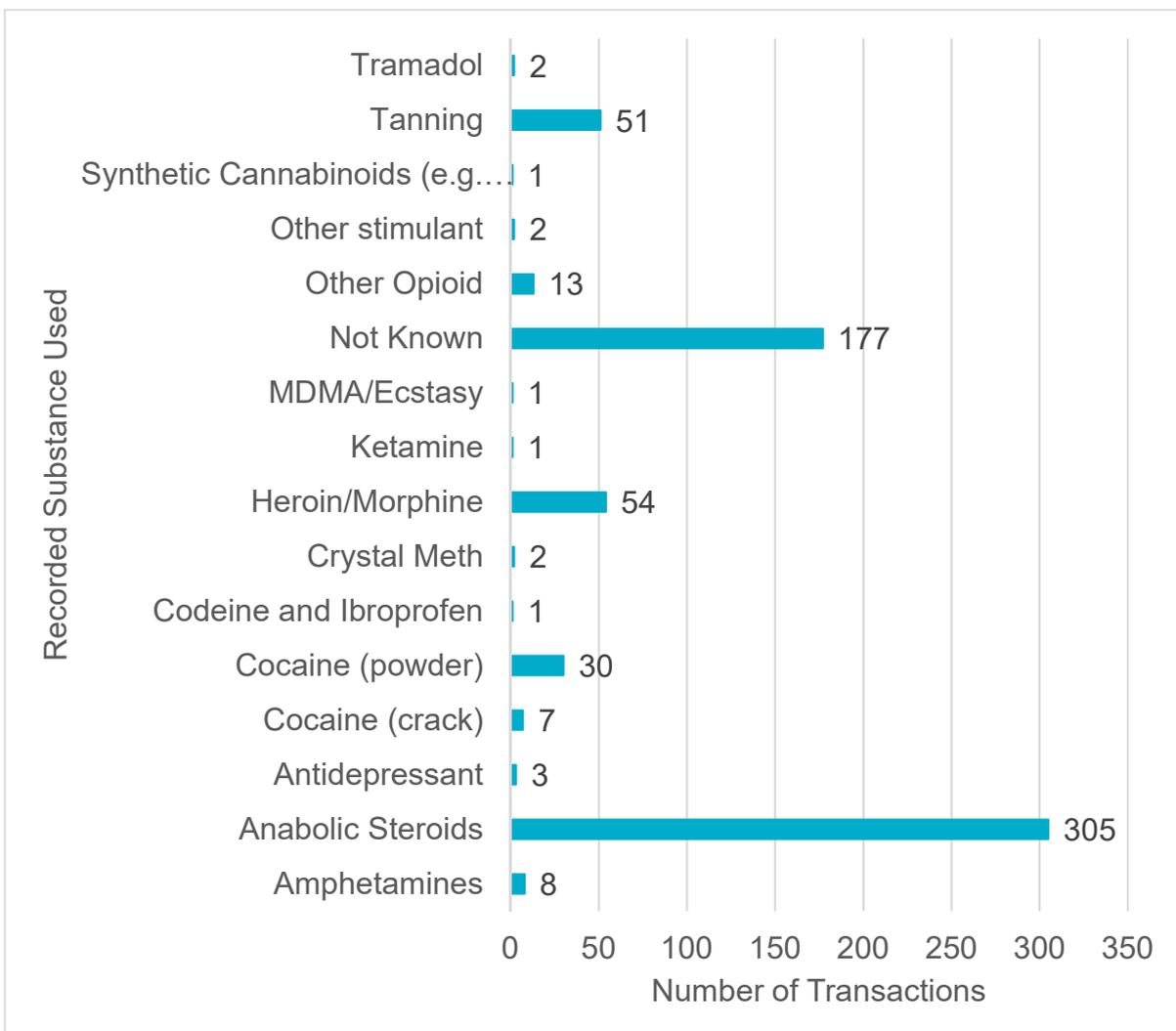
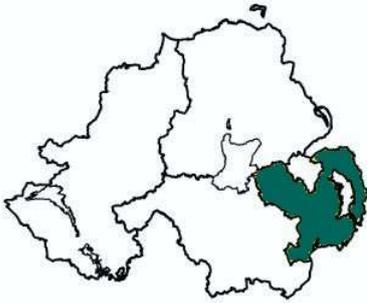


Figure 25 reflects that of the 629 transactions in this reporting period, 658 reports of substance used were recorded across 15 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which accounted for 177 reports (26.8%).

The largest recorded substance usage in needle exchange was anabolic steroids (305) followed by heroin/morphine (54) and tanning (51).

## Section 8: Summary of NSES activity by Trust Area

<p><b>Belfast HSC Trust</b></p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 1524 Percentage male: 87%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Heroin/Morphine</li> <li>2. Cocaine powder</li> <li>3. Anabolic Steroids</li> </ol> <p>Lead Sector: Community Based Providers</p>	<p><b>Northern HSC Trust</b></p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 724 Percentage male: 86%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anabolic Steroids</li> <li>2. Heroin/Morphine</li> <li>3. Cocaine Powder</li> </ol> <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	<p><b>South Eastern HSC Trust</b></p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 403 Percentage male: 89%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anabolic Steroids</li> <li>2. Heroin/Morphine</li> <li>3. Cocaine Powder</li> </ol> <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>
<p><b>Southern HSC Trust</b></p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 221 Percentage male: 86%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Heroin/Morphine</li> <li>2. Anabolic Steroids</li> <li>3. Cocaine Powder</li> </ol> <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	<p><b>Western HSC Trust</b></p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 446 Percentage male: 85%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Anabolic Steroids</li> <li>2. Heroin/Morphine</li> <li>3. Tanning Solution</li> </ol> <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	



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