

Drug deaths – numbers reported show increase on last year

The latest statistics published by National Records of Scotland disclose that 1,172 people died due to drug misuse in Scotland in 2023.

This is an increase of 121 deaths compared with 2022 when the lowest number of deaths was recorded since 2017..

Drug misuse deaths are more common than they were in 2000. After adjusting for age, the rate of drug misuse deaths were 4.2 times as high in 2023 than 2000.

The average age of drug misuse deaths has also increased from 32 to 45 since 2000.

Opiates and opioids, including heroin, morphine and methadone were implicated in 80% of all deaths.

Almost nine out of 10 drug misuse deaths were classified as accidental poisonings, with 7% classed as intentional self-poisonings.

People in the most deprived areas of Scotland are more than 15 times as likely to die from drug misuse compared to people in the least deprived areas. The association of deprivation with drug misuse deaths is much greater than with other causes of death.

Phillipa Haxton, Head of Vital Events Statistics, said: "Today's statistics show an increase in drug misuse deaths

over the last year. The longer term trend shows that drug misuse deaths are still much more common than they were over two decades ago. In the medium term, today's figures represent the second lowest number of deaths in the last six years.

"The statistics also provide information about the people who are dying from drug misuse. The figures show us that males were twice as likely to have a drug misuse death as females. Most of the increase in the past year was due to male deaths.

"Glasgow City and Dundee City had the highest rates of drug misuse deaths while East Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire had the lowest."

The rate of drug poisoning deaths in Scotland was more than double the rates of other UK countries in 2022. The rate was 2.7 times as high as the rates for England and Northern Ireland, and 2.1 times as high as the rate in Wales. This is the most recent year that data is available for across the UK. When comparing Scotland and the rest of the UK, the drug poisoning definition should be used.

EDINBURGH

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.”

POLITICAL RESPONSE

Scottish Conservative Leader Douglas Ross said: “These figures are shocking and shameful. Drug deaths continue to be Scotland’s national shame on the SNP’s watch.

“Behind this heartbreaking increase in drug deaths are families grieving the loss of loved ones and my thoughts are with all of them.

“Scotland’s drug deaths rate is by far the worst in Europe and the SNP’s approach is simply not working. Several years ago Nicola Sturgeon admitted she took her eye off the ball on tackling this emergency but deaths have continued to increase since then.

“That legacy is still causing huge harm in our most deprived areas, where people living in those communities are 15 times more likely to die than those in the least deprived areas.

“These awful statistics highlight yet again the urgent need for John Swinney and the SNP Government to finally give their backing to the Right to Recovery Bill. I will be making that point with him when we meet next month to discuss the Bill.

“If passed it would enshrine in law a right to treatment for all those who need it, including residential rehab, and was written in conjunction with leading experts and has widespread support.

“SNP ministers must stop dithering otherwise more people will die and families will suffer the pain of losing a loved one to

drugs.

“They must respond to these latest figures by confirming that when Parliament returns, the Right to Recovery Bill will become law as soon as possible.”

Alex Cole Hamilton Leader of the Scottish Liberal Democrats said: “This is a painful day for many people across the country. Every death represents a life cut short and a family torn apart by grief.

“Nine years ago, with rates rising and records already mounting, Nicola Sturgeon slashed funding for drug and alcohol services.

“Now Scotland has by far the worst drug death crisis in Europe and it’s getting worse. Today’s devastating news should compel the SNP Government to reverse the indefensible real-terms cut that it inflicted in this year’s budget.

“Everything possible must be done to stop people dying which is why we need the drugs budget protected to strengthen frontline services, new drug checking facilities and a proper nationwide network of safer consumption rooms.”



National Records of Scotland. Photo: © 2021, Martin P. McAdam
www.martinmcadam.com