

Drugs: Policy and Aims

A Manifesto for Scotland

Scottish Drugs Forum

April 2021

Background

For too long public attitudes, political debate and government policy in Scotland failed to take full account of the real drivers of problem drug use. A drug problem is neither a lifestyle choice nor a personal failing; drug problems originate in a lack of support to parents, families and vulnerable young people; the failure of health and other services to engage people in need of support and in Scotland's social, income and health inequalities that result from poverty.

Recently, a consensus has emerged that begins to recognise all this and address problem drug use and the harms caused by drug use as a public health issue.

Scotland needs a new drugs strategy that reflects this reality.

Scotland's new drugs strategy should provide a full response to our drug overdose deaths public health crisis, improve the overall quality of life of people with a drug problem and prevent problem drug use by supporting vulnerable young people and their families. This strategy needs to articulate with government poverty, equalities and other strategies.

1. Driving Change

We need a recognised, voiced, empowered presence for people with an active drug problem in making decisions that affects their lives and people in similar situation.

If we are to create an effective strategy and accessible and acceptable services, the experience and opinions of people with a drug problem cannot be excluded and marginalised within the decision-making structures. People should be encouraged, empowered and supported to engage in the development of strategy and services.

Steps toward this goal in the next parliament will include the development of local and national structures that ensure the opinions and experiences of people with a drug problem are fully articulated and engaged in decision making. Leadership from government and from local champions will help drive this change.

We need to support culture change in services working with people who have a drug problem so people with a drug problem can receive the services they want and need.

Steps toward this goal in the next parliament will include the development and delivery of workforce development activity that allows staff to identify, challenge and eliminate stigmatising practices and build positive relationships with the people they seek to serve.

2. Reducing harm

The strategy should expand and develop an approach that reduces the health and social harms associated with drug use

Steps toward this goal in the next parliament

1. Deliver drug consumption facilities across Scotland by first identifying the specific legal issues and circumventing these through the powers of the Lord Advocate
2. Incentivise engagement with harm reduction services for people who inject drugs by implementing a national rollout of successful local initiatives
3. Invest in HIV and hepatitis testing for all people who may be at risk through drug use, or who have a history of drug use
4. Introduce pre-exposure prophylaxis (PreP) medication for people at particular risk of HIV infection through drug use
5. Develop drug checking services so as to aid removal of the most harmful products from the criminal market
6. Expand the use of alternatives to custody programmes including, where appropriate, drug testing and treatment orders and community pay back orders with the aim of halving the number of people in prison whose crimes are related to their drug problem
7. Decriminalise the possession of all drugs by expanding recorded police warnings to all drugs
8. Review the effectiveness of UK Misuse of Drugs Act which is 50 years old this year and not fit for purpose. Consideration should be given to how the drugs market may be taken out of the hands of organised criminal gangs and regulated.

3. Treatment

Expand and develop a treatment and support service system that

- has a trauma informed approach
- attracts people to engage in treatment
- reduces the harms people endure
- supports people to address the issues they face
- empowers people to identify and challenge stigma

Steps toward this goal in the next parliament

1. Implement the new Medication Assisted Treatment Standards – for people with opiate, benzodiazepine and stimulant based drug problems
2. Double the number of people in treatment
3. Urgently seek to improve services for women with the aim of reducing drug deaths in this group and ensuring women who are mothers are empowered and supported to parent their children
4. Improve social integration for people by expanding and improving employability supports through the development of meaningful activity, volunteering and employment opportunities

4. Prevention

Scotland's drug strategy should prevent problem drug use by addressing the root causes of problem drug use

Steps toward this goal in the next parliament

1. Addressing poverty, income and health inequalities apparent in Scotland by ensuring that the strategies in these areas are effective and that problem drug use reduction is a measure of their success
2. Urgently improve responses to vulnerable families and vulnerable young people – particularly in relation to the development of long term, high quality, support for vulnerable families and employability and mental health services for young people



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