

## Drug-Related Deaths in Scotland and Scottish Borders, 2019 Update

A Scottish Borders Insight produced by the Corporate Performance and Information R&I Team

National Records of Scotland released their 2019 update on Drug-related Deaths in Scotland in December 2020, broken down by cause of death, age, sex, Local Authority Area and Health Board. This insight presents the statistics that are available for Scottish Borders.

### Key Findings

- The number of drug-related deaths in Scotland increased by 6% from 1,187 in 2018 to 1,264 in 2019, representing the highest number since records began.
- In Scottish Borders, the number of drug-related deaths fell by 27% during the same period, from 22 in 2018 to 16 in 2019. This is encouraging but may not be statistically significant due to the much smaller numbers involved.
- Gender splits are not given at Council level but research at a Scottish level showed that nearly 7 in 10 victims were male
- Scottish Borders had an average of 0.13 drug-related deaths per 1,000 population in the period 2015-19. This is well below the Local Authority average of 0.18 per 1,000 and puts Scottish Borders 12<sup>th</sup>-lowest in Scotland, out of the 32 Council areas.
- Of the 16 drug-related deaths in Scottish Borders in 2019, 69% were ruled to be “Accidental poisoning”, compared with 89% in Scotland as a whole.
- 12.5% of the drug-related deaths in Scottish Borders in 2019 were ruled to be “intentional self-poisoning”. This is much higher than the 3% in Scotland as a whole and indicates the toll of mental distress experienced by drug misusers.
- 63% of drug-related deaths in Scottish Borders involved opiates or opioids, often in combination with other prescription or street drugs, or alcohol. The proportion of deaths due to recreational heroin/ morphine overdose in Scottish Borders is half the Scottish rate but the proportion dying from an overdose of prescription opioid painkillers is higher.
- 63% of drug-related deaths in Scottish Borders involved Benzodiazepines, which are prescribed for anxiety and depression. This is similar to the rate in Scotland.
- 25% of drug-related deaths in Scottish Borders resulted at least partly from abuse of MDMA (Ecstasy) and other psychoactive stimulants such as Amphetamines. This rate is much higher than the Scottish average, despite lower numbers
- The peak age groups for drug-related death in Scottish Borders was 35-44, similar to Scotland. However, there is a disproportionately high rate of 15-24s in Scottish Borders, even though numbers are again very low.
- There is evidence that drug misuse, although more common in urban areas, is proportionately more deadly in rural areas with a higher death rate amongst problem users in Council areas such as Scottish Borders, Moray and the Island council areas than other mainland Local Authority areas.

The graph below shows the average rate of drug-related deaths per 1,000 for the five-year period 2015-19. Drug-related deaths tend to occur in spikes due to the movement of “bad batches” of drugs in the drug-using community. Therefore, smoothing the death rate out over a 5 year period can better show longer-term prevailing changes in the trend.

