vinetur

The U.K. issued a new framework for youth alcohol and drug services in England

The guidance tells local authorities and providers to deliver age-appropriate, evidence-based care linked to wider health and social services

Friday, October 2, 2026



The U.K. Department of Health and Social Care on Thursday published a new framework for alcohol and drug services for children and young people in England, setting out guidance for how local authorities, commissioners and service providers should design, commission and deliver support.

The department said the framework is intended to help build services that are effective, evidence-based and tailored to the needs of younger people. It is aimed at those involved in planning and providing care for children and young people affected by alcohol and drug misuse, with a focus on making support accessible, age-appropriate and linked to wider health and social care services.

According to the department, the document covers best practice for assessment, intervention and aftercare. It is meant to improve outcomes for young people, reduce harm linked to substance misuse and support wellbeing. The publication places emphasis on services that are joined up with other parts of the public system, including health and social care, rather than operating in isolation.

The framework applies in England and is directed at the public bodies and providers responsible for frontline delivery. In practical terms, it gives local systems a national reference point for how support should be structured for children, teenagers and young adults who need help with alcohol or drug use. The department’s publication says the aim is to support the development of services that reflect the specific risks and circumstances faced by younger age groups.

That focus is important because treatment and recovery services for younger people often differ from adult provision. Children and teenagers may need support that also considers family circumstances, education, safeguarding and mental health. Young adults can face different issues again, including transitions between child and adult services, housing instability or contact with other support systems. By setting out common expectations, the government is seeking to give commissioners and providers a clearer basis for service planning.

The department did not present the framework as new legislation. Instead, it serves as guidance for those responsible for local delivery. Even so, such documents can shape how services are purchased, organized and measured, especially when commissioners

use them to set standards for providers or to review current arrangements.

The publication also matters beyond the treatment sector. For companies and groups connected to beer, wine, spirits and other drinks, the framework is a sign of how public authorities in England are approaching alcohol-related harm among younger people. While the document is focused on health and care services, stronger national guidance on prevention, intervention and aftercare could, over time, affect demand for local education and support programs and influence the broader policy environment around underage and harmful drinking.

The department's release comes as public bodies continue to place weight on earlier intervention in substance misuse, particularly where alcohol and drugs intersect with mental health, vulnerability and safeguarding concerns. The framework's stress on integrated care suggests that the government wants services for younger people to work more closely with other parts of the system, rather than treating substance misuse as a standalone issue.

In the document, the department says services should be designed around the needs of children and young people, not around administrative boundaries. That approach can affect how referrals are handled, how quickly assessments take place and how follow-up support is provided after initial treatment or crisis care. It also points to a stronger role for continuity of care, especially for young people whose needs may change over time.

For commissioners, the framework offers a benchmark for what evidence-based support should look like. For providers, it sets out expectations on tailoring services to age and circumstance. For families and young people, the practical impact will depend on how local systems use the guidance and whether resources are directed toward the changes it describes.

The publication was released on the GOV.UK website by the Department of Health and Social Care under the title "Children and young people's alcohol and drug services: framework." The department said the guidance is intended to support policymakers, commissioners and providers involved in planning and delivering services for younger people affected by alcohol and drug misuse in England.