



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

1 January 2024 – 31 March 2024

Title	Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Quarterly Report. 1 January 2024 - 31 March 2024
Authors	Adele Dunn, Regional Lead for Needle and Syringe Exchange Service Wendy Montgomery, Data Analyst
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
Publication Date	2 July 2024

Contents

Section 1: Background	4
Section 2: Regional NSES Data Review	7
Section 3: Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data	13
Section 4: Northern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data	16
Section 5: South-Eastern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data	19
Section 6: Southern Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data	22
Section 7: Western Health and Social Care Trust Area NSES Data.....	25
Section 8: Summary of NSES activity by Trust Area	27

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 use. Thirty-five 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.

PHA use an online Harm Reduction Information System called Neo360 to capture live data on needle exchange transactions across all sites. All data captured is anonymous and non-identifiable. 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 months period between 1 January 2024 and 31 March 2024. Needle exchange activity was recorded in 31 active sites throughout this period. Within this period one additional site has been opened within the Community Addiction Service based at St Luke's Hospital in the Southern Health and Social Care Trust area. Queen's Quarter Housing site also closed on 31st March 2024.

This quarter we have expanded the list of equipment which is now available within needle exchanges to include 0.5ml packs, nitazene testing strips, 0.3ml fixed syringes, wound care packs, twin 1ml packs, twin 2ml packs, vitamin c sachets and antiseptic wipes. These have all been added in response to consultations with needle exchange practitioners and service users.

There have been 1,092 new clients registered on Neo360 within this reporting period. This number is understood to be inflated due to the number of clients re-registering on the system out of fear for their anonymity; providers continually work with clients to try to keep this figure as accurate as possible.

In terms of unique client usage for the reporting period, there was a total of 3,077 unique clients across Northern Ireland. When this report is run per Trust area this totals 3,304 unique service users which suggests that 227 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 January 2024.

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 2024 and 31 March 2024 the Public Health Agency had the following sites providing active NSES as shown in Table 1 below:

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

Trust Area	Provider	Provider Type
Belfast	Extern	Community-based
	The Welcome Organisation	Community-based Outreach
	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
Northern	Boots, Ballymena Health Centre	Pharmacy
	Boots, Antrim	Pharmacy
	Boots, Coleraine	Pharmacy
	Boots, Cookstown	Pharmacy
	Boots, Newtownabbey	Pharmacy
	Boots, Queen's Street Ballymena	Pharmacy
	NHSCT Community Addictions Service	Community Addiction Team

Trust Area	Provider	Provider Type
Southern	Extern	Low Threshold Service
	Boots, Armagh	Pharmacy
	Gordons Banbridge	Pharmacy
	McKeagneys, Newry	Pharmacy
	Northern Pharmacies, Craigavon	Pharmacy
	Partridges, Lurgan	Pharmacy
	Thomas Street Pharmacy Plus	Pharmacy
South Eastern	Clear Pharmacy, Bangor	Pharmacy
	Gordons, Downpatrick	Pharmacy
	Gordons, Lisburn	Pharmacy
	Gordons, Newtownards	Pharmacy
Western	Foyle Haven, DePaul Ireland	Low Threshold Service
	Bradleys, Derry/Londonderry	Pharmacy
	Bradleys, Enniskillen	Pharmacy
	Gordons, Limavady	Pharmacy
	Superdrug, Derry/Londonderry	Pharmacy

Section 2: Regional NSES Data Review

NSES Transactions

From January to March 2024 there were a total of 7,205 NSES transactions carried out across Northern Ireland. This quarter has increased from last quarter by 256 transactions, however, comparing this to the same period last year shows a decrease of 1,592 transactions. Yet there is no reduction in the amount of equipment which has been dispensed, despite the large drop in transaction numbers.

Figure 1: Number of NSES transactions by Provider Type

Figure 1 reflects that the community pharmacies completed 53.2% of the transactions for the reporting period. The community-based providers have completed 41% of the total transactions.

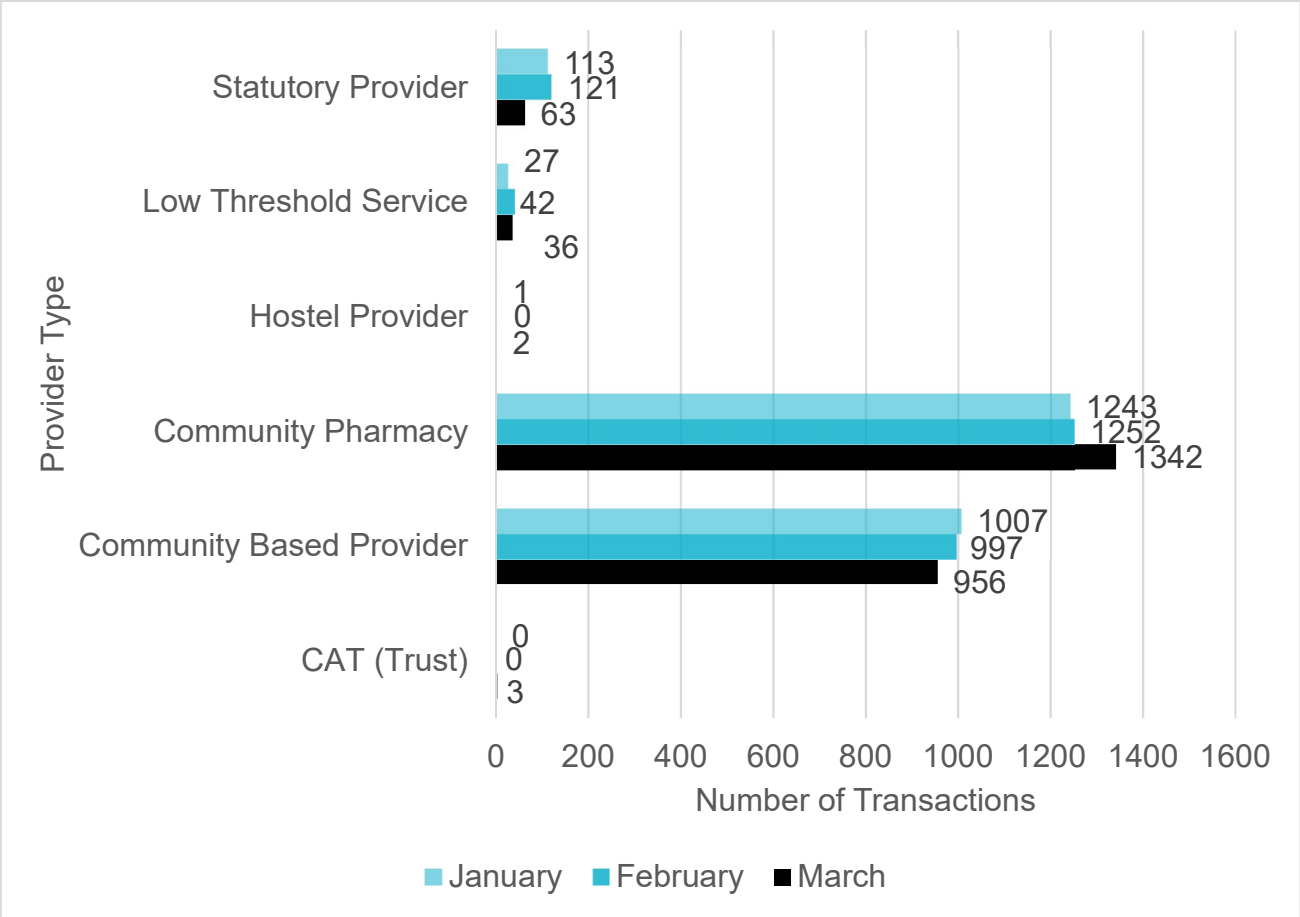
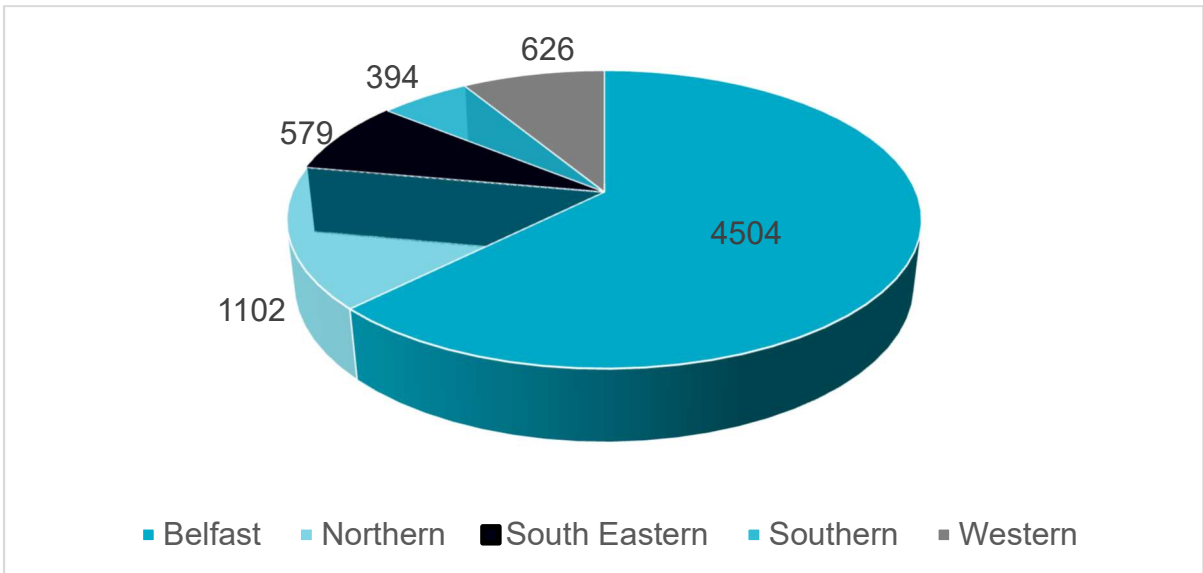


