

West Lothian drug death numbers down on last year but “one death still too many”

This week's figures for drug deaths in Scotland revealed that 31 people in West Lothian died of drug misuse in 2023 – one less than the year before.

Nationally 1,172 people died from drug misuse in 2023 – an increase of 12%. This is 121 more deaths than in 2022 and the second lowest number of drug misuse deaths since 2017. The rate of drug misuse deaths is still much higher than in 1996.

A spokesperson for West Lothian's Alcohol and Drugs Partnership said any death from drugs “ was one too many”

In West Lothian the number of deaths recorded was 23 males and 8 females compared to the 2022 figures of 22 males and 10 females. In the Lothian Heath Board area in which West Lothian sits the number of deaths rose to 182 last year from 166 the year before.

National Records for Scotland figures show that only East Lothian had fewer deaths, 20, than other neighbouring council areas. In West Lothian the number was dramatically less than Edinburgh (111), South Lanarkshire (71), North Lanarkshire (103) and Falkirk (36).

Alison White, the chair of West Lothian Drug and Alcohol

Partnership, said: “National Records of Scotland reported that in 2023, 31 people from West Lothian lost their lives directly to drugs.

“West Lothian HSCP and Alcohol and Drug Partnership convey our deepest sympathy for the families and friends affected: each and every death is one too many.

“All services working in the local area continue to work together alongside communities to improve our services and tackle the wider inequalities that lead to drug deaths.

“We will ensure that people can access services through an approach embedded in human rights, placing local communities at the heart of everything we do, to improve outcomes for people and families affected by problematic drug use.”

In 2023, there were 1,172 drug misuse deaths registered in Scotland, an increase of 12% (121 deaths) compared with 2022. Whilst drug misuse deaths in Scotland have generally been increasing over the last two decades, this is the second lowest number in the last six years,

Drug misuse deaths are still much 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. In 2023, 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. Since 2000, the average age of drug misuse deaths has increased from 32 to 45.

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.

After adjusting for age, Glasgow City and Dundee City had the highest rates of drug misuse deaths while East Renfrewshire and East Dunbartonshire had the lowest.

The most common type of drugs implicated in drug misuse deaths in 2023 were opiates/opioids which were implicated in 80% of all deaths.

The majority (88%) of drug misuse deaths were classified as accidental poisonings, with only 7% classed as intentional self-poisonings.

Those looking for help regarding the problematic use of drugs can find information and support on the Health and Social Care partnership website.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter