

## What is Hair Strand Testing?

- Hair strand testing is when a sample of hair is examined for the presence of drugs and alcohol.

## What can it tell us?

- It can tell us if certain specific requested substances have been used and accumulated in the hair over a period of time.
- It should be used alongside clinical judgements and assessments, rather than in isolation.

## What are the limitations?

The time period covered will depend on the length of hair available for testing

Testing will not expose drug use in the 2-4 weeks prior to sampling

Results can be affected (lowered) by the use of hair treatments, thermal straighteners and hair products

The results can be affected by individual variations in hair colour, race, hormones and body size

The accuracy of the test varies between the substances used

The amount of drug detected in the hair has to be above a certain cut-off point to be reported as a positive result

The amount of drugs which accumulate in hair can be influenced by many factors, including the type of drug, the purity and individual variations in drug metabolism

Results may show a drug as 'not detected' if insufficient drug has been used for enough of it to accumulate in the hair, or if the drug has been used infrequently

Different companies use different testing techniques with variations in detection rates

## So what is the bottom line?



Hair strand testing can be useful as part of a wider assessment to demonstrate repeated, chronic substance misuse.



**But a negative hair strand test should not be used as evidence that someone has not used drugs.**