

Scottish Government submission of 6 June 2023

PE2024/A: Create a national, public information programme to raise awareness of the impacts of steroids, selective androgen receptor modulators, and other performance enhancing drugs

I refer to your email of 9 May asking for the Scottish Government's views on the action called for in the above petition.

The petition calls for the Scottish Government to create a national, public information programme to raise awareness of the impacts of steroids, selective androgen receptor modulators (SARMs) and other performance enhancing drugs (I PEDs). The petition was lodged following the admittance to hospital of a friend of the petitioner with a ruptured aorta as a result of steroid use. The petitioner also highlights the ease with which I PEDs can be obtained and the concern related to the promotion of these substances, often described as 'safe, legal and desirable', by social media influencers.

While the focus of the Scottish Government's National Mission on drugs is to reduce drug related deaths, it is also concerned with improving the lives of those impacted by drugs. We have published a National Mission plan which sets out how we will achieve this but it includes a commitment to reduce harms from the consumption of drugs.

The main drivers of the majority of issues which we face in Scotland from problem substance use come from opioids and benzodiazepines. However, it is clear that in addition to those substances, there are a wide range of others which cause harms to individuals and communities including steroids, SARMS and I PEDs among many others.

In the past the Scottish Government has funded work through the Scottish Drugs Forum (SDF) to identify the specific risks and informational needs of certain 'at-risk' groups, and this included those who engage in the use of image and performance enhancing drugs. As a result of that work, SDF were able to develop information and training resources and programmes to ensure the workforce and service providers working with these individuals are fully trained and equipped to support their specific needs.

Following receipt of this petition, we have also followed up with SDF to inquire about this work and they have reassured us that they continue to deliver training on IPEDs as part of their sexual health and BBV (blood borne viruses) workstream, which is included in their work with vulnerable young people.

We accept that the use of these substances is not without risk, particularly for young people, and that there is evidence of increasing use in communities of IPEDs beyond elite sport. As a harm reduction measure, the Scottish Government would be supportive of increasing the awareness of Injecting Provision Services for anyone involved in the injecting of substances. We know from the evidence, and our own experience, the dangers associated with sharing needles, such as the increased likelihood of blood-borne viruses, including HIV, but also the potential increase in injury.

We are committed to ensuring that we use, and further develop, our public health surveillance data to better understand drug trends, particularly amongst younger groups, and this could be further enhanced to cover these substances. It is vital that young people receive support and treatment that meets their specific needs and at this time there isn't much available for anyone looking for support with these substances.

To identify what the specific needs of children and young people are, we have brought together a range of experts from drug and alcohol, and young people's support services, to form a multi-agency working group whose work includes the development of a set of standards which we expect local areas to have in place to support young people with their drug use.

In Spring 2023, we began engaging with young people using a co-design approach, in order to develop those standards which will be specifically tailored to meet the needs of young people. The standards should also use language that resonates with young people so that they can clearly understand what they can expect when seeking help.

We are also already taking action to provide early access to treatment for all those who need it through the development of assertive outreach services and same-day treatment, as well as increasing the capacity of residential rehabilitation services. This is backed by an investment of £250 million over the length of this parliament.

I hope this response is helpful.

