

# Homeless Deaths

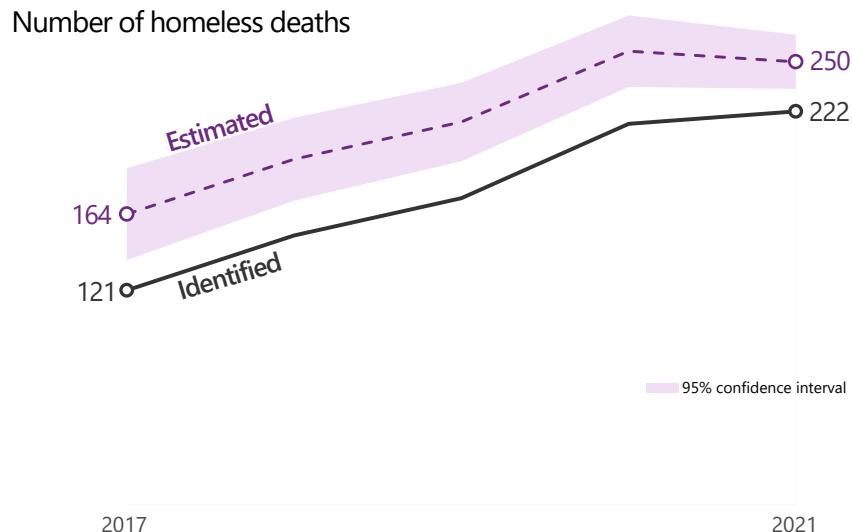
## 2021

Published on 22 November 2022

This statistical report includes estimates of the number of homeless deaths registered in Scotland during 2021. It includes breakdowns by sex and age-group, council area and cause of death. These are **Experimental Statistics** and remain under development. Users should refer to the limitations section of this report before interpreting these statistics.

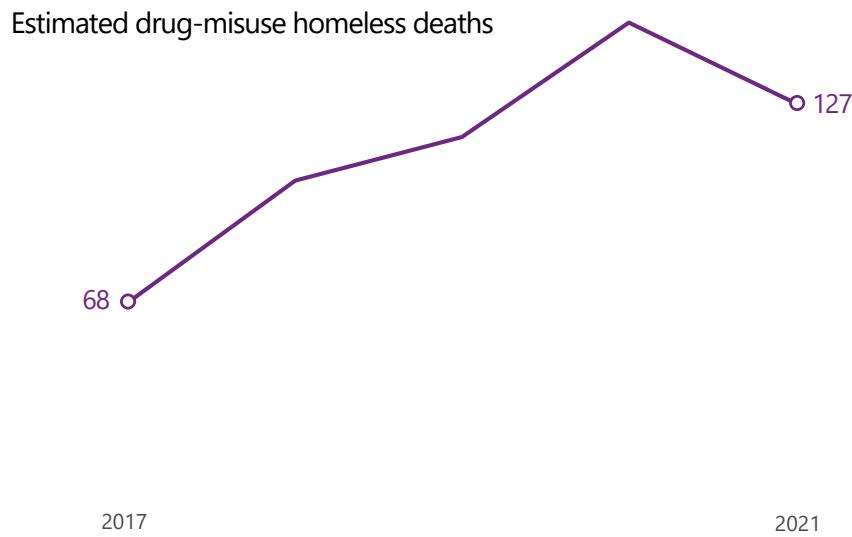
## Homeless deaths in 2021 remained at similar level to the previous year

There were an estimated 250 homeless deaths in Scotland in 2021. This is at a similar level to 2020. Homeless deaths were at a higher level now compared to 2017, when these statistics were first collected.