Figure 2: Number of transactions by each Health and Social Care Trust area

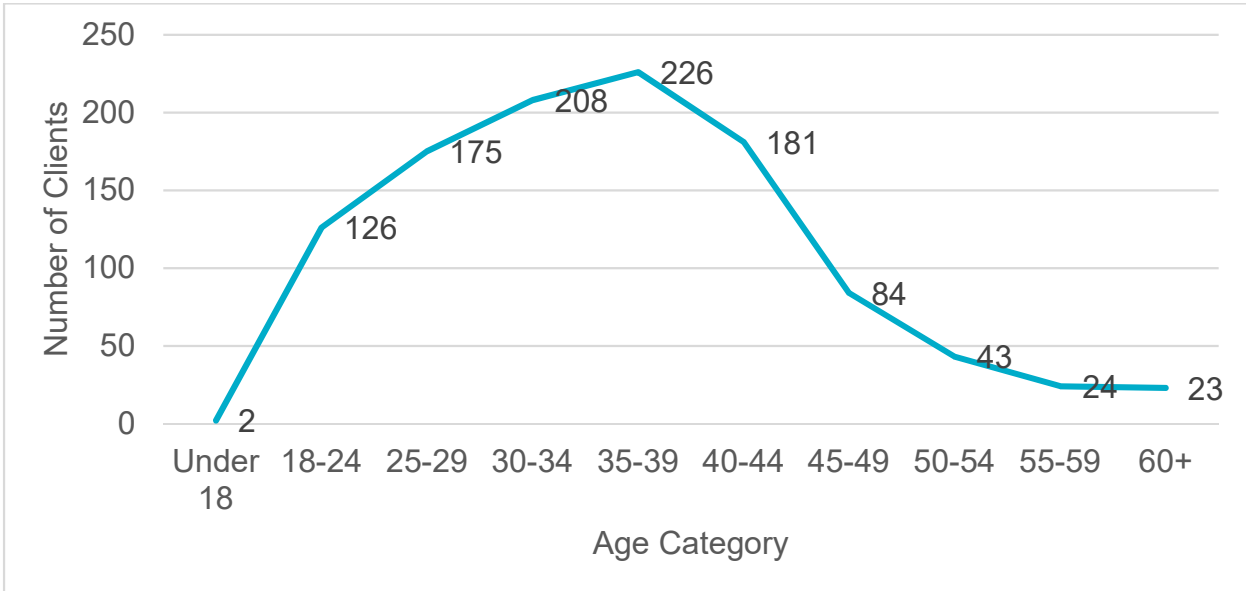


The highest number of overall transactions continue to take place in BHSCT area (62.5%) and the lowest percentage of transactions continue to take place in the SHSCT area (5.5%). However, there has been a steady increase in transactions within SHSCT area due to the opening of new sites in 2023. In the same quarter last year there were 274 transactions (3.1% of overall exchanges)

NSES User Profile

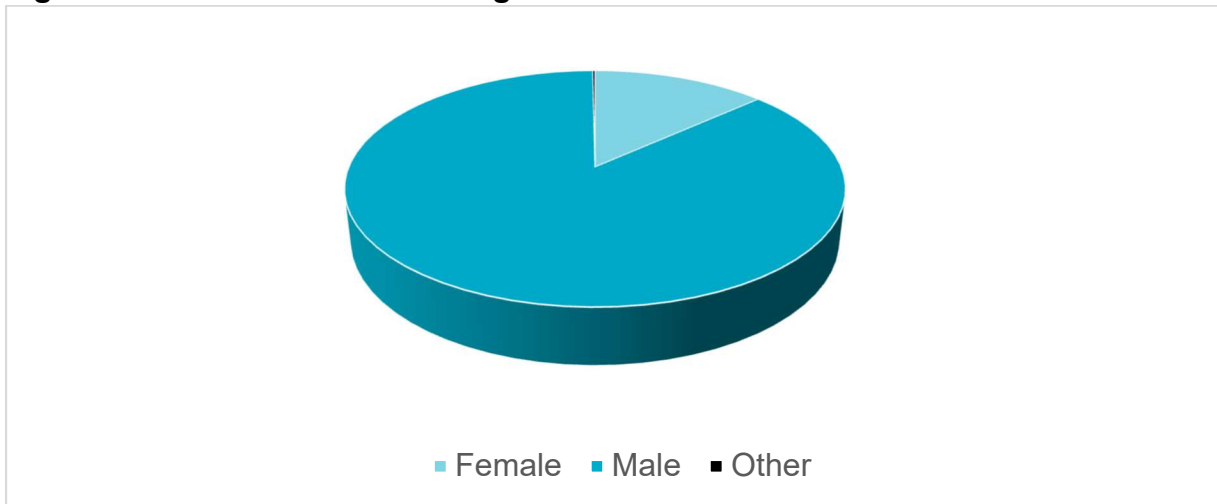
The age and gender profile of the 1092 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 3 and 4.

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



The most common age category for new clients remains the same as the previous quarter at 35-39 years (226), followed by those aged 30-34 (208).

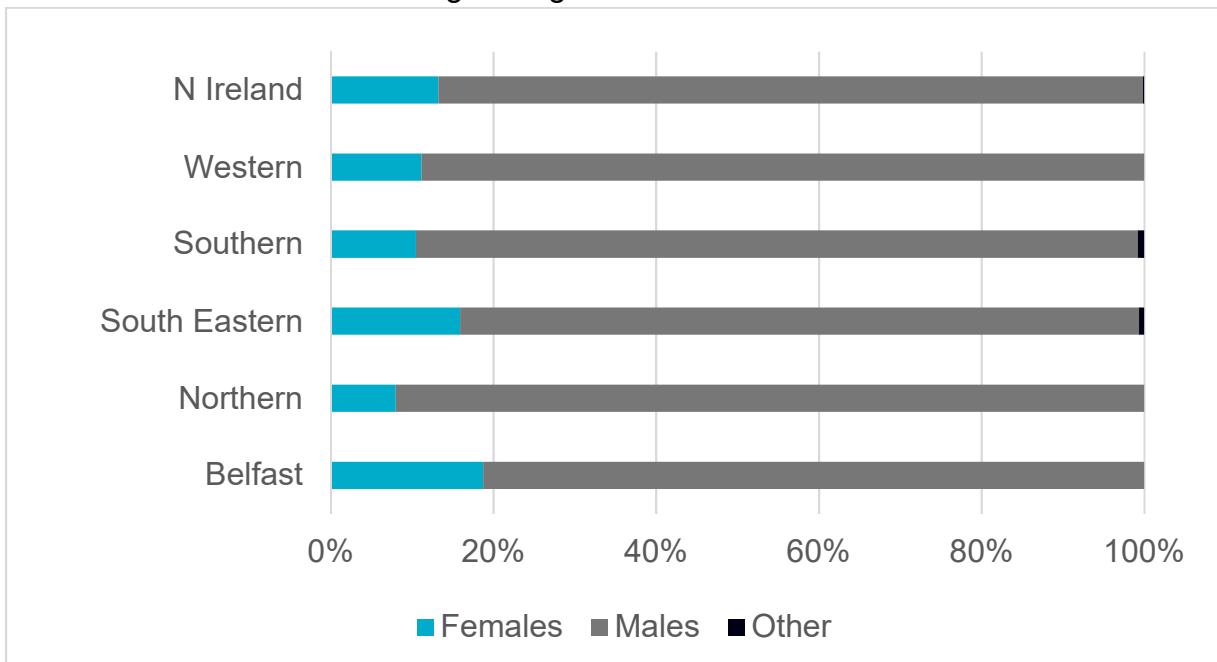
Figure 4: Gender of Clients at registration



This pie chart reflects that the NSES continues to be primarily used by males (86.4%).

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

Figure 5 shows the gender breakdown by Trust of clients registering for needle exchange this quarter. The males remain high, which is the same as previous quarters. The number of female clients is steadily rising in Belfast for example which recorded 19% of new clients registering as female.

