

LIVING EXPERIENCE DRUG TRENDS

BULLETIN

JAN—JUN 2026

INTRODUCTION



Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) has 12 Living Experience Engagement Groups across Scotland:

- Borders
- East Ayrshire
- Edinburgh
- Falkirk
- Fife
- Glasgow
- Highland
- Moray
- North Lanarkshire
- Perth and Kinross
- South Lanarkshire
- West Dunbartonshire

Our groups provide a safe space for people who currently use drugs and/or are on medication assisted treatment. During meetings, group members share issues that are important to them, including drug trends information.

This bulletin includes both anecdotal insights shared by group members and test results from samples submitted to the WEDINOS postal testing service by group members and others across Scotland.



NATIONAL TRENDS

THE MOST REPORTED SUBSTANCES FROM JAN—JUNE 2026

Substance	Geographical areas identified	Key intelligence themes
Heroin	12/12 areas	• Consistently reported across all areas • Key concerns included variable potency and quality, suspected synthetic opioid contamination (particularly nitazenes), overdose risks, changing appearance/consistency and unpredictable effects
Illicit benzodiazepines (benzos)	11/12 areas	• Widespread availability • Increasing concerns regarding unpredictable strength and contents • Reported harms included blackouts, prolonged sedation, memory loss, psychosis, seizures and increased overdose risk
Crack cocaine	8/12 areas	• Continued availability across multiple areas • Increasing reports of cocaine powder turned into crack (“washback”) • Participants highlighted inconsistent quality, variable effects and concerns regarding adulteration
Illicit pregabalin	8/12 areas	• Widely available across several reporting areas • Concerns regarding uncertain origin, variable strength, involvement in poly-drug use and increased risk of overdose and other harms



REGIONAL TRENDS

BORDERS

There was said to be no new changes in the local drug market during the reporting period. Discussions focused on alcohol-related harms, with participants consistently describing daily alcohol use as having a substantial impact on finances, mental wellbeing and physical health. Amphetamine (known as “base”) remained available locally, while there were few reports relating to heroin, cocaine or emerging synthetic substances.

EAST AYRSHIRE

Groups members said that this was one of the most concerning reporting periods for the area, characterised by poor-quality heroin, widespread availability of illicit benzos and increasing concerns regarding synthetics within the local drug supply.

Participants consistently described significant variation in heroin quality and potency, including reports of green or yellow residue during preparation. Concerns were raised that heroin may have been adulterated with nitazenes or other synthetic opioids due to reports of rapid sedation and overdose-like symptoms following consumption.

Crack cocaine remained readily available across the area but was frequently described as inconsistent and poor quality. Participants reported sore throats, mouth ulcers and excessive sedation, with some believing cocaine products were increasingly being mixed with unidentified substances, contributing to unpredictable effects and increased risks.

Illicit benzos remained a major concern within East Ayrshire, with tablets sold as diazepam or “Roche products”. These were associated with prolonged sedation, seizures, blackouts, memory loss and severe withdrawal symptoms. Illicit pregabalin was also reported to follow a similar pattern, with participants describing capsules that appeared stronger and longer lasting than expected, raising concerns regarding increased toxicity.

The most concerning intelligence related to reports of suspected drug-related deaths within the area. Participants on several occasions discussed their concerns over what they believed to be suspected drug related deaths within their local area', reinforcing concerns that the local illicit drug supply has become increasingly unpredictable and hazardous. Overall, intelligence highlights significant risks associated with changing drug consumption, synthetic adulterants and the ongoing prevalence of high-risk poly-drug use.



REGIONAL TRENDS

EDINBURGH

Alongside Glasgow, group members reported that Edinburgh was felt to be one of Scotland's most diverse and established illicit drug markets, with widespread availability of cocaine, heroin, illicit benzos, illicit pregabalin and ketamine throughout the reporting period. Participants described a highly accessible and developed market supported by local supply networks, organised distribution and increasing use of encrypted messaging services and text-based ordering systems.

Cocaine remained widely available, although participants consistently reported significant variation in quality, potency and effects between dealers. Increasing concerns were raised regarding potential adulteration with bulking agents or other substances, with participants linking this to hallucinations. Increased financial pressures were associated with attempting to achieve the desired effects.

