

Changing Lives: The Drug Deaths Taskforce Final Report

Edinburgh 21 July, 2022: Today marks the publication of the Drug Deaths Taskforce's final report. The report represents 3 years of Taskforce work and sets out our evidence based strategy for tackling Scotland's drug deaths crisis. The report draws on evidence of good practice, both in Scotland and internationally.

Our focus is on reducing drug related deaths and harms and in order to do this, major cultural changes are needed. Stigma kills people. We are therefore calling for an end to stigma, discrimination and punishment creating a new system based on care, compassion and human rights. We have called the report "Changing Lives", because change is needed but also, fundamentally, because change is possible.

Every day in Scotland, three people lose their life to a drug related death, this is tragic and unacceptable. For far too long, this issue has not been given the priority it deserves. While significant UK legislative changes would help to strengthen the public health approach, immediate action is required, therefore we have focused on what Scotland can do now, within its powers, to deliver for its people.

David Strang, Chair of the Taskforce said, "We know that factors such as poverty and inequality, trauma, mental ill health, alcohol and drug dependency are all closely linked. Addiction is not a crime and you cannot punish people out of addiction. That has been the approach for years and it hasn't worked.

What is needed now is a comprehensive, consistent and person centred system of care, which takes account of local need. A system which is appropriately funded to respond to the public health emergency it faces. Our report says what needs to be said and identifies what needs to change."

This report is about looking forward. The transformation outlined will rely on key changes to ensure parity of treatment, respect and regard that would be expected for any other health condition. This means:

- Putting families and people with lived and living experience at the heart of the development and delivery of services.
- Delivering a comprehensive treatment and recovery system which offers quality and choice for those impacted by their own or a

family members drug use, including the full implementation of all 10 MAT Standards in the next 2 years;

- Providing treatment at the point of need, including near fatal overdose pathways, emergency and crisis care, all to an agreed minimum standard;
- Developing the most extensive naloxone network anywhere in the world;
- Providing supervised drug consumption facilities, not as a silver bullet, but as one evidence based tool in a wider system of care;
- Ensuring services are inspected against agreed standards and best practice guidance;
- Making the system easier to navigate for each individual who needs support, providing assertive outreach to make getting support as simple as possible; and
- Fully embedding the public health approach at all stages, including throughout the criminal justice system.

Time and again, experts have explored the evidence and come to the same conclusions, what matters now is that action is taken. There must be a genuine commitment to deliver these recommendations at pace. We need strong decisive leadership, both locally and nationally, backed up by clear accountability lines.

Background:

- In total, the final report outlines 10 key principles and 20 recommendations which are underpinned by 139 actions to tackle the drug related deaths crisis.
- The terms of reference are available here: [Taskforce Mission and Terms of Reference | Drug Deaths Taskforce](#)
- The Taskforce membership is available here: [Our Members | Drug Deaths Taskforce](#)