

# The People's Panel on Reducing Drug Harm and Deaths in Scotland

 SCOTTISH DRUGS FORUM'S ANNUAL  
**# STOP THE DEATHS CONFERENCE**  
27th & 28th August 2025 - Radisson Blu, Glasgow

CONFERENCE SPEAKER

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Scottish Parliament



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# What does the Scottish Parliament do?

## Scrutiny

Check and challenge  
the work of  
Government

## Legislation

Make and  
change laws

Represents  
the people of  
Scotland

## Debate

Talk about  
important issues

## Budget

Check and  
approve Government  
spending and tax  
decisions

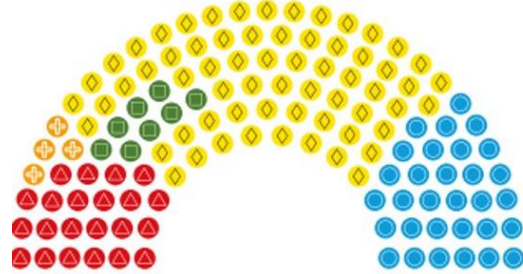




# Scottish Government vs Scottish Parliament

*What's the difference??*

## The Parliament



- Are **all** the MSPs
- Scrutinise and **pass** (or not) each law
- Hold the government to account for:
  - how the laws are working
  - how the Annual Budget is spent

## The Government:



- Are **some** MSPs
- **Propose** most laws
- Implement the laws
- Create the budget
- Spend the money



# What a Parliamentary Committee does

- Currently 15 Committees - themed to devolved issues and Cabinets
- Smaller groups of MSPs from different parties
- Key role in law-making and post-legislative scrutiny
- Key role in scrutinising the Government



# Joint Committee on Reducing drug deaths in Scotland and tackling problem drug use

- The Criminal Justice Committee, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and Social Justice and Social Security Committee are working together
- Considering the progress made on the implementation of the recommendations of the Scottish Drug Deaths Taskforce.
- Meet around once every 6 months...





# People's Panel

- ... to maximise impact and give public a voice in scrutiny the Committees commissioned a People's Panel.
- **‘What does Scotland need to do differently to reduce drug related harms?’**
- The people's panel met over two weekends – on **October 25 to 27** and **November 15 to 17** and two online sessions on **6 and 12 November**



# What is a People's Panel?

## What is a People's Panel and how does it work?



20 to 25 randomly  
selected citizens



They get to hear and  
question expert witnesses



They debate, deliberate,  
and make informed  
recommendations



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# Process

## PLAN

Random  
Selection  
Recruitment

Stewarding  
Board &  
Question

Information &  
Evidence  
Provision

## RUN

Getting the  
group working  
together

Learning Phase

Deliberation

## DECIDE & REPORT

Consensus  
Based Decision  
Making

Recommendations

Passed on to  
Committee and used  
to hold government  
to account



# How did we recruit the People's Panel?

- **Invitation Process:** 5,000 households across Scotland received letters from committee conveners inviting them to register interest in joining a People's Panel on drug-related issues.
- **Selection & Support:** From 205 responses (4.1% rate), a demographically representative group was selected.
- **Participants received travel, accommodation, and a £420 fee** to support inclusive participation.
- **Final Panel Composition:** The final panel included 23 people. While not perfectly representative, the stratified random selection ensured diversity across key demographics.



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You are invited to register your interest in the  
**People's Panel on reducing drug harm and drug deaths in Scotland**

**"What measures should the Scottish Government prioritise  
to tackle drug harm and drug deaths in Scotland?"**

taking place in October and November 2024

Deadline for registering your interest in this event is **Sunday 29 September**  
Register at [www.sortition.uk/scotland](https://www.sortition.uk/scotland)  
or by phone on Freephone 0800 009 6486 (8am-10pm Monday to Friday,  
9am-6pm Saturday, Sunday and bank holidays)



Take part  
and receive  
£420



# Who took part in the People's Panel?

Broadly representative in terms of:

- Gender
- Age
- Location
- Educational Attainment
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Attitudes towards drug use



*“I feel that everyone that had attended from the length and breadth of Scotland's different age groups, different backgrounds, different economic situations” –*

Participant Interview, External Evaluation

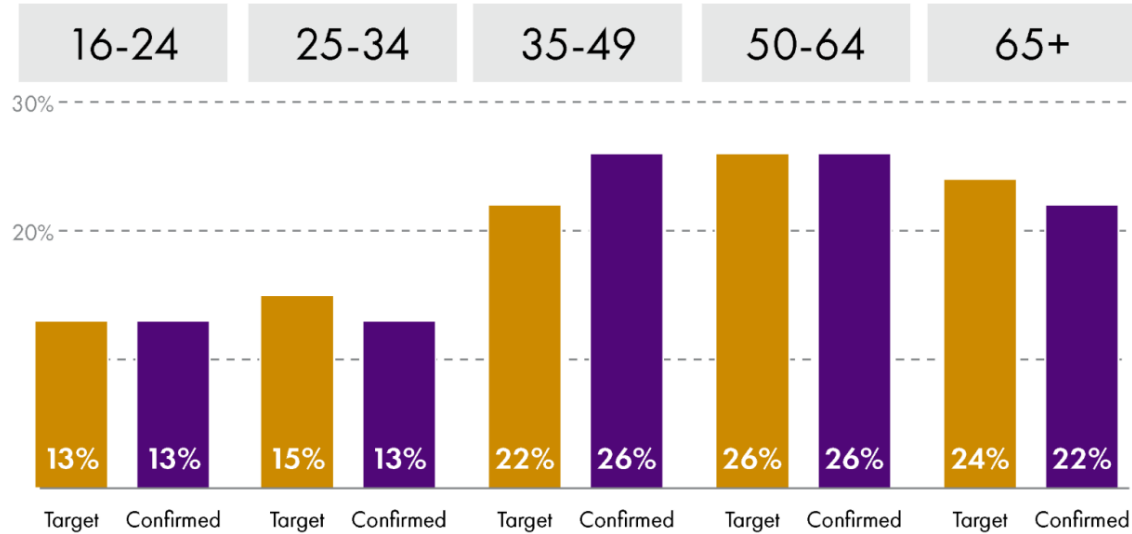


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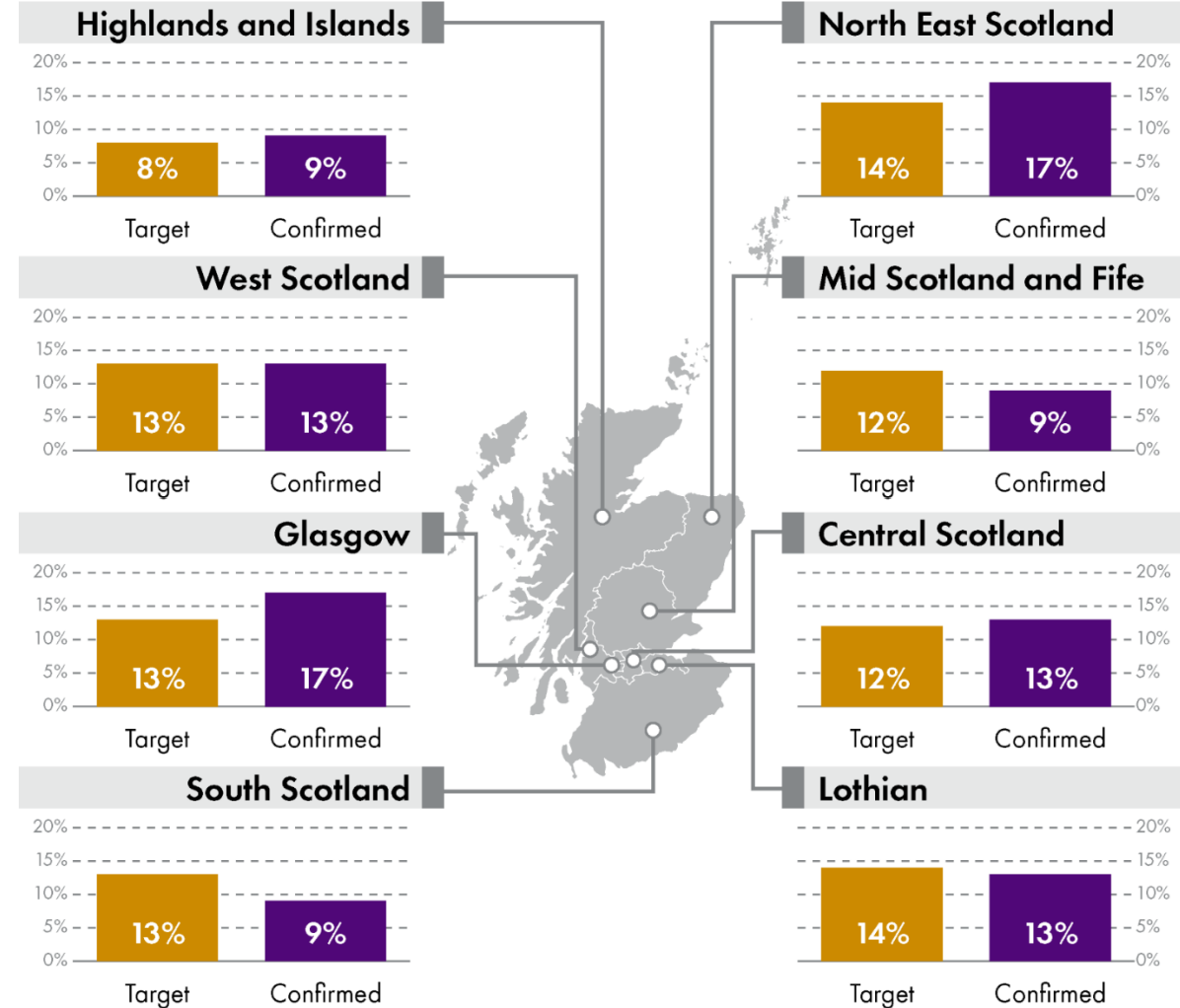
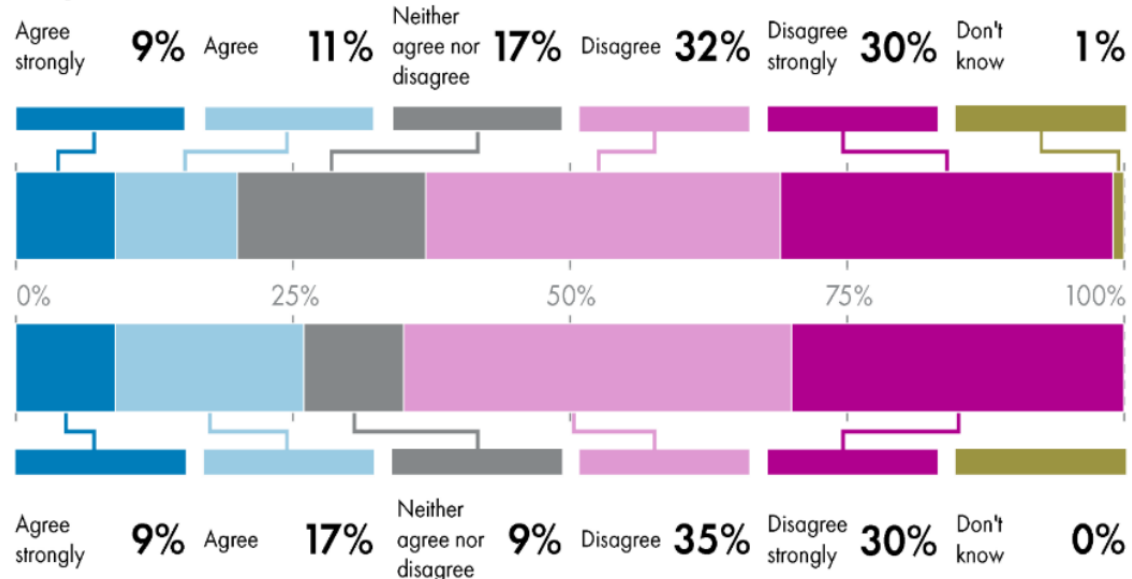
# Who took part in the People's Panel?

## Age

The participants closely matched National Records of Scotland data in all age categories



## Target



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# What did they learn?

- **An independent Stewarding Board.** Their expertise covered harm reduction, public health, criminal justice, law enforcement, recovery, lived experience and youth work.
- Help ensure that the process is **conducted fairly, credibly, and transparently** and that the information provided to the Panel is **fair and balanced and of a high standard.**

**6**

**onboarding  
sessions**

- Role of Parliament
- Respectful dialogue
- Deliberation
- Trauma and self-care

**34**

**witnesses**

- Context and impact
- Current measures
- Different approaches from treatment, recovery, and justice sectors

**Participant  
driven**

- Prevention
- Access to Treatment, Care and Support
- Justice and Drug Law Reform
- Participation, Rights and Lived Experience

**7 reflection  
and drafting  
sessions**

- Discussing evidence
- Collaborative drafting of recommendations
- Collective decision making process

# What were the recommendations?: Collective Statement

## **Lack of implementation**

“The panel strongly believe that the same conversations keep happening, with the same actions being agreed but not enough has been implemented. The panel recognise there has been some progress, for example naloxone programmes and safer drug consumption room implementation, however, this is not nearly enough action.”

## **Longer term Funding**

## **Communication and increased public awareness**

## **Importance of living and lived experience**

## **Time of implementation and planning**

“The panel agree this is a public health emergency and directly affects large numbers of the population. The panel have concluded that the length of time taken to address this issue is unacceptable.”



# What were the 19 recommendations?:

## Rights & Lived Experience

- Human Rights Bill
- Anti-Stigma Training
- More (fairly paid) roles for lived experience in addiction workforce

## Justice and Law Reform

- De-penalisation
- Increase drug courts
- Justice sector to refer to NHS & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector support
- Parliamentary inquiry into drug harm in prisons

## Treatment, care and support

- Single point of access for specialised advice
- Single shared assessments
- 5 year minimum funding
- MAT Standards equivalent for all drugs

## Prevention

- Drug education
- High tolerance approach
- Employability
- Avoiding 'cliff edge'
- Poverty
- Naloxone awareness





# What has the impact been so far?

- 🗣️ **Direct citizen testimony:** Panel participants gave evidence to committees on 20 Feb 2025.
- ⚡ **Immediate government response:** Cabinet Secretary questioned directly after panel evidence.
- 🏛️ **Influenced parliamentary debate:** Led to a dedicated Chamber debate on the report on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2025
- 🔍 **Strengthened scrutiny:** Prompted further examination of government drug harm strategies and inquiry into drug harm in prisons
- 🤝 **Strengthened democratic participation:** Parliament recognised and responded to public-led insights.
- 🤝 **Model for inclusive scrutiny:** Demonstrated how public input can drive timely, accountable action.



# What has the impact been so far?

✅ **13 of 19 recommendations fully accepted** by the Scottish Government; 5 accepted in principle.

📄 **Human Rights Bill** to be introduced next session; Charter of Rights published Dec 2024.

## 👜 **Support for lived experience workforce:**

- *Guiding Principles* for employers.
- *Employability Toolkits* for career pathways.
- *Workforce Knowledge & Skills Framework* launched.

## ⚖️ **Justice reform:**

- Exploration with courts on expanding drug courts.
- Criminal Justice Committee currently delivering inquiry into drug harm in prisons

## 🔄 **Improved information sharing:**

- Legislation planned via National Care Service Bill (Part 2, Section 36).

## 💰 **Funding reform:**

- Fairer Funding pilot with 2-year commitments for eligible organisations.



# What will happen next?



**Joint Committee to reconvene in Autumn** to hear progress update from the Minister.



**Criminal Justice Committee inquiry** into drug harm in prisons to report before session ends.



**Parliamentary business actively monitored** to track further impact of Panel's recommendations.



**Sustained scrutiny:** Ensures government accountability and continued focus on drug harm reduction led by public input.





# External Evaluation


**“For participants themselves, this experience was extremely positive. They showed improvements across learning outcomes, a better understanding of the topics and institutions they interacted with, and felt empowered. Some feedback was highly emotional, reflecting how this civic space reconnected them with the political sphere.”**




# The People's Panel on Reducing Drug Harm and Deaths in Scotland


READ THE REPORT







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**People's Panel on  
reducing drug harm  
and deaths in  
Scotland**

**Final Report**  
21.01.2025  
SP Paper 722





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