

Scotland's drug deaths now 3 times the UK rate

16 Jul 2019



The Scottish drugs death rate is now three times higher than the UK average – and has more than doubled on the SNP's watch.

Statistics released today have shown 1187 people died following drug use in 2018, a 27 per cent rise on the previous year.

It's the highest figure on record, and more than twice the rate of a decade ago.

The National Records of Scotland stated this means Scotland isn't just the worst in the UK, but has a higher mortality rate than the whole of Europe.

Methadone, the medication prescribed by the NHS to help heroin users, contributed to nearly half of all deaths, and featured more often than the drug it's meant to safely replace.

The SNP government immediately used the figures to call for the creation of a state-run heroin consumption room in Glasgow – the one measure it knows it isn't able to introduce.

That stance has been attacked by the Scottish Conservatives, who point out the nationalists have had sole control over health and justice for 12 years, yet has only worsened the drugs crisis.

The Scottish Conservatives last year set out a detailed strategy to cut drug deaths by half – proposing a “second chance” plan for drug users caught for the first time, a review of the SNP's controversial methadone programme, and new personalised “life plans” for every drug user to help them beat their addiction.

Scottish Conservative public health spokeswoman Annie Wells said:

“The crisis in relation to drugs-related deaths in Scotland should now be a number one concern for this SNP government.

“On its watch, these fatalities – all of which are avoidable – have more than doubled since it came to power.

“The SNP has had control over health and justice for 12 years, yet hasn't managed to bring in anything that comes close to dealing with this problem.

“As these figures show, whatever drugs strategies it has adopted have only made things worse.

“Predictably, in their desperation, the nationalists are now pinning their hopes on consumption rooms, because they know it’s something the UK Government does not agree with.

“That’s a cowardly approach from those ministers who’re meant to be taking responsibility.

“Instead, they’re hiding behind a ruse.

“They should be focusing their efforts on rehabilitation and abstinence-based recovery, the very services they have cut to the bone.

“Over the last decade, the Scottish Government’s approach has been to park vulnerable users on methadone.

“Yet these figures show methadone now causes even more deaths than heroin.

“What more evidence do we need that this SNP government has failed every single one of these vulnerable people who’ve lost their lives to ruinous drug addiction.”

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs added:

“It is a shocking indictment of 20 years of failed drug and alcohol policies under Labour, Liberal Democrat and SNP governments that we see Scotland today now record the highest drug deaths anywhere in Europe.

“We need to see a new approach which firstly ends drug and alcohol partnerships being the Cinderella service in the NHS.

“We are the only party which has brought forward a radical new approach to redesign and invest in addiction services and rehabilitation across Scotland.

“That is why we want to see action now from SNP ministers to instigate a third sector-led review of all recovery services in Scotland, a review of the methadone programme, and new fast-track residential rehabilitation places.

“SNP ministers have taken the regressive decisions to cut alcohol and drug partnership budgets in the past which has resulted in the destabilisation of services across the country.

“It’s time for a radical new approach that gives people with addictions and their families hope.”