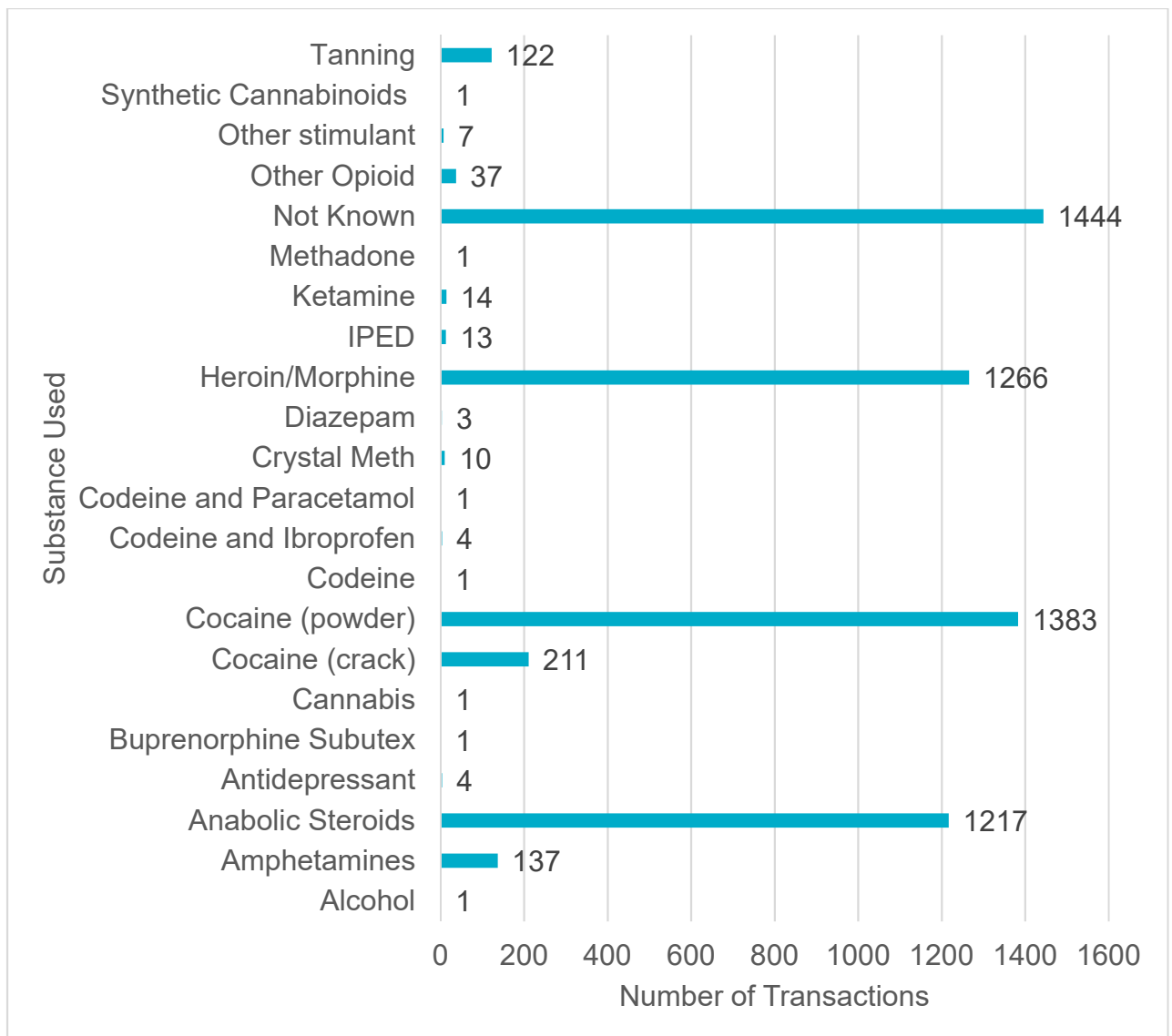


Recorded Substance Used

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 7,205 transactions in this reporting period, 5,879 reports of substance used were recorded across 21 substances.

Figure 6: Reported Substances Used by Transaction



Cocaine powder (1,383) has the largest reported usage within needle exchange clients. Heroin/Morphine (1,266) has the second largest reported usage followed closely by Anabolic steroids (1,217). This is the first time that cocaine usage has taken over heroin usage.

Table 2: Number of clients using most reported substances, number of transactions per substance and average transaction rate per substance.

Substance	Number of NSES unique clients using	Number of transactions for this substance	Average transaction per client
Anabolic Steroids	954	1217	1.27
Cocaine (powder)	346	1383	3.99
Heroin/Morphine	310	1266	4.08

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

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 176,487 needles and syringes combined were dispensed across needle exchange in Northern Ireland.

Category	Item	Total
Needles	16mm [5/8 inch] orange	3,739
Needles	25mm [1 inch] blue	2,374
Needles	25mm [1 inch] orange	3,522
Needles	30mm [1 1/4 inch] blue	37,452
Needles	38mm [1 1/2 inch] black	444
Needles	40mm [1 1/2 inch] green	37,014
Syringes	0.5ml Fixed Syringe	55,527
Syringes	1 ml 30G Unisharp fixed	35,592
Syringes	0.3ml Fixed Syringe	823
Total Needles Dispensed		176,487

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. We have also added a 0.3ml fixed syringe into needle exchange this quarter to promote

the use of even smaller needles, targeting female injectors especially. It is positive from a harm reduction perspective that these smaller needles (0.3mls, 0.5mls and 1mls) continue to be used frequently within needle exchange with 91,942 (51%) were dispensed in the reporting period. This also reflects the increase in cocaine injecting through the use of the 0.5ml fixed syringe, from January 2023 to March 2023, 32,820 0.5mls were dispensed, showing a 41% increase in usage from the same quarter last year.

NSES dispenses a 2ml starter pack and 2ml standard pack; 1,114 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) with 37,452 (21.2%) dispensed and green (40mm) with 37,014 (20.9%) dispensed giving a total of 74,466 (42.1%) dispensed in the reporting period. These are the largest needles and are used for both groin injecting and steroid injecting.

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. Fifteen sites dispensed 1,061 packets (20 per pack).

Returns

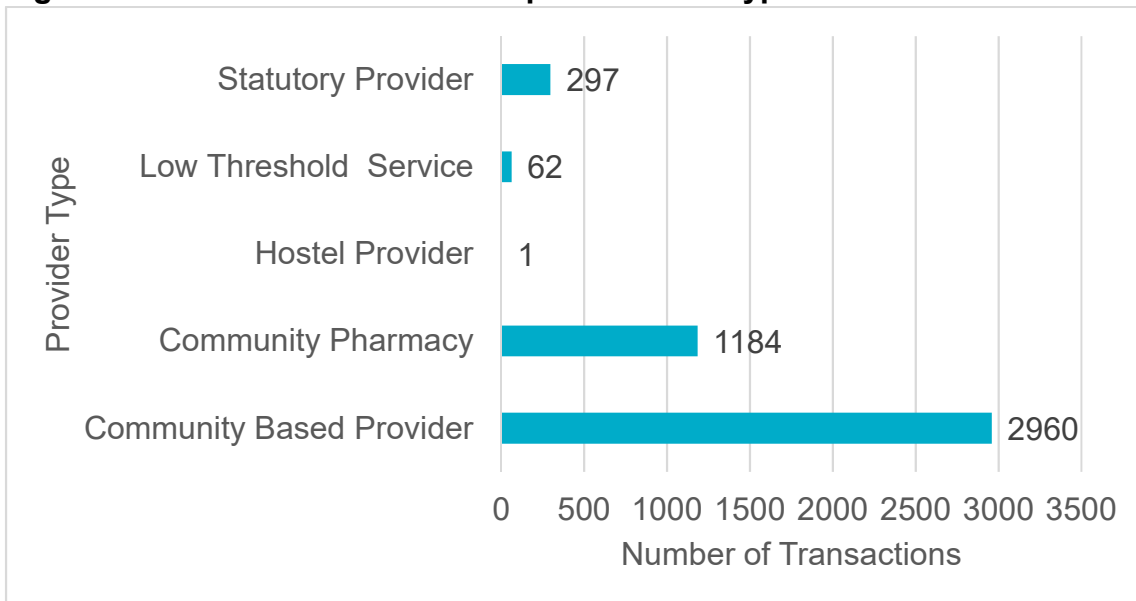
This quarter 23,459 estimated needles were returned within exchanges. This reflects a return rate of 18.95%. The number of returns continues to increase; clients are encouraged to return used needles at every transaction.

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:

- 4,504 NSES transactions completed
- 1,441 unique clients using NSES
- 347 new clients registered for NSES
- 106 anonymous transactions completed

Figure 7: Number of Transactions per Provider Type in BHSCT

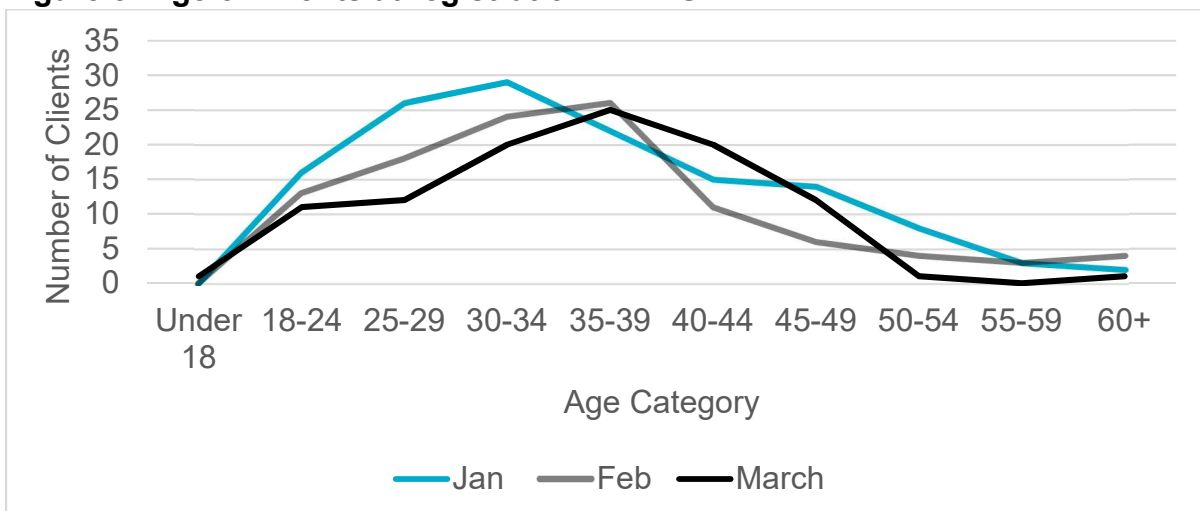


Community based providers remain to be completing the highest volume of transactions (65.7%) for the BHSCT.

