



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

What is this initiative?

In 2024, three Scottish Parliament committees commissioned a People's Panel to hear evidence on the current state of drug-related harms and deaths in Scotland. The People's Panel was set up to make recommendations to answer the question: What does Scotland need to do differently to reduce drug-related harms?

How does it work?

A People's Panel is a form of public engagement and deliberation, which brings together a randomly selected and broadly representative sample of the population to learn about an issue, discuss it, and make policy recommendations. People's Panels give people the opportunity to contribute and deliberate on key issues, giving parliamentary committees informed public input to support their scrutiny role.

Following a topic selection process involving Conveners of all Scottish Parliament committees (known as the Convenors Group) and parliamentary officials, three committees jointly commissioned this People's Panel (Criminal Justice, Health, Social Care & Sport, and Social Justice, & Social Security).

The People's Panel consisted of 23 randomly selected individuals aged 16 to 75. The participants were chosen via invitations sent to 5,000 households across Scotland and those selected participated in two residential weekends at the Scottish Parliament and two online sessions in October and November 2024.

The recruitment process, managed by the Sortition Foundation, was designed to ensure diversity and inclusion. The panel broadly reflected Scotland's demographics in terms of gender, age, region, ethnicity, disability, educational level, and attitudes towards drug harm.

A Stewarding Board of experts oversaw the process to ensure fairness, credibility, and transparency. Their expertise covered areas such as drugs law and policy, lived experiences of drug harm, justice, drug law enforcement, and youth-related drug issues. The Board approved the overarching question for the People's Panel, contributed to the design of the session structures and identified expert witnesses.

The People's Panel covered a wide range of evidence, including background to drug policy; the impact of drug harm; the current measures being delivered by the Scottish Government and various approaches from the drugs treatment and recovery and justice sectors. The panel focused on seven core themes: Access to Treatment Care and Support; Prevention; Justice and Law Reform; Harm Reduction Programmes; Participation, Rights and Lived Experience;



the Workforce; and Tackling Stigma. Participants were also empowered to choose topics for further evidence during the second weekend.

The decision-making process involved drafting an overarching collective statement and detailed recommendations under thematic categories. Recommendations were refined through small group discussions, with rounds of voting and amendments. Only recommendations that secured the support of 87% or more of participants were included in the final report.

Impact

After two weekends, the panel agreed a collective statement and nineteen recommendations covering issues such as, rights, lived experience, justice, and law reform. The Panel's recommendations were considered by the members of the three committees, followed by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care providing a formal response to the People's Panel report.

The Scottish Government accepted eighteen of these recommendations, leading to commitments to develop:

- A 'Guiding Principles' document setting out how employers can best support employees with lived and living experience of substance use
- Two 'Employability Support Toolkits' to support those with lived and living experience to pursue careers in the substance use sector
- A Drugs and Alcohol Workforce Knowledge and Skills Framework for those supporting people to address their substance use challenges
- Engagement with the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service around the feasibility of a further expansion of drug courts

The process also demonstrated how people can contribute to decisions on complex social challenges when they are given the opportunity, time, information, and support to deliberate together. As the independent, external evaluation of this people's panel found, participants' views greatly improved towards the parliament and its work following their experience on the panel.

Where to find out more?

[Final committee report](#)

[Independent evaluation](#)

[Clerks note including Scottish government response](#)