

Naloxone in Scotland: A National Approach

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Drug-related deaths in Scotland continue to be among the highest in Europe. Over 500 lives are lost each year due to accidental and preventable drug overdoses and most of these deaths involve opioids.

In 2010, following advice from the National Forum on Drug-Related Deaths and three successful small scale pilots, the Scottish Government launched a fully funded National Naloxone Programme. Scottish Drugs Forum was commissioned to coordinate the programme and deliver training for trainers to staff across Scotland.

Training for people who use drugs is delivered as a brief intervention and take-home naloxone is supplied by nurses working in community drug treatment/harm reduction services and across the prison estate to people when they are liberated. Some areas in Scotland also utilise community pharmacies as a supply route, particularly those with injecting equipment provision. There are also now networks of peer educators across the country, in the community and in prisons, who play a key role in engaging those that services find hard to reach.

In October 2014, 3 years of monitoring data showed that almost 14000 take-home kits had been supplied and the baseline monitoring of the programme, which was to see a reduction in deaths within 4 weeks of prison liberation, showed significant progress in this area.

The programme will continue to be funded for a further financial year, however whether this will continue at the same level is currently undergoing review. There are several work streams in progress to expand the programme in to other areas, such as the use of naloxone in custody centres.

There is no doubt that providing people with take-home naloxone is an essential part of any overdose prevention strategy and the outcomes and benefits go beyond saving lives alone.