Heroin intelligence suggested periods of increased potency, with participants reporting stronger effects from relatively small amounts and heightened concerns regarding overdose risk. Poly-drug use remained a consistent feature of local drug use patterns, particularly involving combinations of heroin with illicit benzos, pregabalin or prescribed opioid substitution medications.

Illicit benzos continued to be widely available across Edinburgh. Many tablets were described by participants as diazepam, highlighting ongoing concerns regarding the presence of other benzos within the local market. Overall, poly-drug use remained a dominant theme across reported substances, increasing the potential for overdose and contributing to greater unpredictability in drug effects.

ELGIN

Participants described a diverse and evolving illicit drug market, with continued availability of heroin, crack cocaine, ketamine and illicit benzos alongside increasing reports of online purchasing.

Participants described obtaining substances including ketamine, amphetamine and oxycodone through cryptocurrency and darknet markets, suggesting an expansion beyond traditional local supply routes.

Changes in purchasing and preparation practices were also reported, with crack cocaine increasingly being purchased as powder and turned into crack ("washed back"). Participants perceived these products to be of higher quality than ready-made crack. Reports also highlighted considerable variation in heroin quality throughout the reporting period, with batches unusually potent and poor-quality batches identified.



REGIONAL TRENDS

FALKIRK

There was continued widespread availability of heroin, crack cocaine, illicit benzos and illicit pregabalin throughout the reporting period. Participants described an increasingly accessible drug market, with supply facilitated through social media platforms, text messaging services and home delivery, enabling rapid access to a range of substances.

Changes in purchasing and preparation practices were also reported, with participants frequently describing the purchase of cocaine powder to “wash back” into crack cocaine. This reflected changing market behaviours driven by perceptions of improved purity, value and stronger effects.

Illicit benzos remained a significant concern, with participants reporting tablets associated with rapid intoxication, prolonged sedation and blackouts. Access to pharmaceutical pregabalin was reported to be increasingly limited, resulting in greater reliance on illicit pregabalin of uncertain origin. Growing awareness of synthetic opioid risks was also identified, reflecting increasing concerns regarding the potential presence of nitazenes within the wider drug supply.

FIFE

Discussions from Fife indicated an increasingly diverse illicit drug market, with cocaine, crack cocaine, illicit benzos, illicit pregabalin, ketamine and cannabis products all widely reported. Participants consistently described changes in the quality of cocaine between dealers, including potential adulteration and fluctuating purity.

Changes in patterns of use were also identified, with more participants reporting smoking cocaine rather than injecting. Poly-drug use remained common, particularly involving pregabalin, benzos and heroin.



REGIONAL TRENDS

GLASGOW

Alongside Edinburgh, Glasgow was reported to be one of Scotland's largest and most dynamic illicit drug markets. Group members felt that there was a larger choice of different substances available, with heroin, crack cocaine, cocaine, illicit benzos, illicit pregabalin and ketamine remaining widely available throughout the reporting period. Participants also described increasing use of social media platforms and home delivery services to access drugs, alongside growing reports of online purchasing, reflecting continued changes in local supply routes.

Changes in consumption patterns were also identified, with participants increasingly reporting the purchase of cocaine powder to “wash back” into crack cocaine, based on perceptions that it produced a higher-quality product. Crack cocaine remained widely available across the city, with participants also describing increased public visibility of crack smoking.

Considerable variation in heroin quality was reported across localities. Participants expressed ongoing concerns about the potential presence of nitazenes after experiencing rapid intoxication and overdose-like symptoms following relatively small amounts, while reports of non-fatal overdoses remained common.

INVERNESS

Discussions indicated a highly variable illicit drug market, with heroin, cocaine, illicit benzos and ketamine available throughout the reporting period. Participants consistently described marked variation in heroin potency, with some batches producing little effect while others resulted in profound sedation after relatively small amounts. Reports of green residue during preparation also raised concerns about the potential presence of unidentified adulterants.

Illicit benzos remained widely available and were commonly associated with blackouts, prolonged intoxication, memory loss and unpredictable behaviour.

Participants also reported considerable variation in cocaine quality, describing inconsistent effects and suspecting products were frequently mixed with bulking agents. Poly-drug use remained common across the local drug market.



REGIONAL TRENDS

NORTH LANARKSHIRE

There were ongoing concerns regarding high-strength heroin, increasing availability of illicit benzos and the potential presence of synthetic opioids within the local drug supply. Participants frequently described heroin producing overdose-like effects following relatively small amounts, alongside reports of green residue during preparation and persistent ringing in the ears.