NSES User Profile

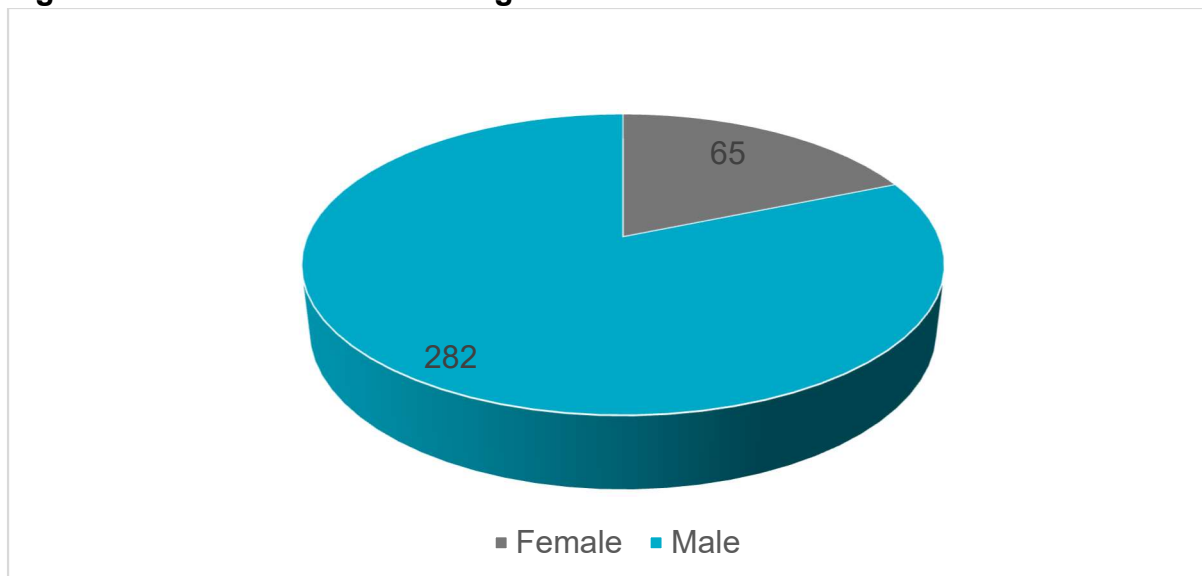
The age and gender profile of the 347 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 8 and 9

Figure 8: Age of Clients at registration in BHSCT



The most common overall age group of new clients in BHSCT was age 30-34 and 35-39 years.

Figure 9: Gender of Clients at registration in BHSCT



The majority of new clients registered were male (81.2%).

Figure 10: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in BHSCT

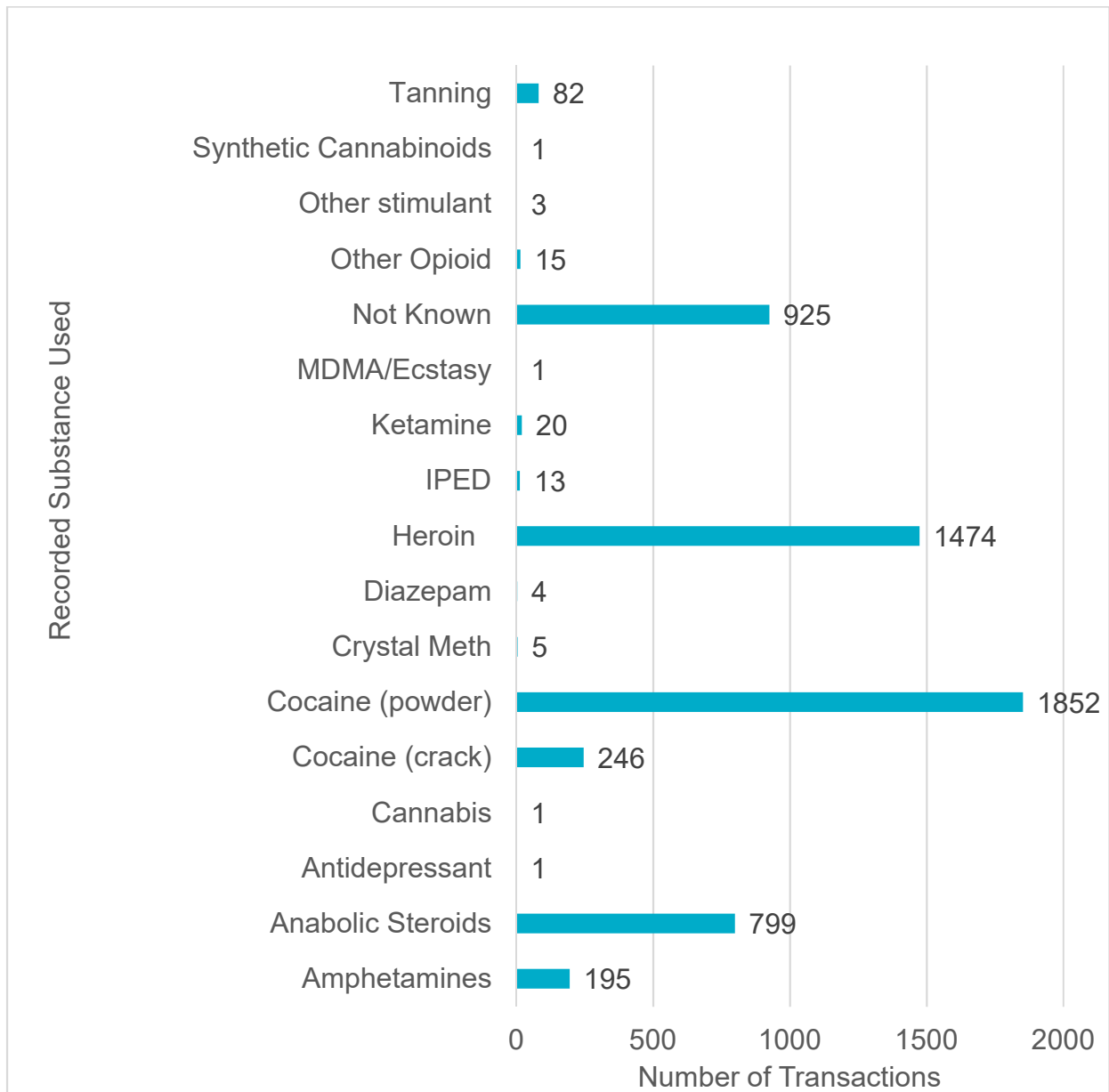


Figure 10 reflects that of the 4,504 transactions in this reporting period, 5,637 reports of substance used were recorded across 16 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which was 925 (19.6%).

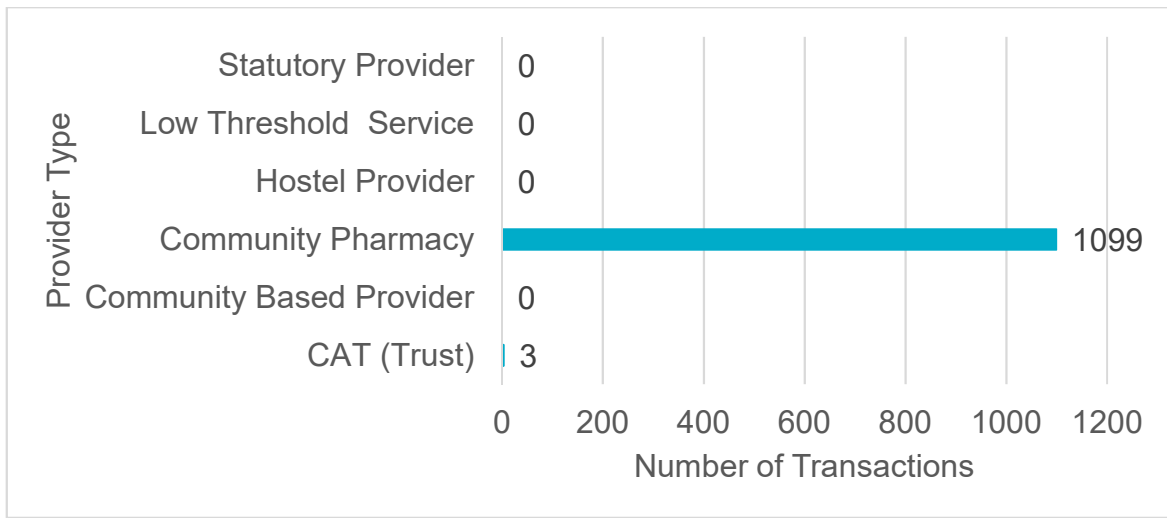
The largest recorded substance used in needle exchange was cocaine powder (1,852) followed by heroin/morphine (1,474) and anabolic steroids (799).

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:

- 1,102 NSES transactions completed
- 762 unique clients using NSES
- 287 new clients registered for NSES
- 5 anonymous transactions completed

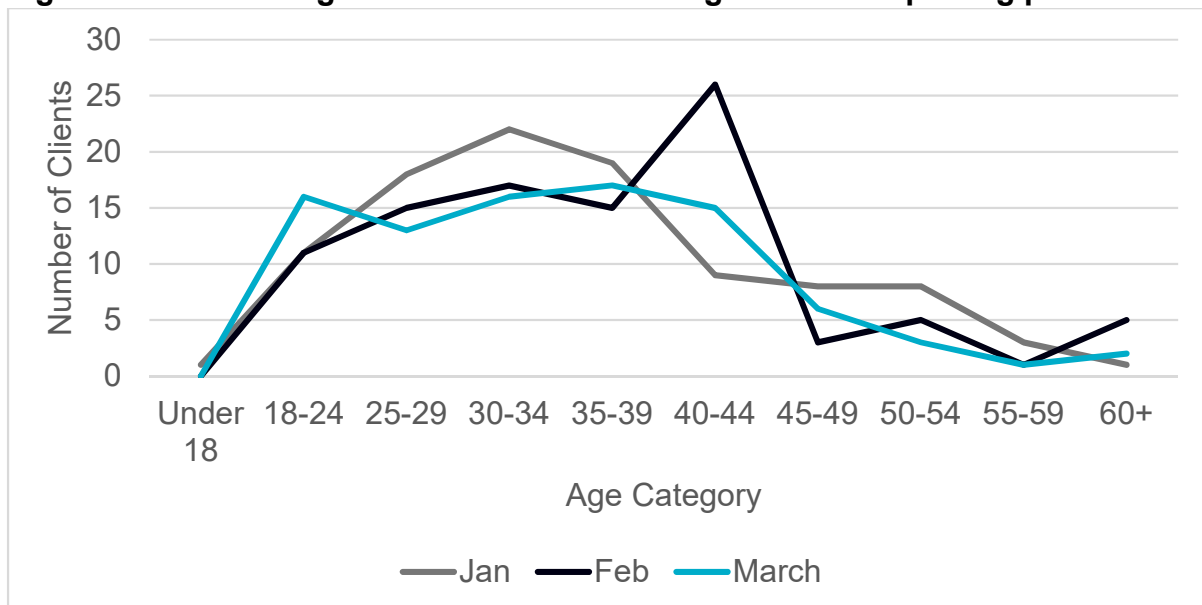
Figure 11: Number of Transactions per Provider Type in NHSCT



