

Audit scope

Drug and Alcohol Services

How effective is the performance of Scotland's alcohol and drug services in delivering on the Scottish Government's strategies?

ACCOUNTS COMMISSION 

AUDITOR GENERAL 

Prepared by Audit Scotland

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Background

In 2022, there were 1,051 drug misuse deaths in Scotland, and a further 1,276 people died because of alcohol-specific causes. Scotland has persistently experienced the highest rate of drug-related deaths in Europe, and both drug and alcohol related deaths are significantly higher in Scotland than in England and Wales.

In 2020/21 over five per cent of all hospital admissions were either drug or alcohol related. Problem drug and alcohol use also cause wider harm, including from other related health conditions, crime and economic costs.

We also know that Scotland's most deprived communities are disproportionately affected by drug and alcohol harm. For example, drug misuse deaths are 16 times as likely for people living in the most deprived areas of Scotland compared with those living in the least deprived areas. Alcohol-specific deaths are 4 times as likely in those most deprived areas.

This backdrop led the then-First Minister to describe the rate of Scotland's drug-related deaths as a 'national disgrace' in 2021 and to announce a national mission to tackle drug-related harm. An additional £50 million

per year of investment has been committed over the lifetime of the current Parliament (2021-26) to reduce drug harm.

In 2022 Audit Scotland published a [briefing](#) on drug and alcohol services and concluded that progress in reducing drug and alcohol-related harm had been slow, and lacked leadership from the Scottish Government. We also concluded that clearer accountability was needed across a complex service delivery landscape managed by many organisations across different sectors.

The briefing also noted that it was too early to determine the effectiveness of the investment to support the [national mission](#), including new treatments and new standards.

18 months on from our 2022 briefing, we believe that now is the right time to assess what progress that has been made in the delivery of drug and alcohol services to reduce harm, how effective investment in these services has been, and follow up on the recommendations we made in our 2022 briefing.

Our audit is primarily focussed on treatment and recovery services. Although not the primary area of focus for our audit, prevention is an increasing priority for the

Scottish government and we will consider how well embedded prevention is in national strategies, how much is being invested in prevention, and whether it is adequate. Drug enforcement is not included within the scope of our current work.

This audit will aim to answer some key questions:

- How well are current leadership and accountability arrangements supporting the effective delivery of the Scottish Government's drug and alcohol strategies?
- How effective are the funding arrangements for drug and alcohol services for achieving objectives in the strategies, and what is the balance of investment across different types of services?
- How well do partners work together to deliver drug and alcohol services that meet the needs of people at risk of harm?

Public Health Scotland (PHS) has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to undertake evaluations of both the national mission and the expansion of residential rehabilitation. We will work closely with PHS to align our areas of work.

Why is this audit important?

Drug and alcohol problem use is a national public health issue that impacts on health and justice systems, and disproportionately affects people living in Scotland's most deprived communities. Significant additional funding is currently being invested in drug and alcohol services. It is important to assess if this investment is being directed to the right areas and those most in need, supporting recovery, and improving outcomes for those with lived and living experience of problem drug or alcohol use.

How will we carry out this audit?

We will review literature and data, and interview key stakeholders from the Scottish Government, Alcohol and Drug Partnerships

(ADPs), third sector organisations and statutory and other service providers.

We will use this information to assess how well strategic plans and financial investment are delivering better outcomes for those needing drug and alcohol services, and how those with lived and living experience are shaping the ways in which these services are provided. We will capture real-life experiences of those engaging with services compared to the expectations set out in government strategies and policies.

What do we want to happen as a result?

The audit will provide an independent assessment of how effectively drug and alcohol services are being delivered and resources invested. We will make recommendations on how services can make better use of the available resources and improve outcomes for those in need of drug or alcohol services.

Timetable

We plan to carry out fieldwork in late 2023 and early 2024 and publish our findings in the autumn of 2024.

Contact

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