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Press release

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Scotland's growing drug and alcohol problem needs a coordinated effort across the whole public sector

Given Scotland's problem with drugs and alcohol, a coordinated effort is needed to ensure services meet local needs and are delivered to consistent standards nationally.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *Drug and alcohol services in Scotland*, provides further evidence of Scotland's growing problem with drug and alcohol misuse. Drug and alcohol-related death rates are among the highest in Europe and have doubled in the past 15 years. Alcohol misuse is an even bigger problem than drug misuse. Alcohol problems affect many more people and cause three times the number of deaths compared with drug misuse.

The impact is felt across the country and throughout local communities but deprived areas are worst affected. The Audit Scotland report says a coordinated effort is needed across the public sector to deliver services that meet the needs of people with misuse problems and of communities. The report says the Scottish Government needs to work with the NHS, councils and other partners to ensure all public bodies are clear about their collective responsibilities.

Last year the public sector in Scotland spent £173 million directly on drug and alcohol services for prevention, treatment and enforcement activities. The wider costs to society are estimated at £5 billion a year, including costs associated with drug and alcohol-related crime, hospital admissions, and workplace absences.

Many different agencies are involved in providing drug and alcohol services and funding for services is often complex. This makes it difficult to plan and provide appropriate services. Spending decisions are not always based on evidence of what works or is needed in a particular area.

Auditor General for Scotland, Robert Black, said: "Drug and alcohol misuse is a significant and worsening problem in Scotland. The range of services for people in need of help can depend on where they live, and there is not enough information about the effectiveness of these services.

"The Scottish Government has published two new strategies in the past 12 months, and there is a lot of activity going on at a local level to address drug and alcohol problems. A coordinated effort is needed by all agencies involved to make sure people get the support and treatment they need and also to really find out which services work best in which circumstances."

Chairman of the Accounts Commission for Scotland, John Baillie, said: "Tackling drug and alcohol misuse accounts for large amounts of public money. It is very important that councils and their partners have a good understanding of what services they need to deliver and of the cost and impact of these."

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Notes to editors

1. It is estimated that 4.9 per cent of the Scottish population aged 16 and over are dependent on alcohol, and there is a particular increase in misuse among women. However, estimating the actual size of Scotland's alcohol problem is difficult due to a lack of national data and under-reporting of consumption.
2. The estimated number of people aged between 15 and 54 misusing opiates, such as heroin, is 51,582, or 1.8 per cent of Scotland's population. Cocaine use in Scotland is small in comparison but is increasing. The number of people contacting services and citing cocaine as their main drug problem doubled from 284 in 2003/04 to 625 in 2007/08. Deaths involving cocaine have doubled over the past five years.

3. Of the £173 million of direct expenditure on drug and alcohol services, 68 per cent is on treatment and care which includes residential treatment and community treatment such as methadone, six per cent is on preventative activities and five per cent on enforcement activities. The remainder is on other general activities to support people who misuse drugs and alcohol.
4. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
5. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report jointly for the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland:
 - The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.
 - The Accounts Commission for Scotland was set up in 1975 and is independent of both central and local government. The commission checks whether local authorities, fire and police boards spend £19 billion of public money properly and effectively.