

Scottish officials approve UK's first drug consumption room intended for safer use of illegal drugs

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A view of a mock drugs consumption room - where users take heroin under medical supervision - staged at Colston Hall in Bristol, Jan. 24, 2020. Scottish authorities on Wednesday, Sept. 27, 2023 approved a 2.3 million-pound (\$2.8 million) pound drug consumption room, the first government-backed place in the

U.K. where users can take illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroine under the supervision of medical staff. Local officials in the Scottish city of Glasgow on Wednesday approved the facility, which had long been delayed by political disagreements. Credit: Claire Hayhurst/PA via AP, File

Scottish authorities on Wednesday approved a 2.3 million-pound (\$2.8 million) pound drug consumption room, the first government-backed place in the U.K. where users can take illegal drugs such as cocaine and heroin under the supervision of medical staff.

Local officials in the Scottish city of Glasgow on Wednesday approved the facility, which had long been delayed by political disagreements. Authorities hope the [pilot project](#) will help tackle drug misuse problems in Scotland, which has the highest drug death figures in Western Europe and saw almost three times the rate of drug poisoning deaths compared to the U.K. average in 2021.

The facility, which will start recruiting staff next year, was first proposed in 2016 following an HIV outbreak in Glasgow among people who injected drugs in public places. It's backed by the Scottish government, although some lawmakers have raised concerns about the impact on [local residents](#) and businesses.

Proponents, including Scotland's drug and alcohol policy minister Elena Whitham, say evidence from more than 100 similar facilities worldwide, including in Germany and the Netherlands, show they work to save lives and reduce overall costs to [health services](#).

The center will be staffed by trained [health care professionals](#) and offer a hygienic environment where people can consume drugs they obtained elsewhere.

Officials say people can't share drugs with others in the facility, and that health and [social workers](#) at the center will offer advice and support on recovery and welfare. They added that the center doesn't encourage drug use but promotes harm reduction and reduces overdoses.

In a report, Glasgow officials, including health professionals, said there was "overwhelming international evidence" that such facilities reduce the negative impact of drug use in public spaces, in particular the risk of infection and risks to the public from discarded needles.

It said that following the 2016 HIV outbreak, an assessment found there were "approximately 400 to 500 people injecting drugs in [public places](#) in Glasgow city center on a regular basis."

Official figures for last year showed that 1,051 people died in Scotland because of drug misuse, a decrease compared to recent years but still far higher than the rest of the U.K. and most places in Europe. The city of Glasgow had the worst problem, with 44 such deaths per 100,000 people.

Whitham said Scotland's government has committed 2.35 million pounds a year from 2024 to fund the pilot facility.

Scotland's devolved government makes its own policy decisions on matters such as health and education. The U.K.-wide government in London has previously said it does not support such facilities in England and Wales, citing concerns that they condone or encourage drug use.

The Scottish government, which often takes more liberal positions on [social issues](#) than the Conservative administration in London, has proposed decriminalizing possession of all drugs for personal use. But that suggestion was blocked by the U.K. government in London, which said it had no plans to soften drug laws.

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