

Statement on drug deaths in Scotland

12 October 2026

Drug deaths are a human rights issue.

Updated statistics from National Records of Scotland, published on 23 September 2026 (NRS), show an 11% rise in deaths related to illicit drugs. Reporting of these statistics highlighted that Scotland is facing the highest rate of drug deaths in Europe.

This is devastating for the people affected, their families and communities. Death rates are persistently high in Scotland, despite policy commitments to reverse this situation.

The Scottish Human Rights Commission [has been clear](#) that drug deaths are unacceptable and avoidable. While this is a persistent and complex issue, it is not inevitable. Government action must address the root causes as well as the symptoms of drug deaths.

Drug deaths are a human rights issue. We all have the right to life - an absolute right protected under Article 2 of the ECHR and under the Human Rights Act 1998. We also have the right to the highest attainable standard of health. This right is recognised under Article 12 of the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

There is a clear link between deprivation and drug deaths. The SHRC's [spotlight on poverty](#) highlights that poverty is both a cause and a consequence of human rights denials. Drug deaths are also linked to poverty and other human rights denials. The Government should take a human rights based approach to designing and evaluating its plan to tackle this issue and in ensuring adequate remediation and redress.

We have written to the First Minister to ask for an update on how the Government is making this happen.

[Read the letter to the First Minister](#)

[Read the SHRC evidence to the Right to Addiction Recovery \(Scotland\) Bill - Stage 1 January 2025](#)