

## News release on behalf of the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission

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### Overarching drug and alcohol plan needed

**Drug and alcohol services in Scotland are complex and a clear plan is needed to improve people's lives and increase transparency around spending.**

Drug-related deaths have been rising steeply since 2013. A record 1,339 people lost their lives to drugs in 2020 – the highest rate in Europe. Alcohol deaths have been decreasing since the early 2000s, but rose by 16 per cent in 2020, when there were 1,190 deaths.

Alcohol and drug partnerships (ADPs) are charged with helping people at the local level. But how services are delivered remains complicated and lines of accountability are not always clear. Overall funding for ADPs fell over the last few years before returning to 2015 levels by April 2021, but with no real terms increase. The Scottish Government has also provided additional investment for new initiatives, including a drug deaths taskforce and new evidence-based treatments and standards. But it is too early to gauge their effectiveness.

Spending remains difficult to track, including how money is distributed and what it is achieving. For example, in September 2021 the Scottish Government committed to invest £250m to reduce drug deaths - £50m for the next five years. But details of how much of the £50m will be spent on each local area, or how the funding will be distributed, have not been published. More widely, data gaps around drug and alcohol referrals, waiting times and outcomes persist. And there is a considerable time lag in public reporting.

Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland said:

"We've recently seen more drive and leadership around drug and alcohol misuse from the Scottish Government. But it's still hard to see what impact policy is having on people living in the most deprived areas, where long-standing inequalities remain.

"Drug and alcohol data is not good enough, and there is a lack of transparency about how money is being spent and allocated. The Scottish Government needs to set out an integrated plan, with clear measures showing how extra spending is being used to reduce the tragic loss of life we've seen over the last decade."

William Moyes, Chair of the Accounts Commission said:

"Delivery of drug and alcohol services in Scotland is complex and difficult to navigate, with many organisations working across different sectors. What we need to see now is clearer accountability across all partners.

"In the longer term, more focus is needed on the root causes of drug and alcohol dependency and breaking the cycle of harm stretching down generations and across communities."

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## Notes to Editor:

1. This briefing is produced jointly by the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission, prepared on their behalf by Audit Scotland. It is a high-level summary of the key challenges and recent progress in drugs and alcohol policy in Scotland.

2. The Scottish Government does not publish a full breakdown of all drug and alcohol funding in one place. Information is incomplete, disparate and presented inconsistently. Various funding announcements are published in different places, including the Scottish Government and Parliament websites, programme for government and budget documents.

3. There are 31 ADPs in Scotland which bring together local partners including NHS boards, councils, police and voluntary agencies. ADPs are responsible for commissioning and developing local strategies for tackling problem alcohol and drug use and promoting recovery, based on an assessment of local needs. They work alongside integration authorities and community planning partnerships (CPPs), but accountability is not always clear.

4. In 2016/17, Scottish Government annual core funding to ADPs reduced by over 20 per cent in cash terms to £53.8 million (in the previous two years ADPs received a total of £69.2 million per year). ADP funding began to increase again from 2018/19 and stood at £76.8 million in 2020/21.

5. The Scottish Government has confirmed that, from 2021/22, ADPs will receive a further £20m each year over five years.

6. Audit Scotland has prepared this briefing for the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)

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