NSES User Profile

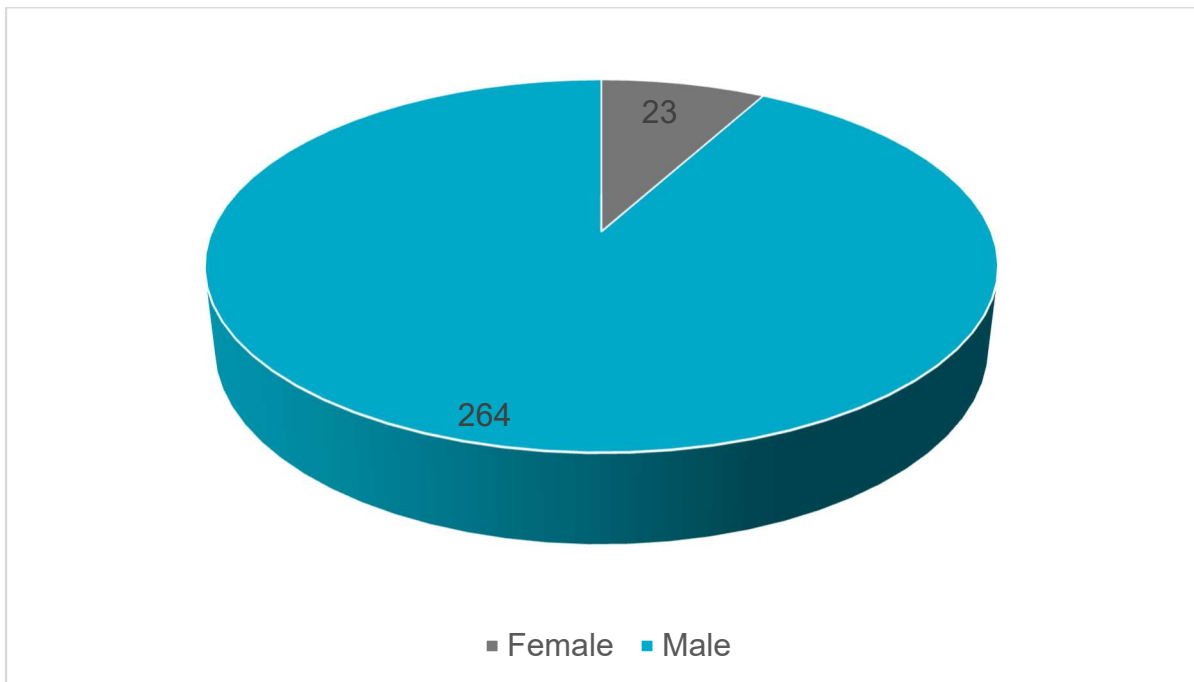
The age and gender profile of the 287 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 12 and 13.

Figure 12: 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 13: Gender of Clients at registration in NHSCT



The majority of new clients registered were male (91.9%).

Figure 14: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in NHSCT

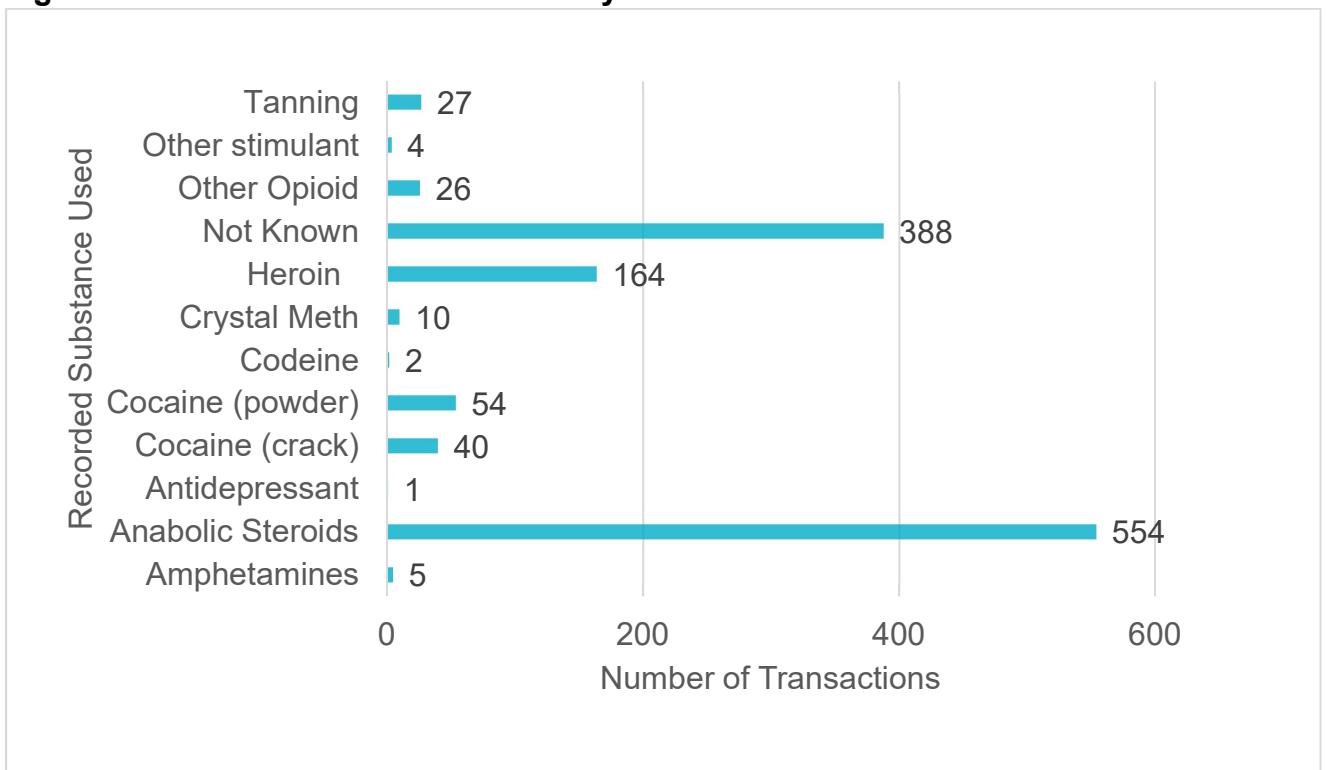


Figure 14 reflects that of the 1,102 transactions in this reporting period, 1,275 reports of substance used were recorded across 12 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which remains very high at 388 (30.4%) of reports.

The largest recorded substance used in needle exchange was anabolic steroids (554), followed by heroin/morphine (164), followed by cocaine powder (54). This remains the same from previous quarters.

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:

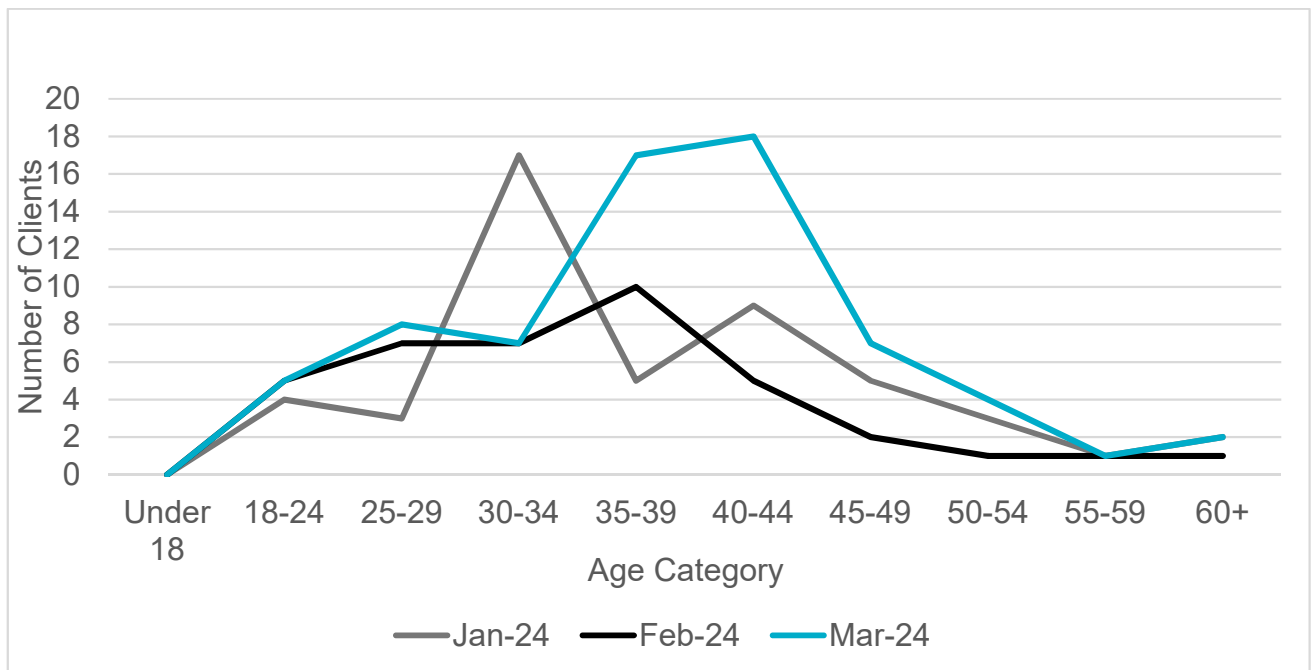
- 579 NSES transactions completed
- 410 unique clients using NSES
- 157 new clients registered for NSES
- 14 anonymous transactions completed

All transactions within the SEHSCT were completed by community pharmacies.