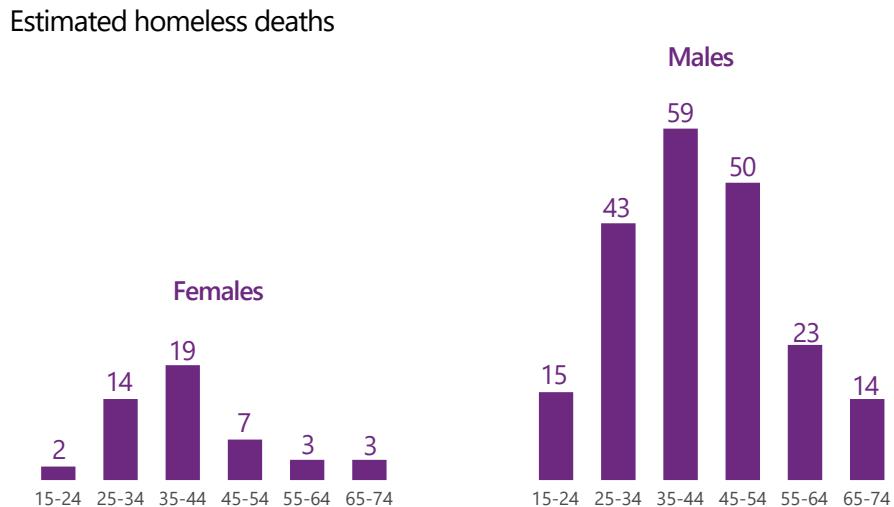
## Homeless drug-misuse deaths fell, but still represent over half of homeless deaths

In 2021 there were an estimated 127 drug-misuse deaths of people experiencing homelessness. While this is a fall over the past year, drug-misuse still accounted for 51% of all homeless deaths.



## Four out of five homeless deaths were male

The most common age group for females and males was 35-44. A higher proportion of female deaths are under 45, with 72%. For males 58% of deaths were under 45.



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## 1. Main Points

- There were an estimated 250 deaths of people experiencing homelessness registered in Scotland in 2021. This is similar to the level in 2020. Homeless deaths are at a higher level now compared to 2017, when these statistics were first collected.
- Midlothian, Glasgow City and City of Edinburgh had the highest rates of homeless deaths per million population (aged 15-74) in 2021. Due to small numbers, the local authority level figures can fluctuate from year to year.
- 81% of homeless deaths were male and 19% were female.
- 60% of homeless deaths were people aged under 45.
- Drug-misuse deaths of people experiencing homelessness fell in the past year for the first time, from 151 to 127. Drug-misuse deaths still make up over half of all homeless deaths in Scotland (127 deaths, 51% of the total number of deaths).
- Estimates of homeless deaths in other parts of the UK are not comparable with those for Scotland. An article, (jointly published by statistics producers across the UK) explains the reasons for this in more detail.

These statistics include people who were in temporary accommodation at the time of their death as well as those who were sleeping rough.

## 2. Introduction

This report provides **experimental statistics** on deaths of people experiencing homelessness in Scotland. Figures are provided for deaths registered in 2021, with breakdowns by sex and age-group, local authority and cause of death. [Experimental Statistics](#) are those that are in the testing phase and not yet fully developed. They have not yet been assessed against the rigorous quality standards of National Statistics. They will remain experimental statistics for a period of evaluation of their suitability and quality and feedback is invited from users and stakeholders. When interpreting the statistics, users should be aware of their limitations and read the [methodology](#) section for details on how they have been developed.

Deaths of homeless people were identified from death registration records, and a statistical method called capture-recapture modelling was used to estimate the likely number of additional deaths which we were unable to identify as homeless using the information available. Figures in this report are shown for both identified deaths and estimated deaths. Refer to the [methodology](#) section for further explanation of the difference between the two figures.

### Why do we use a model to estimate homeless deaths?

Homeless deaths are difficult to count and we know that we will miss some based on the sources of information we have. The model we use tries to account for and estimate how many we might have missed. For more details see the box entitled “Limitations of these Statistics”.

### 3. Homeless deaths in Scotland

In 2021, there were an estimated 250 homeless deaths. This is at a similar level to the 2020 estimate.

