

# Safer consumption and drug checking facilities key to addressing drug harms in Edinburgh, report finds

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Edinburgh, Scotland. Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

Safer drug consumption facilities (SDCF) and drug checking could be key to addressing drug harms in the city of Edinburgh, according to

University of Stirling experts in substance use.

A study commissioned by the City of Edinburgh Council and the Edinburgh Alcohol and Drugs Partnership in the wake of concerns over [drug-related deaths](#) in the city recommends that SDCFs be set up in a number of locations, and that facilities and staff are equipped to address significant changes in patterns of drug use in Edinburgh.

Changing patterns of drug use in the city include: concerning numbers of people injecting cocaine; use of multiple drugs at the same time; and high levels of harm from the use of benzodiazepines, a class of depressant drugs usually prescribed for anxiety and insomnia.

Edinburgh's "complex and variable" patterns of drug consumption mean SDCFs would need to do more than accommodate people injecting heroin, say researchers.

Interviewees for the study—which included 22 people with living experience of injecting drug use, as well as families and professionals working in health, housing, treatment and other services—were strongly supportive of SDCF provision as part of a wider harm reduction and treatment response. They viewed SDCFs as non-judgmental spaces which could help signpost people towards services and treatment.

More than 200 SDCFs operate globally in at least 12 countries. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde plans to open an SDCF in Glasgow this year. Evidence shows they can reduce overdose risks, support safer injecting practices and provide harm reduction advice for people attending the facilities.

City of Edinburgh Councilors will meet in March to discuss the SDCF study, which was carried out by the University of Stirling, Glasgow Caledonian University, University of Glasgow and Figure 8 Consultancy.

Dr. James Nicholls, senior lecturer in public health at the University of Stirling, said, "While safer drug consumption facilities are not a silver bullet, our study indicates they could provide vital support for marginalized and [vulnerable groups](#) in Edinburgh and play an important role in addressing the high levels of drug harms in the city."

Also up for discussion in March is a feasibility study on drug checking services (DCS) in Edinburgh. Commissioned in parallel with the SDCF report and also carried out by the University of Stirling, it found a need and demand for flexible, accessible and user-friendly drug checking facilities.

The University of Stirling recently published its [findings](#) from a wider report into drug checking services in Scotland. It found that demand was high for a range of different DCS across the three proposed pilot areas—Aberdeen, Dundee and Glasgow. All three cities are working toward applying for Home Office licenses which are required to run these services.

Dr. Hannah Carver, senior lecturer in [substance use](#) at the University of Stirling said, "The results of both these studies into DCS show that drug checking services in Scotland need to be adaptable to local needs. There clearly is not a one-size-fits-all solution."

**More information:** The reports are available online:  
[www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads ... -feasibility-studies](http://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads...-feasibility-studies)

Provided by University of Stirling

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