

Alcohol & Other Drugs: What's Next?

Close the Implementation Gap

This Government started with an unprecedented commitment to reducing drug related harms. The last five years of record investment and political attention should have been transformative, but we have lacked the focus and accountability required for significant change. The steps forward that we have made have been hard fought for but have taken far too long because we have not made the structural shifts needed to allow for the responsive, flexible and evidence-based treatment and support options that people need.

The Government's new strategy for alcohol and drugs, *'Preventing Harm, Promoting Recovery'*, acknowledges this implementation gap, and the need to intensify and accelerate action to deliver meaningful change.

<p>Scotland's first Safer Consumption Facility, The Thistle, has taken a decade to materialise. Permission was eventually granted by the Lord Advocate, but even then, we have only found a way to operate within the restrictions of the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA), rather than removing those restrictions for future services.</p> <p>An increasing number of people in Scotland smoking their drugs which carries the risk of respiratory harm, with shared and unsafe homemade pipes carrying the risk of injury and viral infection. However, provision of smoking paraphernalia for other drugs, such as crack pipes is also prohibited under the MDA.</p>	<p>The Drug Death Task Force (DDTF) identified out of hours support and greater action at points of crisis, particularly following a near fatal overdose as areas of need.</p> <p>The Overdose Response Team (ORT) model was developed to fill this gap and ran as a Test of Change project funded by the DDTF. An independent evaluation published in 2023 showed that this service provided something not available – but much needed – within the current system</p> <p>When the DDTF funding came to an end, so did the service, leaving provision patchy and inconsistent.</p>
---	--

We are looking for our next government to:

- **Commit to ongoing pressure on the UK Government to either reform or devolve the Misuse of Drugs Act:** The MDA is incompatible with the public health approach that was set out 'A caring, compassionate and human rights informed drug policy for Scotland'. But apart from setting out this vision, we have not seen the action needed to make it a reality.
- Establish a standard for **Overdose Response Teams** that reflects the Test of Change evidence of what works and ensure the availability of ORTs across the country through both funding and leadership.

Prioritise Prevention

The focus of much of our drug policy is on responding to crisis, treating and managing harm that has already occurred. We can and should be working towards preventing problematic alcohol and other drug use, and just like homelessness prevention, action must be taken across public service delivery.

Preventing problematic Alcohol and Other Drugs use requires action around poverty, inequality, education and employment, citizenship, justice, physical as well as mental health and social care and support. Our Alcohol and Other Drugs policy should connect to this broader work and must also be more specific and responsive to current risks. We prevent further harm – to the person and to their families and communities – by getting our treatment and support services right.

Instead of forcing people to fit services we make services fit people, meeting them where they are, with what they need, when they need it.

<p>When people choose to abstinance or wish to enter a residential rehabilitation service that requires abstinence, our Stabilisation service is designed to support people in achieving this goal safely.</p> <p>For certain drugs, specifically benzodiazepines, stabilisation in the community can carry significant risk and be more difficult to achieve. Our service provides a residential setting with a specialist, clinical intervention for people who need that additional level of support.</p>	<p>The Citizenship framework is a holistic approach promoting recovery, inclusion of people experiencing drug use, mental health challenges, homelessness and learning disabilities by focusing on a person's strengths and the valuable contributions they can make to their communities. Citizenship is defined as a measure of the strength of an individual's connection to the 5 R's of rights, responsibilities, roles, resources, and relationships that society makes available to its members.</p> <p>Our innovative harm reduction cafes in South and North Lanarkshire are an example of Citizenship in action, with those who attend taking up valued roles, reporting a sense of belonging and leadership in a safe space.</p>
---	---

We are looking for our next government to:

- **Deliver on the commitment to expand stabilisation services:** The government committed to the expansion of stabilisation services as part of the National Mission but has not delivered. We need to see funding structures put in place to ensure access to stabilisation across Scotland.



BECAUSE PEOPLE MATTER

Strengthen Integration

Alcohol and Other Drugs treatment and support is a clear example of the need for both a health and social care input, and to be effective, that input must be coordinated.

Part of what we hoped to achieve through the health and social care integration agenda (built on the Public Bodies (Joint Working) Act 2014) was an improved coordination of action and resources around shared responsibilities, but this agenda has only taken us so far. While strategic structures have been established, and some services have been co-located, significant divisions around budgets, culture and information sharing remain.

The DDTF report (published 8 years later in July 2022) highlighted the barriers created when services turn people away, without a plan for support, because of siloed service design and a lack of partnership-working.

“They can be refused help because they have mental health needs or be denied support with non-drugs issues until they are in treatment for, or abstinent from, drug use... There should be no wrong door to entering support. All services to which people present should ensure no one is turned away without ensuring that supportive contact is made.”

The Scottish Government's response to these DDTF recommendations was to develop the Getting it Right for Everyone (GIRFE) pathfinders to test out a new approach to a more personalised way of delivering support.

We are looking for our next government to:

- **Embed the GIRFE model in our Public Service Reform Strategy:** Although the Minister has indicated that the GIRFE model will be launched as core practice across all Health Boards and Health & Social Care Partnerships across Scotland, the approach was not mentioned in the Government's Public Service Reform strategy.