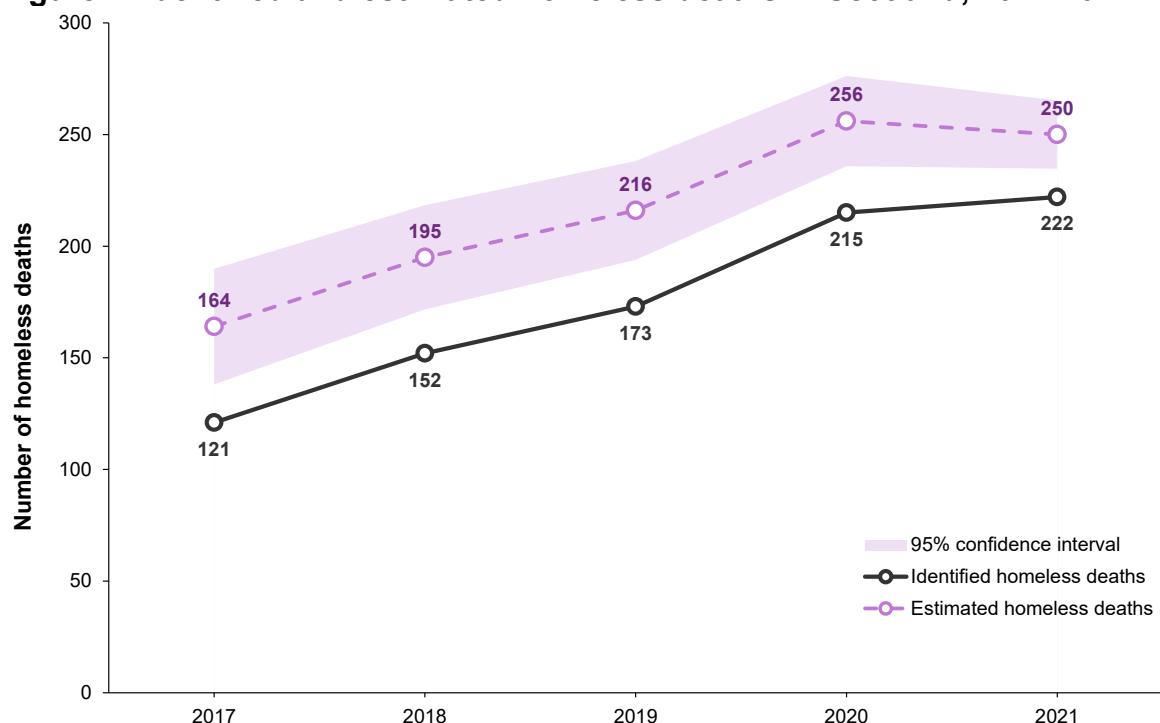
Of the total 250 deaths estimated in 2021:

- 222 were identified from death registration records.
- The additional 28 deaths were estimated using the statistical model.

The 95% confidence interval around the estimated figure of 250 was +/- 15 meaning the true number of homeless deaths is likely to be within the range of 235 to 265. For comparison, estimated homeless deaths last year (2020) fell within the range 236 to 276.

The identified number of homeless deaths was higher in 2021 than in 2020, but the estimated number of deaths was lower than in 2020 (although the change was not statistically significant). A higher number of deaths were identified through our different data sources in 2021, and the level of overlap between the data sources was greater. This makes the model more confident in its estimated value. More info about how the model works can be found in the [Methodology](#) section.

**Figure 1: Identified and estimated homeless deaths in Scotland, 2017-2021**



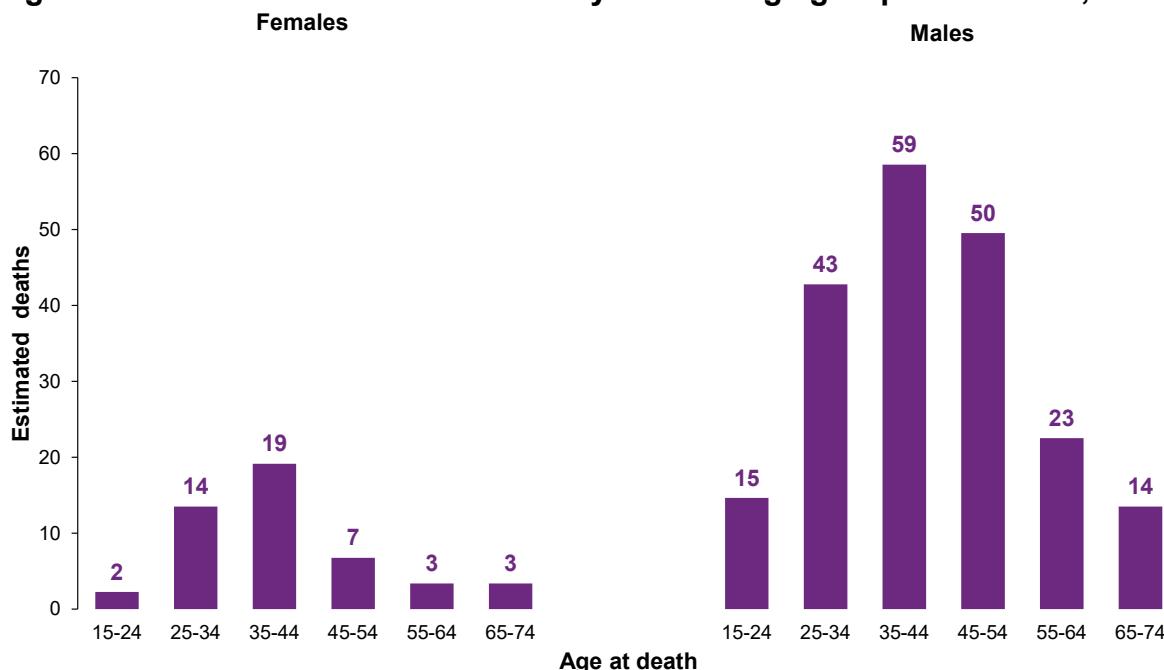
## 4. Homeless deaths by sex and age group

The majority of homeless deaths in 2021 were males.

- 81% were males
- 19% were females

The most common age group for females and males was 35-44. A higher proportion of female homeless deaths are under 45, with 72%. For males, 58% of deaths were under 45.

**Figure 2: Estimated homeless deaths by sex and age group in Scotland, 2021**



## 5. Homeless deaths by Local Authority

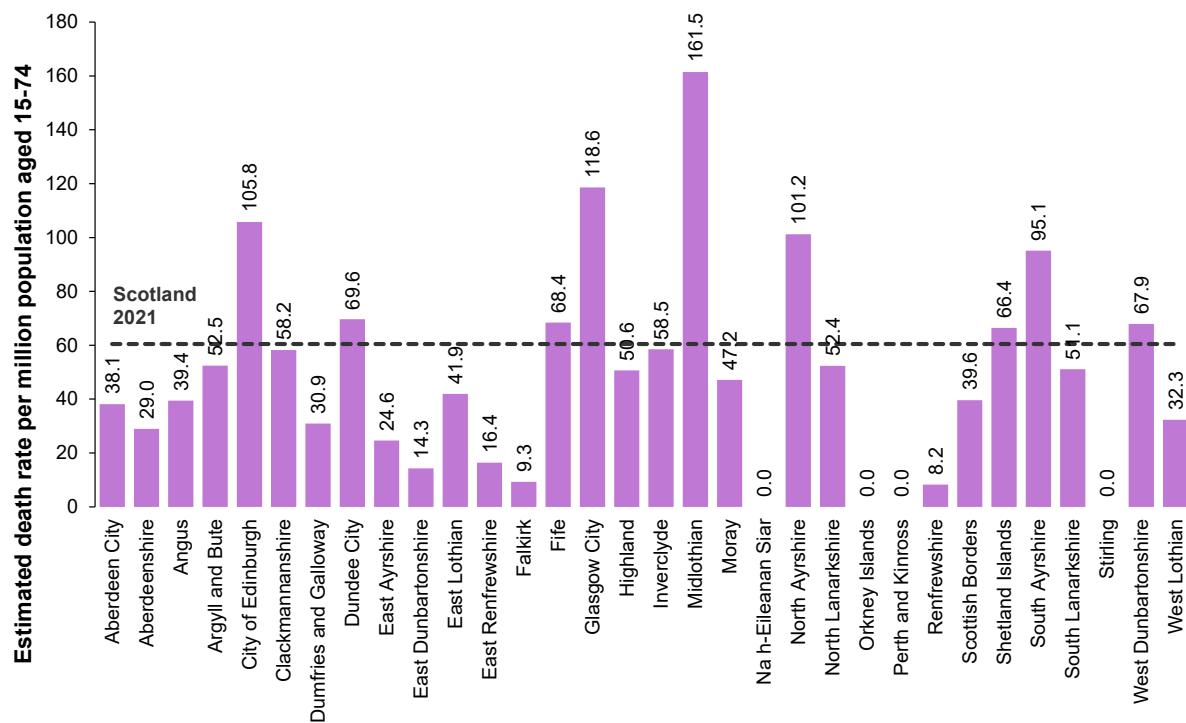
Midlothian, Glasgow City and City of Edinburgh had the highest rates of homeless deaths per million population in 2021.

Four local authorities had no identified homeless deaths in 2021:

- Na h-Eileanan Siar
- Orkney Islands
- Perth and Kinross
- Stirling

It is important to note that these are not age-standardised mortality rates, and the rates are based on the whole population aged 15-74, not just the population of people experiencing homelessness.

**Figure 3: Estimated homeless deaths by local authority in Scotland, 2021**



It is important to note that deaths do not necessarily represent deaths of homeless applicants to the council that they died in. Deaths are assigned to a local authority based on the address of usual residence or (if no usual residence recorded) the place of death. If a local authority has provided someone with temporary accommodation in a neighbouring authority and they died while at that address, the death will be assigned to the area that they died in.

## 6. Homeless deaths by cause

When cause of death was broken down by ICD-10 chapter<sup>1</sup>, the most common cause of homeless deaths in 2021 were:

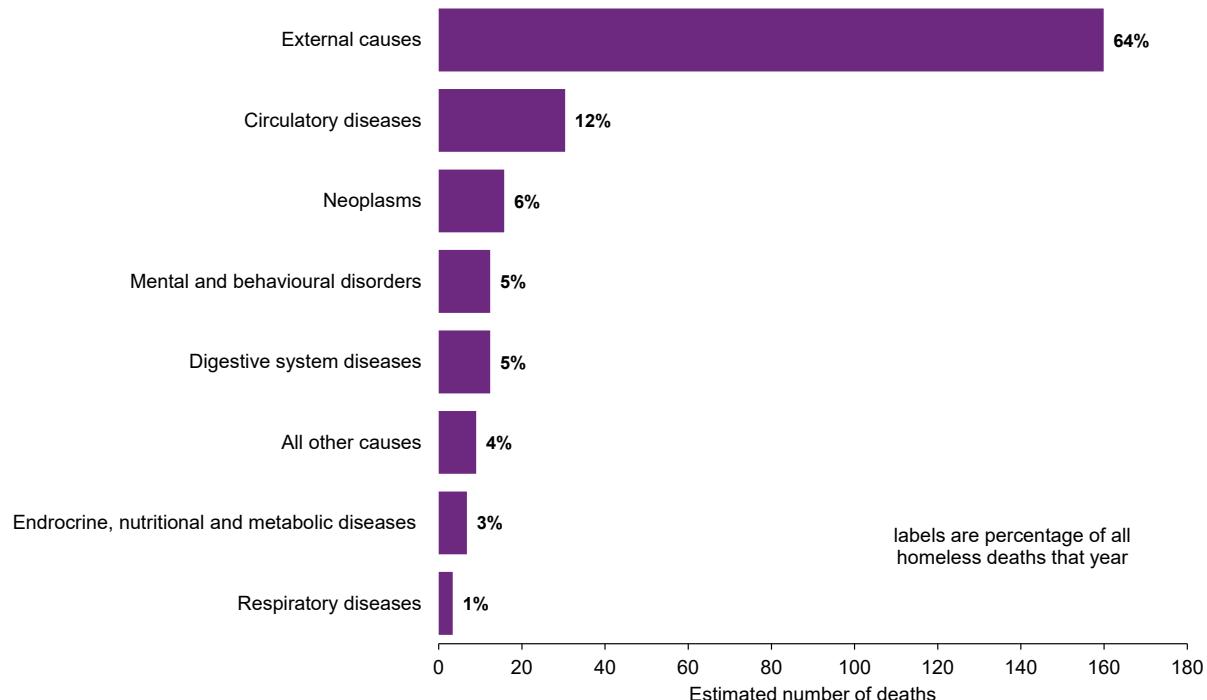
- XX - External causes of morbidity and mortality (including drug-related deaths, accidents, suicides and assaults) (64%)
- IX - Diseases of the circulatory system (including heart disease and stroke) (12%)
- II - Neoplasms (cancers) (6%)

The number of homeless deaths from external causes decreased in 2021, from 181 to 160. This is driven by a fall in drug-related deaths among homeless people in the past year.

There were 2 recorded deaths of people experiencing homelessness where COVID-19 was the underlying cause of death in 2021.

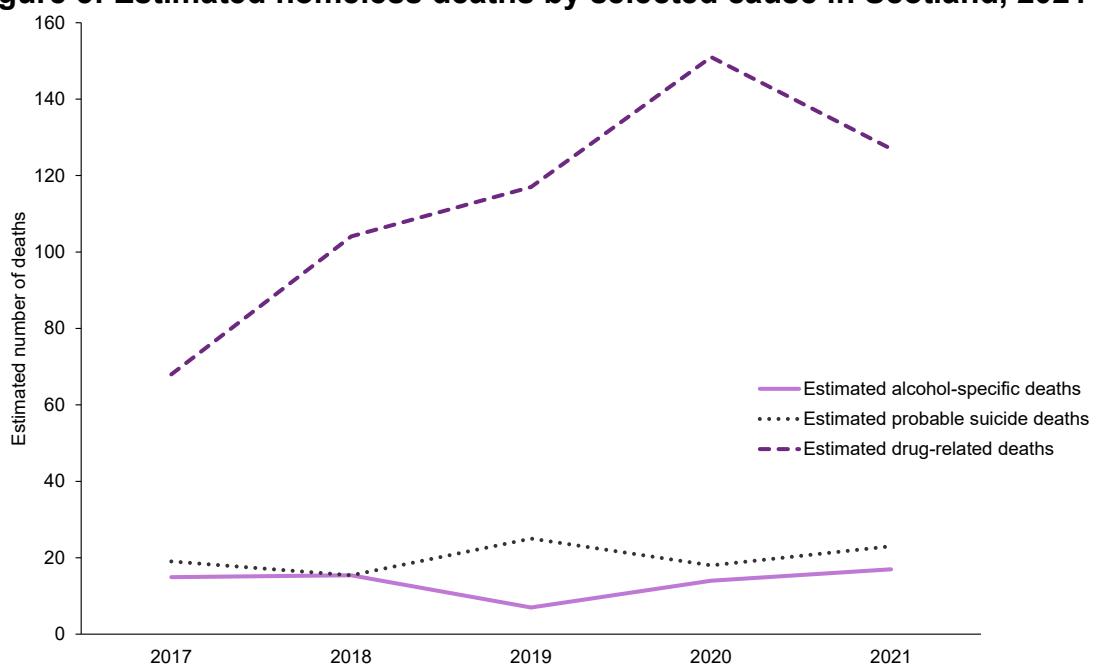
<sup>1</sup> Causes of death are coded according to International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems 10th Revision (ICD-10).

**Figure 4: Estimated homeless deaths by cause of death in Scotland, 2021**



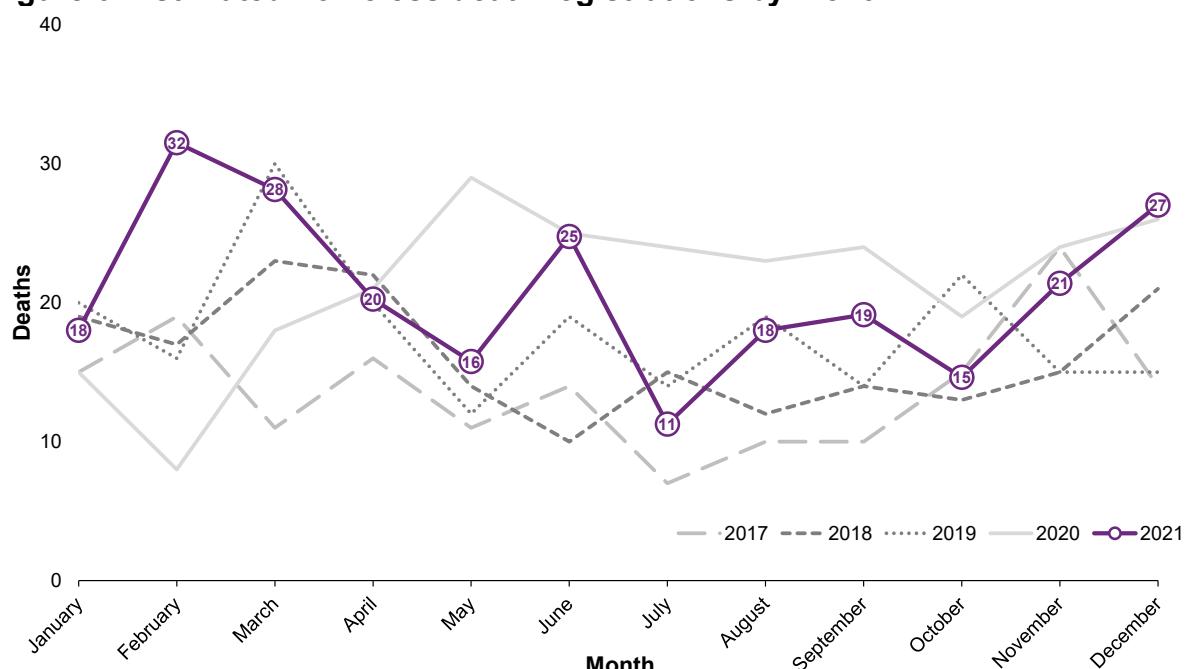
Looking more specifically at selected causes of death, over half of deaths of people experiencing homelessness were due to drug-misuse (51%, 127 deaths). Suicide accounted for 9% and alcohol-specific deaths 7%. It is important to highlight that there can be overlaps between suicides and drug-misuse deaths as a death can be counted as both. For this reason, when interpreting these statistics the two categories should not be added together as some deaths may appear in more than one category.

**Figure 5: Estimated homeless deaths by selected cause in Scotland, 2021**



## 7. Monthly death registrations

Figure 6: Estimated homeless death registrations by month



There were an estimated 32 homeless death registrations in February 2021, with March (28) and December (27) having the next highest. In 2020, homeless deaths were higher than usual through the summer, but in 2021 deaths generally returned closer to average levels.

## 8. Comparisons with UK countries

Estimates of homeless deaths in other parts of the UK are not comparable with those for Scotland.

An article exploring the different sources of data used to estimate homeless deaths across the UK has been jointly produced by NRS, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Homelessness Coherence Team. This concluded that estimates were not produced on a comparable basis across the UK and that they should not be compared.

NRS engage regularly with local authorities in Scotland throughout the process of estimating homeless deaths. Data on temporary accommodation is collected directly from the local authorities and extensive data quality assurance is carried out in partnership. This methodology and process is likely to identify proportionately more homeless deaths than in other parts of the UK, hence why it is concluded that the estimates for Scotland are not comparable with those for the rest of the UK countries.

## **9. Improvements to methodology**

The full methodology for this publication can be found on the NRS website.

This year, in addition to the data we usually receive, we requested extra data from councils to allow us to investigate improvements to the accuracy of our estimates. As well as asking councils for their list of temporary accommodation addresses for us to match to our deaths database, we also asked for details of deaths of homeless people who were known to local authorities.

This new stream of data will essentially be used as a quality assurance resource, to help us strengthen the confidence we have in each match identified across our five existing data sources. As we continue to improve the methodology, we will look to directly include this sixth source of homeless deaths in our estimation model. We will report on the impact on our estimates of including this additional data source in due course.

## **10. Limitations of these statistics**

These statistics are experimental statistics and represent our best estimate of the number of deaths of people experiencing homelessness, but there are limitations which users should be aware of.

We rely on information which is provided to registrars by the informant when a death is registered. The informant is usually a family member or a friend, but in some cases the informant may be a police officer, a social worker, a funeral director or other person. In these cases, the informant may not have all of the information needed to determine whether the person was homeless at the time of their death. Even when the informant is a family member, they may not have been in touch with the deceased for some time and may be unaware of their circumstances, or they may not wish the fact that their relative was homeless to appear on the death certificate.

Although we have carried out multiple searches of our data sources to identify homeless people, there are a number of groups who we may have missed, or underestimated, in this process.

A small percentage of people present to their local authority as homeless but never take up an offer of homeless accommodation. They may be able to stay with friends or relatives until permanent accommodation is found for them. They are unlikely to be identified in the searches we have carried out.

A number of people who are sleeping rough may not present themselves as homeless to their local authority and are therefore not registered as homeless. If they die while sleeping rough, they may be picked up by our searches but only if the informant provides this information to the registrar when registering the death.

The capture recapture estimation technique we have used attempts to address this undercount, but the method used is known to produce conservative estimates - the actual number of homeless deaths may be higher.

## 11. Related statistics

- [Homelessness in Scotland](#) statistics are published by Scottish Government and updated bi-annually. They contain statistics on homelessness applications, assessments and outcomes. They also provide data on the number of households in temporary accommodation.
- [Births, Deaths and Other Vital Events, Quarterly Figures](#) are published by National Records of Scotland and contain statistics on deaths for the most recent quarter.
- [Vital Events Reference Tables](#) are published by National Records of Scotland and contain annual statistics on deaths.
- Deaths from specific causes are published by NRS, including:
  - [Drug-related deaths](#)
  - [Alcohol-specific deaths](#)
  - [Probable suicides](#)
  - [Other causes](#)
- [Deaths of Homeless people in England and Wales](#) is published by the Office for National Statistics.

## 12. Notes on statistical publications

### Experimental Statistics

The statistics in this publication are experimental statistics. They are in the testing phase and are not yet fully developed. They have not yet been assessed against the rigorous quality standards of National Statistics.

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) designates statistics as National Statistics, in line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (available on the UKSA website). National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

### Information on background and source data

Further details on data source(s), timeframe of data and timeliness, continuity of data, accuracy, etc. can be found in the metadata that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

### National Records of Scotland

We, the National Records of Scotland, are a non-ministerial department of the devolved Scottish Administration. Our aim is to provide relevant and reliable information, analysis and advice that meets the needs of government, business and the people of Scotland. We do this as follows:

Preserving the past – We look after Scotland's national archives so that they are available for current and future generations, and we make available important information for family history.

Recording the present – At our network of local offices, we register births, marriages, civil partnerships, deaths, divorces and adoptions in Scotland.

Informing the future – We are responsible for the Census of Population in Scotland which we use, with other sources of information, to produce statistics on the population and households.

You can get other detailed statistics that we have produced from the [Statistics](#) section of our website. Scottish Census statistics are available on the [Scotland's Census](#) website.

We also provide information about [future publications](#) on our website. If you would like us to tell you about future statistical publications, you can register your interest on the Scottish Government [ScotStat website](#).

You can also follow us on twitter [@NatRecordsScot](#)

### **Enquiries and suggestions**

Please get in touch if you need any further information, or have any suggestions for improvement.

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