NSES User Profile

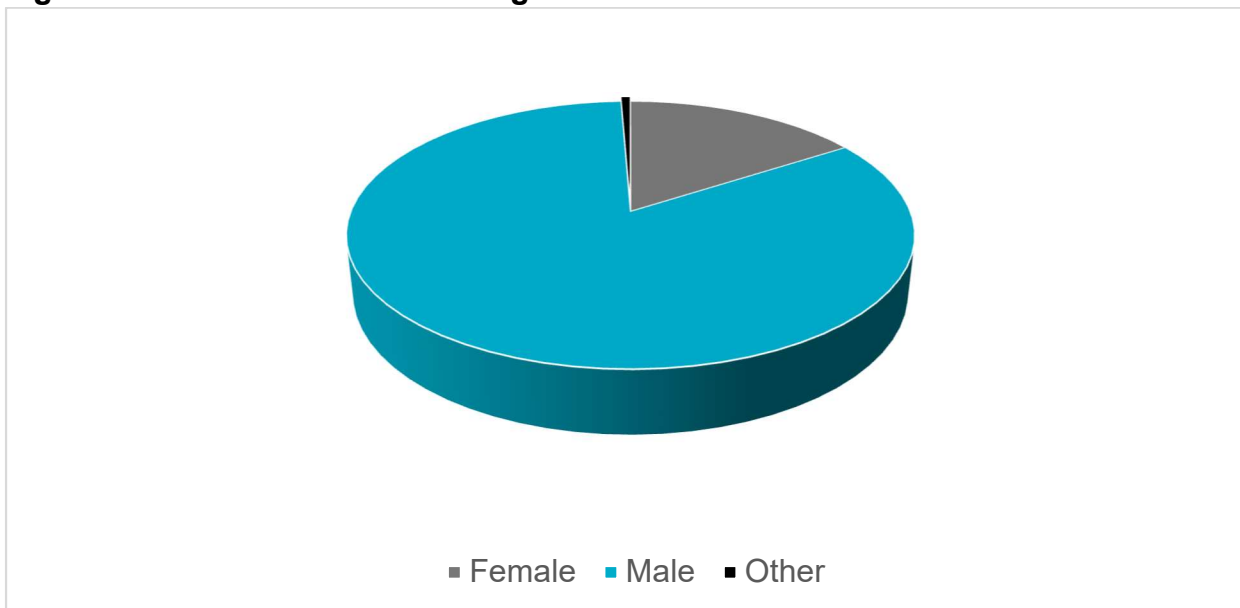
The age and gender profile of the 157 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 15 and 16.

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



The most common overall age group of clients in SEHSCT was age 35-39 and 40-44 years.

Figure 16: Gender of Clients at registration in SEHSCT



The majority of new clients registered were male (83%).

Figure 17: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in SEHSCT

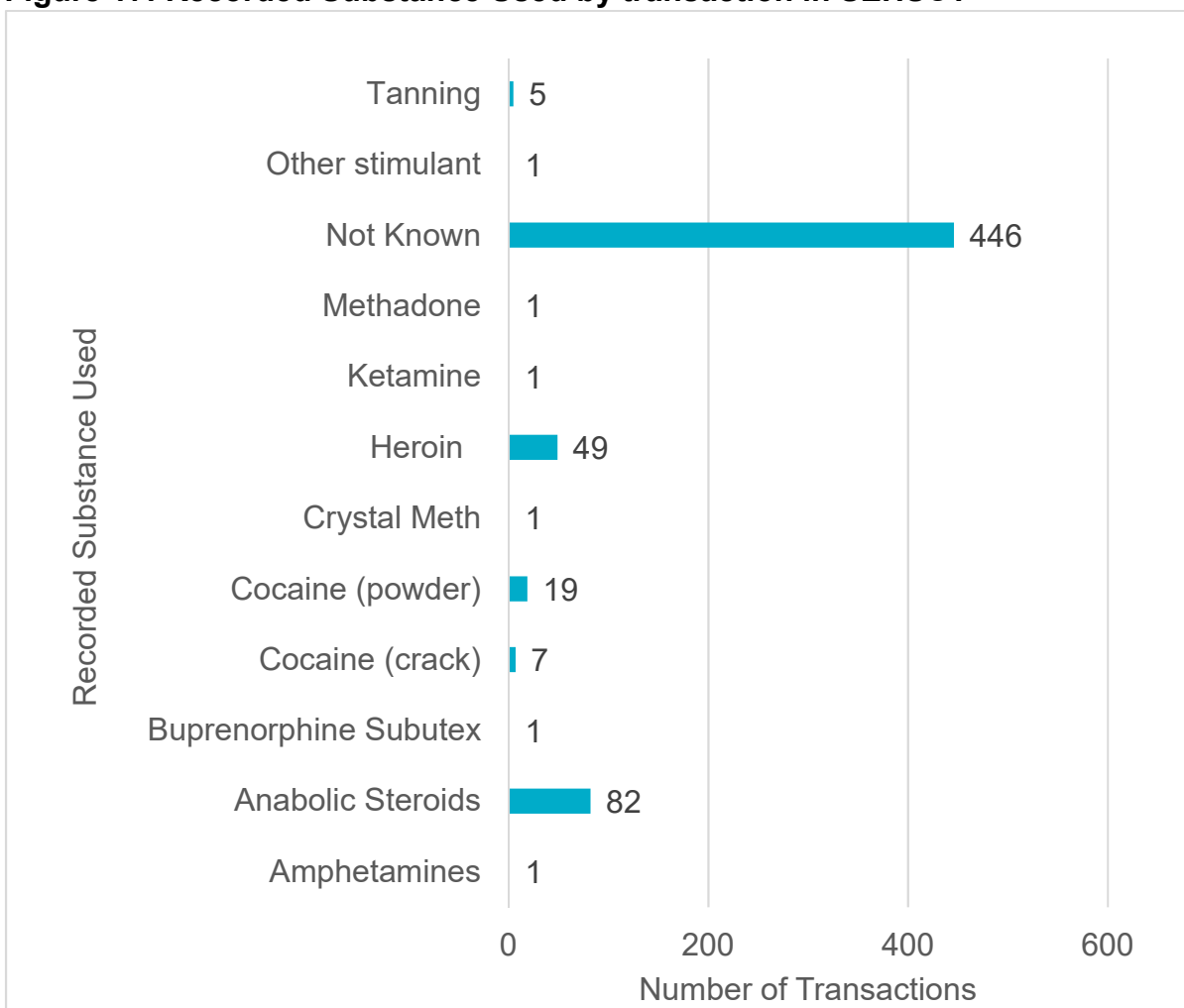


Figure 17 reflects that of the 579 transactions in this reporting period, 614 reports of substance used were recorded across 11 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which was 446 times (72.6%).

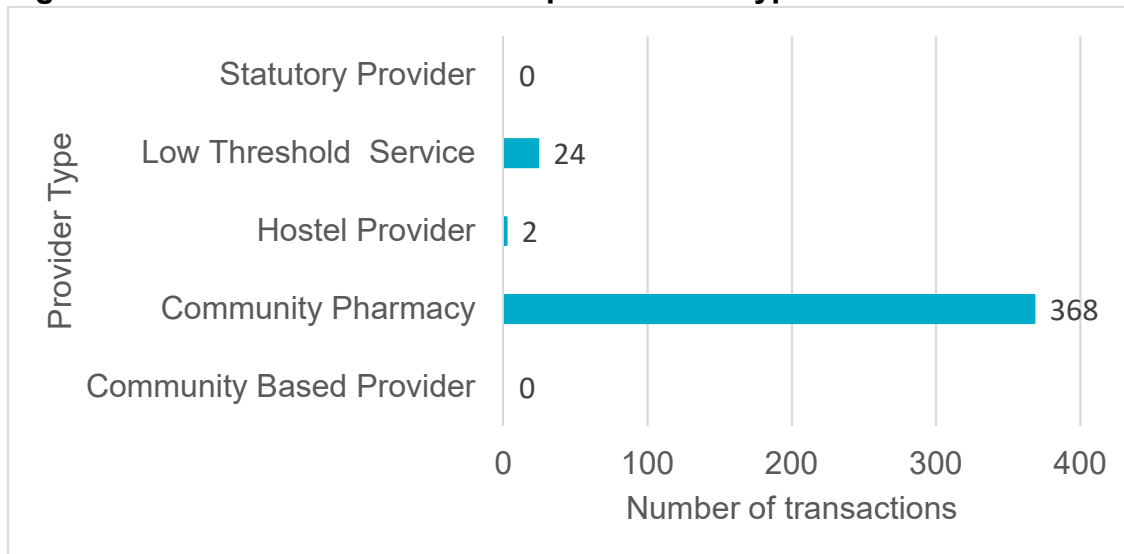
Of those who did report, anabolic steroids (82) was the most reported substance followed by heroin/morphine (49) and cocaine powder (19).