Intelligence from group members repeatedly suggested the possible presence of nitazenes within the heroin supply, although laboratory confirmation was not available for reported incidents.

Cocaine remained widely available, with participants reporting inconsistent effects and concerns that products were increasingly mixed with unidentified substances.

Overall, the information reported by participants would suggest a highly active and evolving drug market, with increasing complexity, changing supply routes and heightened risks associated with unpredictable changes in substances.

PERTH AND KINROSS

There were increasing concerns regarding heroin, crack cocaine, illicit benzos and illicit pregabalin throughout the reporting period. Participants consistently described unusually potent illicit benzos, with reports of non-fatal overdoses, prolonged unconsciousness and emergency hospital admissions following relatively small amounts.

Heroin quality was reported to vary considerably, with participants describing both highly potent batches and cream-coloured heroin perceived to be weaker in effect. Intelligence from group members also identified concerns regarding possible xylazine contamination, alongside reports of unusual syrup-like consistency during heroin preparation, raising concerns about changes in drug composition and potential adulterants.

Participants are of the belief that illicit pre-gabalin may be linked to suspected DRD's Overall, intelligence from group members suggests an increasingly unpredictable local drug market, characterised by potential synthetic adulterants and heightened risks associated with toxicity and overdose.



REGIONAL TRENDS

SOUTH LANARKSHIRE

Discussions indicated an active heroin and crack cocaine market, supported by home delivery services and daily text-based supply networks. Participants described considerable variation in crack cocaine quality, with increasing numbers reporting the purchase of cocaine powder to “wash back” into crack cocaine, based on perceptions that this produced a higher-quality product.

Illicit pregabalin remained widely available alongside prescribed medication. Illicit benzos continued to be associated with a range of harms, including paranoia, psychosis, prolonged intoxication and memory loss.

Nitazene test strips were discussed and used within local services, reflecting growing awareness of synthetic opioid risks. Poly-drug use remained widespread across substances, increasing the potential for overdose and other drug-related harms.

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE

There was said to be a highly volatile illicit drug market, with some of the strongest reports of emerging synthetic substances identified during the reporting period. Participants consistently described changes in heroin appearance and effects, including altered colour, jelly-like residue during preparation and periods of unusually high potency followed by significantly weaker batches. These reports raised ongoing concerns about heroin quality and the potential presence of adulterants.

Illicit benzos remained widely available in multiple forms and strengths. Drug checking identified a number of different substances in submitted samples, highlighting the variability of substances being sold as benzos within the area. Participants also reported severe dehydration, prolonged unconsciousness, blackouts and unpredictable behaviour following use.

Heroin quality was reported to deteriorate during the latter part of the reporting period, with some participants describing withdrawal symptoms despite continued use. Crack cocaine, illicit pregabalin and ketamine also remained readily available. Overall, intelligence suggested an increasingly unpredictable drug market.

TRENDS FROM ENGAGEMENT GROUPS

Emerging or notable trends

- **Growing market and instability.** Several areas reported increasingly varied illicit markets, with marked fluctuations in heroin and cocaine quality, suggesting inconsistent supply and possible adulteration.
- **Expansion of online and social-media-enabled supply.** Glasgow, Elgin and Falkirk in particular highlighted increasing use of encrypted messaging, text services, home delivery, darknet markets and social media to access drugs.
- **“Wash back” as a recurring purchasing pattern.** In Fife, Elgin, Glasgow, South Lanarkshire and Falkirk, participants increasingly reported buying cocaine powder and turning it into crack themselves, often because they believed it produced a better-quality product.
- **Continued harms linked to illicit benzos and pregabalin.** Across several areas, these substances were associated with blackouts, prolonged sedation, memory loss, psychosis, seizures and overdose risk. This shows they remain a major driver of harm.
- **Newer substances.** Ketamine use was repeatedly described as increasing across several groups.
- **Poly-drug use.** Mixing heroin, benzos, pregabalin and other substances remained common across most areas, increasing overdose risk and complicating harm reduction messaging.
- **Localised concerns in East Ayrshire.** This stood out as the most high-risk group, including suspected drug-related deaths, highly unpredictable heroin, and strong concerns about synthetic contamination.

