

Management Information

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

Suspected drug deaths in Scotland: October to December 2023

1. Background

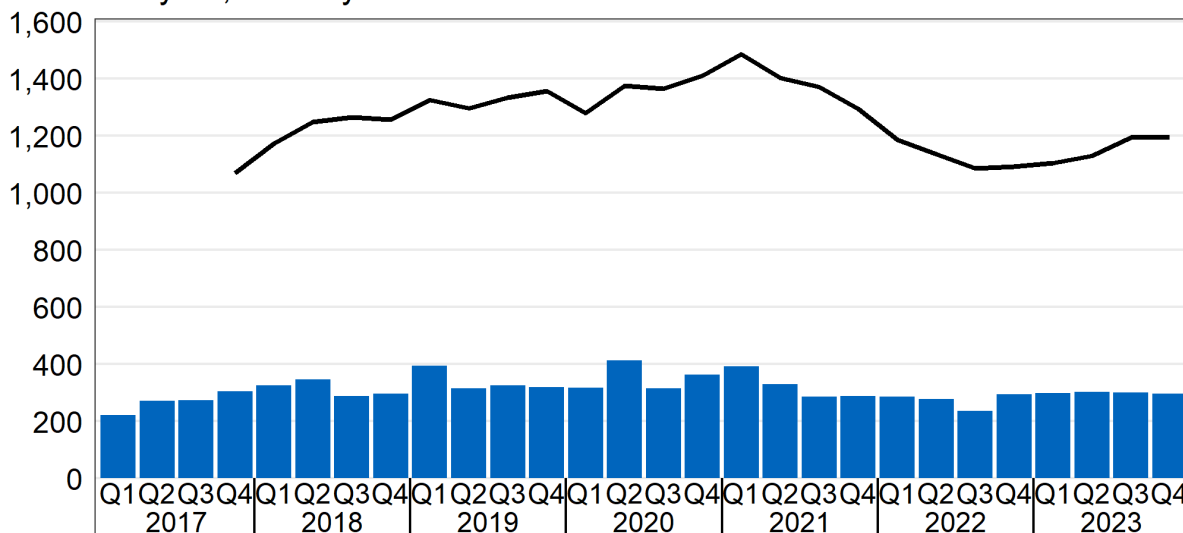
The Scottish Government has a National Mission to reduce drug deaths and improve the lives of those affected by drugs. This quarterly report presents Police Scotland management information to provide an indication of current trends in suspected drug deaths in Scotland.

2. Summary

There were 1,197 suspected drug deaths between January and December 2023. This was 10% (105) more than during the same period of 2022 (1,092). After following a downward trend from early 2021 to late 2022, the rolling 12-month total of suspected drug deaths has increased over recent quarters.

3. Main points

Figure 1: Number of Police Scotland suspected drug deaths by quarter and year, January 2017 to December 2023



Note: Q1 is January to March, Q2 is April to June, etc
Source: Police Scotland

■ Police Scotland suspected drug deaths — Rolling annual suspected drug deaths (sum of last 4 quarters)

During 2023:

- There were 1,197 suspected drug deaths, 10% (105) more than during 2022.
- There were 875 suspected drug deaths of males (73%). This is an increase of 14% (108) compared to 2022, when there were 767 such deaths.
- There were 322 suspected drug deaths of females (27%), a decrease of 1% (3) compared to 2022 when there were 325 such deaths.
- A majority (66%) of suspected drug deaths were of people aged between 35 and 54. This is broadly in line with previous periods.
- There were 54 suspected drug deaths in the under 25 age group (5%). This is 2% (1) fewer than in 2022 when there were 55 such deaths.
- The Police Divisions with the greatest number of suspected drug deaths were: Greater Glasgow (303), Lanarkshire (147) and Edinburgh City (118).

For quarter 4, October to December 2023:

- There were 297 suspected drug deaths recorded, 1% (3) fewer than between July to September 2023 (300), and 1% (2) more than the same calendar quarter in the previous year (October to December 2022; 295).

Note that numbers of suspected drug deaths fluctuate from quarter to quarter. Care should be taken not to interpret movements between individual calendar quarters as indicative of any long term trend.

More detail on the statistics presented above is available in the workbook presented alongside [this report](#).

4. Methodology

The data in this report is operational information from Police Scotland who compile figures on the basis of reports from police officers attending scenes of death. This is management information and not subject to the same level of validation and quality assurance as Official Statistics. National Statistics on drug deaths in Scotland are published annually by [National Records of Scotland](#).

More information on definitions, data sources, methodology and interpretation of the data, including the historical relationship between suspected drug death figures and drug misuse death statistics, can be found in the [Methodology Annex](#).

5. Next update

Public Health Scotland (PHS) compile a [Rapid Action Drug Alerts and Response \(RADAR\) Quarterly report](#) of drug-related indicators in order to inform action to prevent drug harms and deaths. In January 2023, PHS added suspected drug deaths to their set of RADAR indicators, presenting weekly data on suspected drug deaths from Police Scotland. PHS will now publish data on this indicator quarterly, with the next publication due for release on 30 April 2024. In light of this, Scottish Government, together with partners, is considering the future of the 'Suspected drug deaths in Scotland' report.

The next annual drug misuse deaths Accredited Official Statistics publication from NRS is due to be released in Summer 2024.

6. Accessing help and support for problem drug use

If you or anyone you know is affected by drug use, support is available via the following organisations:

- [Scottish Drugs Forum](#)
- [Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs](#)
- [Know the Score](#)
- [With You](#)

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