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:

- 394 NSES transactions completed
- 233 unique clients using NSES
- 76 new clients registered for NSES
- 5 anonymous transactions completed

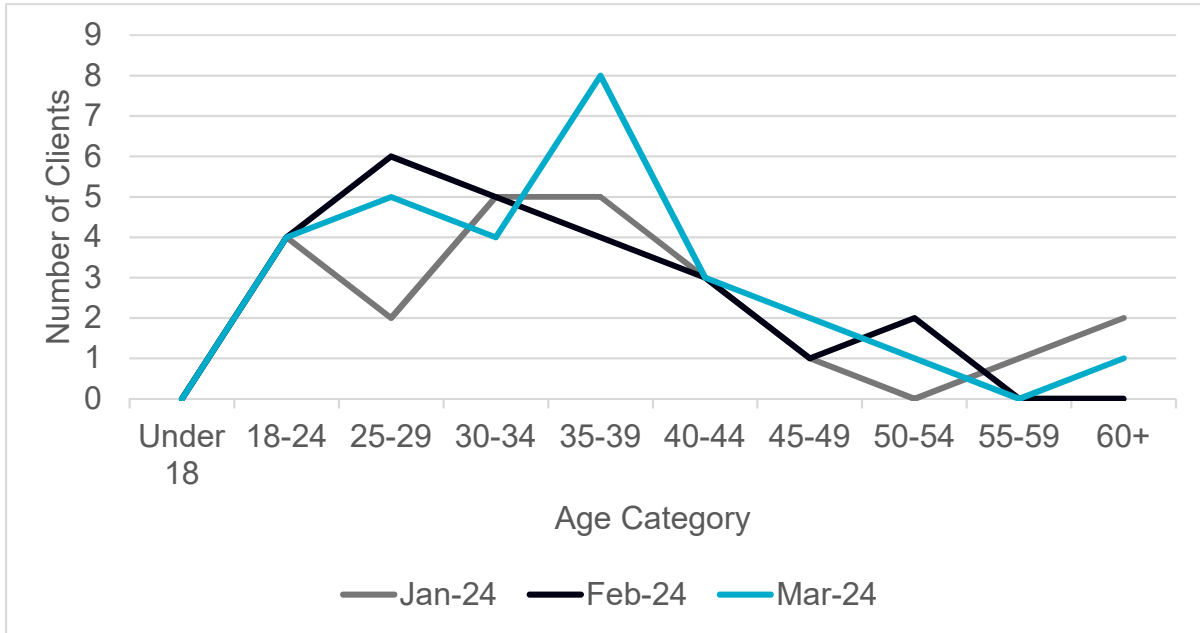
Figure 18: Number of Transactions per Provider type in NSES for SHSCT area



NSES User Profile

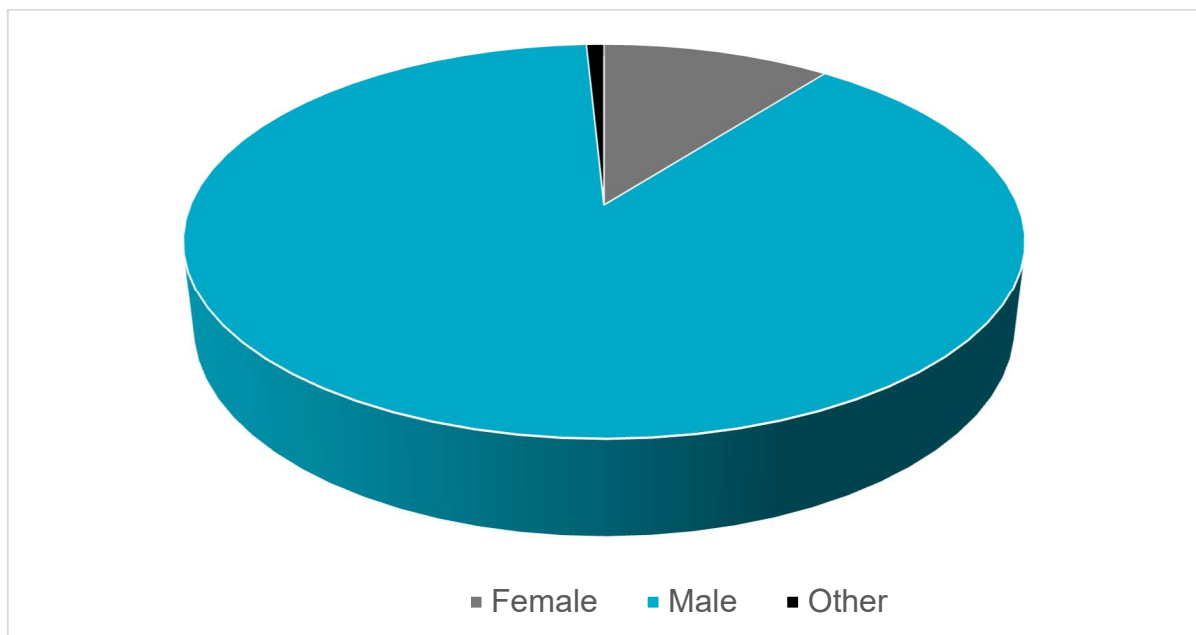
The age and gender profile of the 76 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 19 and 20.

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



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

Figure 20: Gender of Clients at registration in SHSCT



The majority of new clients registered were male (89%).

Figure 21: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in SHSCT

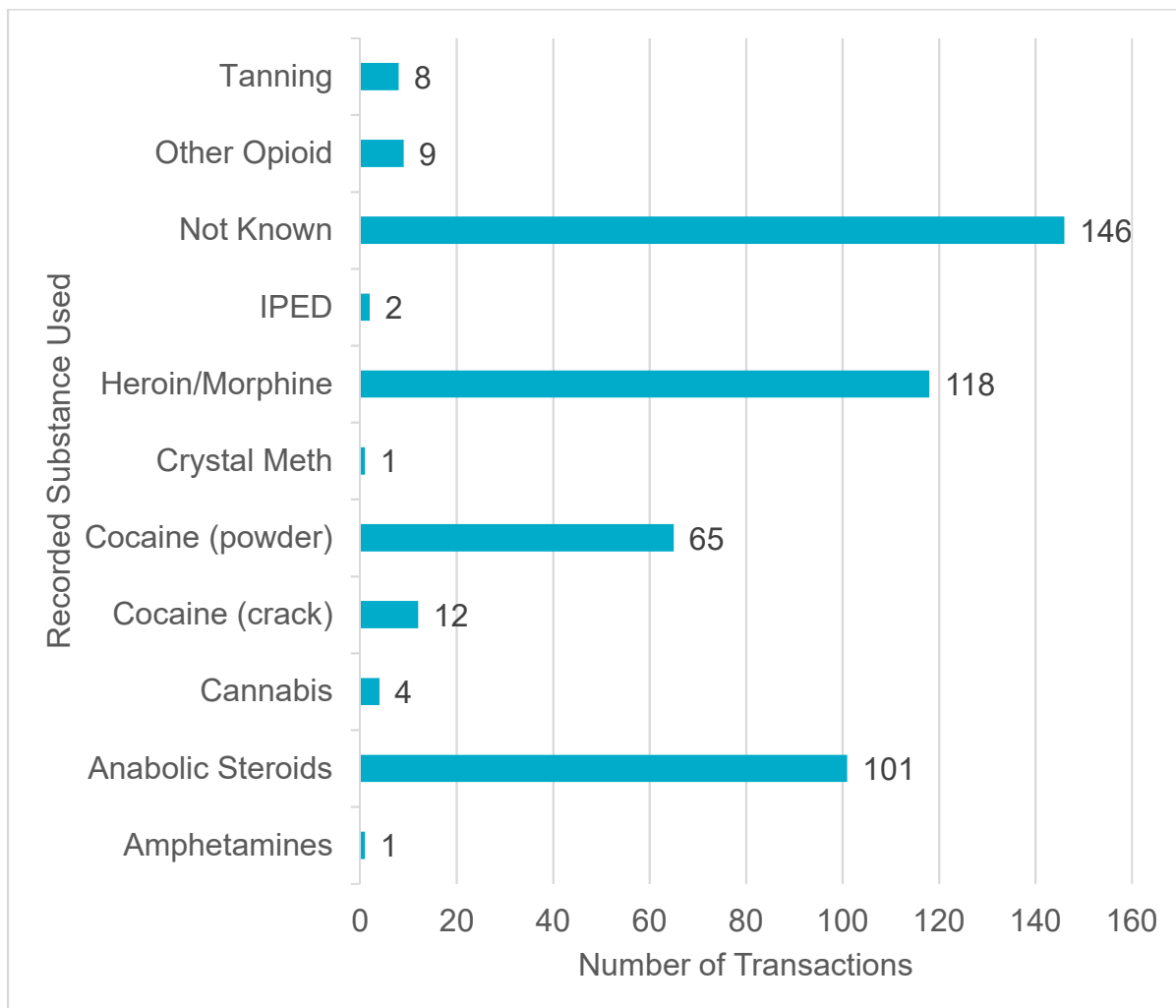


Figure 21 reflects that of the 394 transactions in this reporting period, 467 reports of substance used were recorded across 10 substances. This includes those selecting the ‘unknown’ category which was selected 146 times (31.2%).

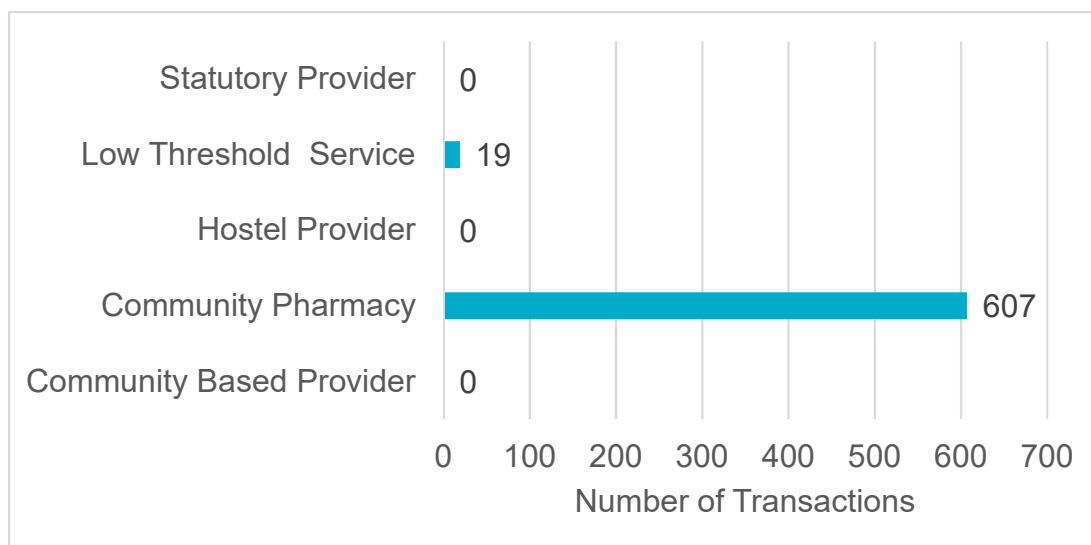
The largest substance recorded was heroin (118) followed by anabolic steroids (101) and cocaine (powder) (65).

Section 7: 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:

- 626 NSES transactions completed
- 458 unique clients using NSES
- 225 new clients registered for NSES
- 7 anonymous transactions completed

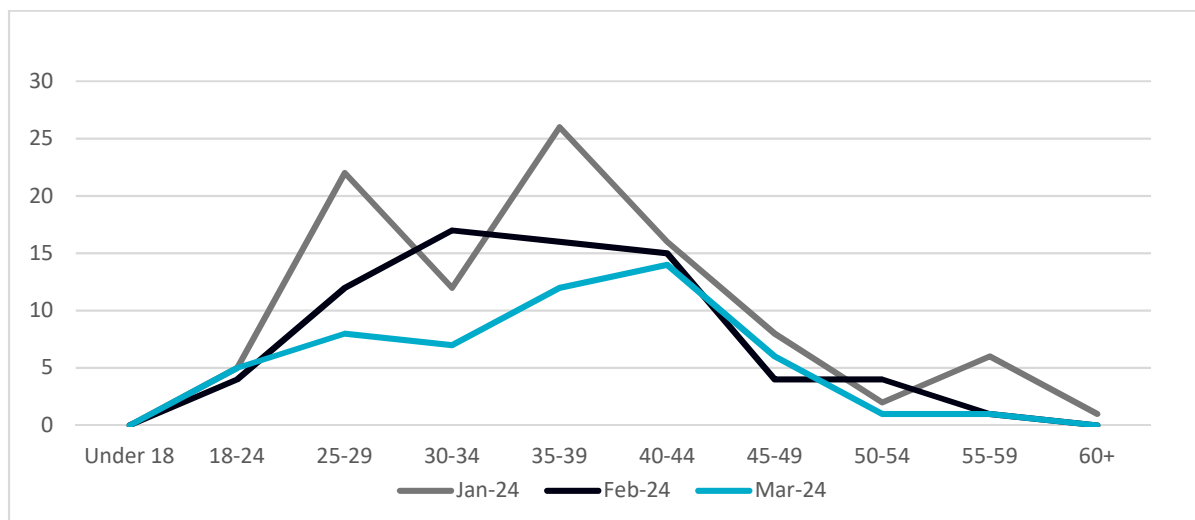
Figure 22: Number of Transactions per provider type for WHSCT



NSES User Profile

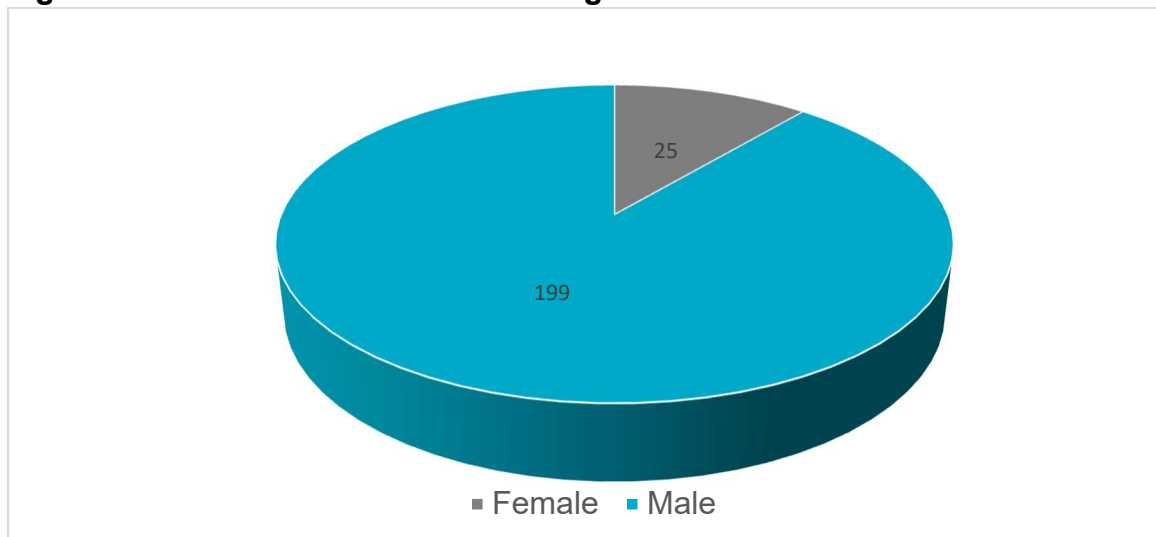
The age and gender profile of the 225 users registered within the reporting period is shown in Figures 23 and 24.

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 (89%) within the WHSCT area.

Figure 25: Recorded Substance Used by transaction in WHSCT area

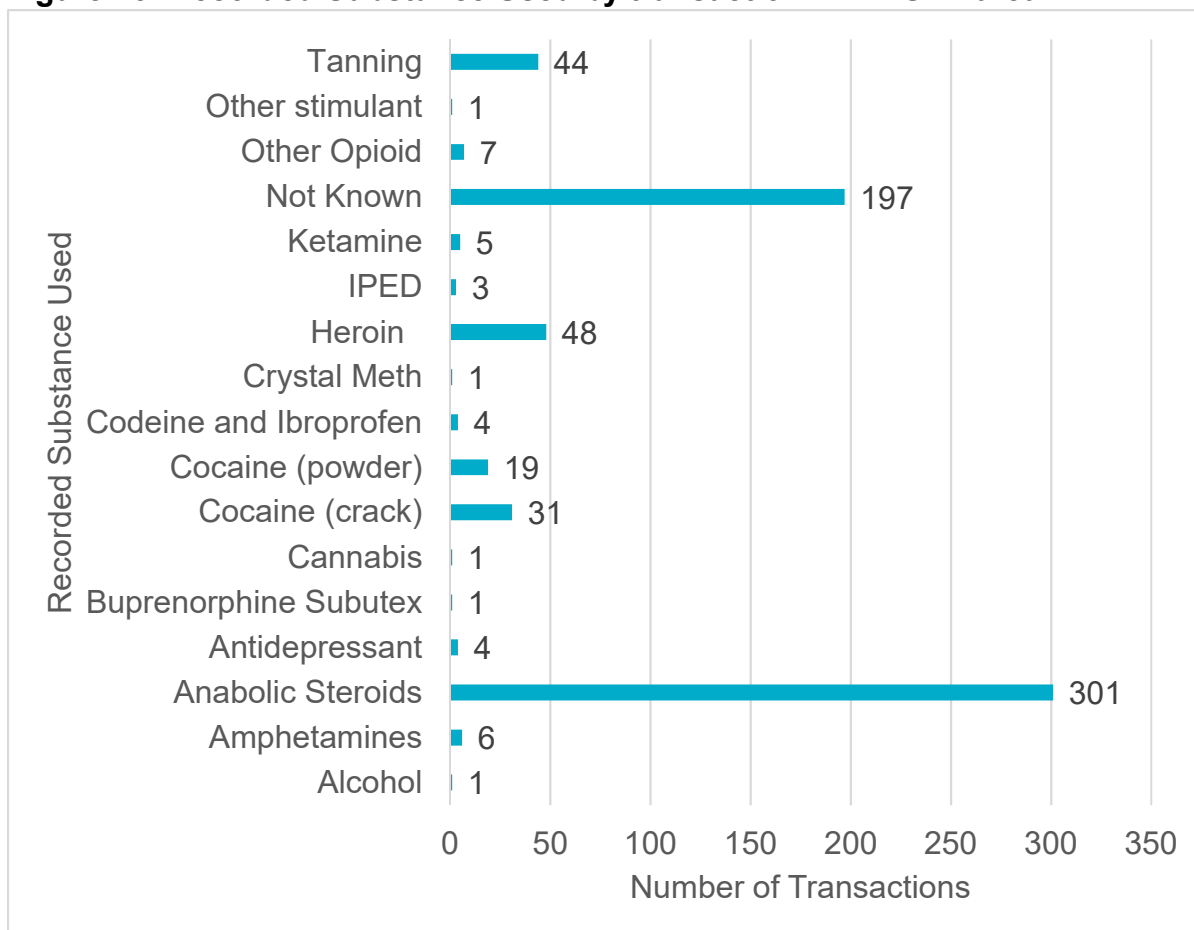





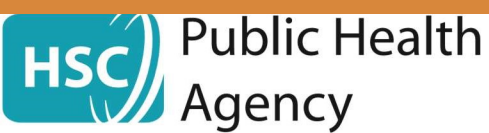


Figure 25 reflects that of the 626 transactions in this reporting period, 674 reports of substance used were recorded across 16 substances. This includes those selecting the 'unknown' category which accounted for 197 reports (29%).

The largest recorded substance usage in needle exchange was anabolic steroids (301) followed by heroin (48) and tanning (44).

Section 8: Summary of NSES activity by Trust Area

<p>Belfast HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 1441 Percentage male: 81%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cocaine Powder 2. Heroin 3. Anabolic Steroids <p>Lead Sector: Community Based Providers</p>	<p>Northern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 762 Percentage male: 92%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin 3. Cocaine Powder <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	<p>South Eastern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 410 Percentage male: 89%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin 3. Cocaine <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>
<p>Southern HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 233 Percentage male: 89%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heroin 2. Anabolic Steroids 3. Cocaine Powder <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	<p>Western HSC Trust</p>  <p>Number of unique clients: 458 Percentage male: 87%</p> <p>Most commonly reported Drugs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anabolic Steroids 2. Heroin 3. Tanning Solution <p>Lead Sector: Community Pharmacy</p>	



Public Health Agency
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).
www.publichealth.hscni.net

Find us on:

