

Drugs crisis needs a cross-party, cross-government summit

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The Scottish Conservatives are calling for a cross-party summit on Scotland's drug emergency, after figures yesterday revealed the country's death rate is the highest in the developed world.

It is also supporting calls for the UK Government to attend the summit to ensure that both Scotland's governments and all opposition parties are involved in debating action to combat the crisis.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said that the party would bring its own drug strategy to the table, released in November last year.

It calls for ministers to set a clear target to halve the number of drug deaths in Scotland over the next five years and increase the number of drug users accessing treatment to 60 per cent by:

- Allowing first time drug users to avoid a criminal record so long as they attend Local Commissions
- Creating an independent review of methadone
- A redesign of alcohol and drug services
- The redirection of funds into rehabilitation, recovery and abstinence
- More prison based interventions followed by transitional and long-term support for addicts
- Increased peer support, employability and education programmes
- A third sector led recovery taskforce

It comes after yesterday's drug figures showed a total of 1187 deaths in 2018 – up 27 per cent from the previous year.

More than half of all deaths involved so-called "street drugs" like painkillers and Valium, a rise of 43 per cent.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"Over the last decade, the Scottish Conservatives have a track record of working across party divides to tackle Scotland's drug crisis.

"It's time we all rose to the challenge again, starting with a cross-party summit so we can begin a serious and detailed conversation about how to tackle this national emergency.

"With 1187 of our fellow Scots losing their lives to addiction last year the need for cross-party and inter-governmental discussions to find solutions is critical.

“This is a crisis that spans political divides, so we would hope that both Scottish and UK governments are involved.

“Our own proposals were spelled out in our Addictions Strategy: Life Plan launched last year, to halve the number of drug deaths in Scotland over the next five years.

“Rather than give first time offenders a criminal record, we think they should be asked to attend local ‘commissions’ and receive treatment, in order to stop their descent into the hell of drug dependency.

“We also want an independent review of the methadone programme, and more government support for services that help addicts into rehabilitation and recover services.

“So-called safe consumption rooms aren’t the only answer here – what we need is a fresh approach that helps people to change and one which takes a holistic approach to addiction.

“The Scottish Conservatives have been warning ministers about the growing opioid crisis for some time. The situation in Scotland today is at crisis point.

“But there are also warning signs coming internationally – the opioid crisis which we see in the United States is a major warning sign and a call to action for us all.

“We need to act to make sure we are ahead of the curve if we are going to avoid seeing the development of an opioid crisis of similar levels in the future here in Scotland.

“What’s now vital is that all parties make this national emergency a national priority.

“We can and must rise to the challenge.”