WEDINOS RESULTS

FROM LIVING EXPERIENCE GROUP SAMPLES (JAN—JUNE 2026)

Samples submitted

The Living Experience Engagement team has supported group attendees in accessing substance testing through WEDINOS.

Over the period January – June 2026, 16 samples were sent for testing.

Intended purchases	Results
Heroin (two samples)	• One sample was not returned (January) • One sample was not analysed due to multiple samples with same reference number (May)
Illicit benzos (seven samples)	• Two samples consisted of diazepam • Two samples consisted of bromazolam • One sample consisted of clonazepam • One sample consisted of medetomidine • One sample was sent but not returned (January)
Cocaine powder (two samples)	• One sample consisted of MDMA, amphetamine and caffeine • One sample was not analysed due to multiple samples with same reference number (May)
Crack cocaine (two samples)	• One sample consisted of cocaine, benzoylecgonine and ecgonine methyl ester • One sample sent but not returned (February)
Pregabalin (one sample)	• Pregabalin
Herbal cannabis (one sample)	• THC
Cannabis vape (one sample)	• Sent but not returned (May)

NATIONAL TRENDS

WEDINOS RESULTS (JAN—MAY 2026)

Samples submitted

At Scottish Drugs Forum, we actively encourage and support the use of WEDINOS confirmatory testing for anyone concerned about the contents of the substances they use. This commitment is reflected across all our programmes of work and the networks we facilitate, including the Scottish Needle Exchange Workers Forum (SNEWF) and Scottish Naloxone Network (ScoNN).

In the reporting period, 355 samples have been sent to WEDINOS from Scotland for testing. Samples were sent from Argyll and Bute, Ayrshire and Arran, Borders, Dumfries and Galloway, Fife, Forth Valley, Grampian, Greater Glasgow and Clyde, Highlands, Lanarkshire, Lothian, Orkney, Shetland and Tayside.

Samples included drugs bought or sold as heroin, cocaine, MDMA, ketamine, benzos, various painkiller-type tablets, amphetamines, cannabis, mephedrone, and “unknown” substances.

30

samples involved drugs
intended to be cocaine
and crack cocaine

35

samples involved drugs
intended to be heroin

162

samples involved drugs
intended to be various
types of benzos

NATIONAL TRENDS CONTINUED

WEDINOS RESULTS (JAN—MAY 2026)

Results

The WEDINOS results for Scotland during this period highlighted the ever-changing supply and unpredictability of our market, with many results not being what someone intended to purchase.

Cocaine	• Unexpected contaminants in cocaine included heroin, paracetamol, metonitazene, 6-MAM, ketamine and phenacetin • 15 samples contained cocaine only • 11 samples contained cocaine and other common adulterant drugs • Three samples contained unexpected results • One sample contained no cocaine, testing positive instead for MDMA, amphetamine, and caffeine
Heroin	• 19 samples tested positive for a nitazene-type drug • 12 samples tested positive for a xylazine-type drug, specifically medetomidine
Benzos	• The benzo market is ever evolving and changing. Of 162 samples: • 100 contained the benzo the person intended to purchase • 59 were an extensive mix of various substances including nethylpentedrone, ethylbromazolam, clorpheniramine, bromazolam, tapentadol, methylclonazepam, etizolam, nitrazepam, clonazolam, phenazepam, ketamine, MDMA, cocaine, paracetamol and medetomidine • Three contained no active component

Eight samples intended to be diazepam were 100% medetomidine. Medetomidine toxicity and withdrawal can be medically complicated, and poses a high overdose risk associated with sudden collapse.

SDF encourages samples of all substances to continue to be sent to WEDINOS to build a clearer picture of Scotland's current drug landscape. This information helps ensure harm reduction advice, alerts and public messaging remain accurate, up to date and responsive to emerging trends; helping keep people as safe as possible. While some samples (such as pregabalin, diazepam and zopiclone) may be confirmed by WEDINOS to be the substance intended, there is no guarantee of the strength or concentration. Tablets that appear to be legitimate, purchased online via various overseas pharmacies, or come in official looking packaging, are not guaranteed to be what the individual expects.



A Scotland free from drug-related health and social harm.



VISION



MISSION

To improve Scotland's approach to drug-related issues. We influence this through our work by striving for compassionate, inclusive, evidence informed policy and practice.

CONTACT US

For more information about the trends outlined in this bulletin or for further details about the regional living experience groups, please contact us.



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