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The number of homeless people discharged from hospital with nowhere to go has increased by nearly 300 per cent since the SNP came to power, it has emerged.

New figures have revealed that 582 people were told they were free to go from hospital last year, despite having “no fixed abode”.

That compares to 148 in 2007, a statistic which has risen steadily in the years since.

The Scottish Conservatives said more needs to be done to ensure vulnerable people who have required hospital care then have some kind of safety net rather than returning to live on the streets.

Shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said while he accepted hospitals couldn't be used as accommodation, a government initiative was required to make sure individuals who've just recovered from illness aren't put back out on the street.

He added that many of these people will be vulnerable drug users, and face immediate risks to their health from sleeping rough.

Last month it was confirmed that more people die from drug-related causes in Scotland than anywhere else in the developed world.

Today's data was released following a Parliamentary Question by Mr Briggs. In her response, health secretary Jeane Freeman pointed out some of those included in the statistics could be people with a “mobile lifestyle” such as travellers and those with multiple residences.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“Something is clearly going wrong in the system for there to be such an increase in people discharged from hospital straight back out onto the street.

“It's not like this mirrors a trend in overall homelessness – there's been a very specific change and we need to work out what that is.

"The SNP is in sole charge of health and housing and, on its watch, this figure has risen threefold.

"It now needs to explain why that is, and take some responsibility when it comes to addressing it.

"We know Scotland is now the drugs deaths capital of the developed world.

"Many of these individuals will be vulnerable drug users, and once released from hospital are in immediate danger of overdosing again.

"If we want to reduce the mortality numbers, solving this particular problem would be a good place to start.

"The Scottish Conservatives have been calling for some time on SNP ministers to develop new housing initiatives to make sure vulnerable individuals are supported into assisted living and local support services."