

# **Drug deaths in Edinburgh remain high as annual figures published**

**The rate of drug-related deaths remains high in Edinburgh, tragic new statistics have revealed.**

There were 111 in 2023, compared to 113 last year and 109 in 2021 – and up 73 per cent from a decade ago.

The capital's small decrease bucked the national trend, as drug misuse deaths rose 12 per cent across Scotland.

National Records of Scotland (NRS) figures published on Tuesday, August 20, showed 78 males and 33 females suffered fatal overdoses across the city last year.

Opiates were implicated in 100 of the deaths, benzodiazepines in 75, cocaine in 56 and alcohol in 17.

Pat Togher, Chief Officer of the Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership, said: "I am saddened to see that so many drug related deaths continue to occur across Scotland and whilst Edinburgh has not seen a rise we acknowledge that the current figure is too high and that we remain committed to reducing drug related deaths and drug harms wherever possible.

"I want to pay tribute to the excellent work that people in Edinburgh carry out to address substance use harms, including the implementation of the national Medication Assisted Treatment Standards, and the constant sharing of experience, hope and strength by the recovery community.

“We know that further work is still required to support more people into treatment. We also continue to work with our partners in the City of Edinburgh Council, NHS Lothian, the voluntary sector and with our communities to address the wider causes of substance use harm, including through poverty prevention work.”

In March councillors agreed to progress proposals for the city’s first pilot safe drug consumption facility (SDCF) to be established in a bid to reduce the number of drug-related deaths.

Research commissioned by the council and Edinburgh Alcohol and Drug Partnership (EADP) said it would be a “key opportunity for harm reduction” and a “broad estimate” priced the service at between £1m and £2m a year.

Spokesperson for drug harm reduction charity Cranstoun, Ant Lehane, said the latest statistics “demonstrate that much more must be done to combat drug deaths in Scotland”.

He said: “After two years of declining numbers of people dying from drugs [across Scotland], it is worrying to see numbers increase again.

“Across the country in 2023 we saw the emergence of very strong synthetic opioids and there is significant cause for concern that this already dire situation could get worse if these types of drugs become mainstream in the drug supply in Scotland.

“We published a report, with cross-party backing in Scotland and across the UK, which recommended key ways to mitigate some of the risks posed by synthetic opioids.

“Some recommendations have been enacted but a Whole System response to this emerging crisis is crucial to reduce fatalities. These include formalised drug checking services, increasing the number of people accessing treatment –

including through the expansion of Diamorphine Assisted Treatment and Overdose Prevention Centres.

“We need to see action to ensure that we can prevent harm, keep people safe and stop the tragedy of drug related deaths.”

By Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter