



# Scottish Public Health Observatory Update

## Estimated Quarterly Numbers of People Prescribed Opioid Substitution Therapy in Scotland (12 months to 31 December 2024)

A Management information release for Scotland

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### About this release

This release by Public Health Scotland (PHS) concerns updated statistics for the '[Prescribing for Drug Use](#)' page in the Drugs topic area of the Scottish Public Health Observatory (ScotPHO) website.

### Main points

Drugs – Prescribing for Drug Use

- In the 12-month period ending 31 December 2024 (the end of 2024/25 Q3), Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) was prescribed to an estimated minimum of 28,644 people in Scotland. In the 12 months to the end of the previous financial year quarter (2024/25 Q2) an estimated minimum of 29,126 people were prescribed OST.
- The NHS Board areas where the highest estimated numbers of people prescribed OST (inclusive of injectable buprenorphine prescribing) lived were Greater Glasgow & Clyde (8,294; 29%), Lothian (4,537; 16%) and Lanarkshire (2,958; 10%).

### Background

These figures estimate the number of individuals prescribed Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) drugs for the treatment of opioid dependence from legacy British National Formulary (BNF) subsection 04.10.03. This includes methadone hydrochloride, buprenorphine, buprenorphine & naloxone and long-acting buprenorphine (including Buvidal© slow-release formulations). Lofexidine hydrochloride and naltrexone hydrochloride (both primarily used for the management of opioid withdrawal) are not included.

These figures are based on combined data from Prescribing Information System (PIS) and Hospital Medicines Utilisation Database (HMUD) for a rolling 12-month period, updated each quarter. They are described as 'estimates' or 'minimum numbers' due to issues which mean that it is challenging to provide a robust count of the number of people prescribed these medications.

For PIS data, estimates for local authority and NHS Board of residence are based on the number of unique Community Health Index (CHI) numbers captured from named community prescriptions for relevant medications at any time within 12 months of each financial year quarter. Generally, patient numbers and characteristics are only provided when PIS CHI completeness is 85-90% or higher. However, data completeness remains variable at NHS Board level with national completeness at the lower end of the threshold.

HMUD contains details of some long-acting buprenorphine treatments administered in community settings which are prescribed via hospital stock order forms. As HMUD does not include patient details, it is not possible to produce patient estimates in the same way as for PIS. Following consultation with specialist Pharmacists, it has been agreed that the average number of 28-day injectable buprenorphine formulations ordered per month (based on quarterly data) can be used to estimate the number of patients to whom treatment is delivered in each NHS Board.

The variable quality of the underlying data means that these figures, and comparisons over time, should be treated with caution. Due to the public interest in OST prescribing, these statistics are published as management information.

The **Scottish Public Health Observatory** collaboration is led by PHS and includes the Glasgow Centre for Population Health, National Records of Scotland, the Medical Research Council/Chief Scientist Office Social and Public Health Sciences Unit and the Scottish Learning Disabilities Observatory.

The aim of the collaboration is to make public health information more accessible, to promote the reduction in inequalities and to inform health improvement in Scotland.

## Contact

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## Further information

Data from this publication are available from the [publication page](#) on our website.

Our statistical practice is regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR).

Visit our website for [further information about our statistics and PHS as an Official Statistics producer](#).

The next ScotPHO annual update will be released in September 2025.

Other formats of this publication are available on request by calling 0131 314 5300 or emailing [phs.otherformats@phs.scot](mailto:phs.otherformats@phs.scot).

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### PHS and official statistics

Public Health Scotland (PHS) is the principal and authoritative source of statistics on health and care services in Scotland. PHS is designated by legislation as a producer of 'Official Statistics'.