Alcohol-specific deaths in Highland

2025 Briefing Paper

1. Introduction

In September 2026 National Records of Scotland (NRS) published statistics on alcohol specific deaths registered in Scotland during 2025.[1] Information is available for each local authority and health board on the overall trend, age at death, cause of death and deprivation. Information about the age at death and sex has been added to from NRS data available locally. Full details of the definitions and methods are available in the national report and NRS website.[1,2] This summary paper summarises the main results of deaths for the Highland Alcohol and Alcohol Partnership (HADP) area and is based upon deaths registered during 2025 of either Highland Council area residents, persons of no fixed abode who died in Highland or people resident outside Scotland who died in Highland.

2. Key Points

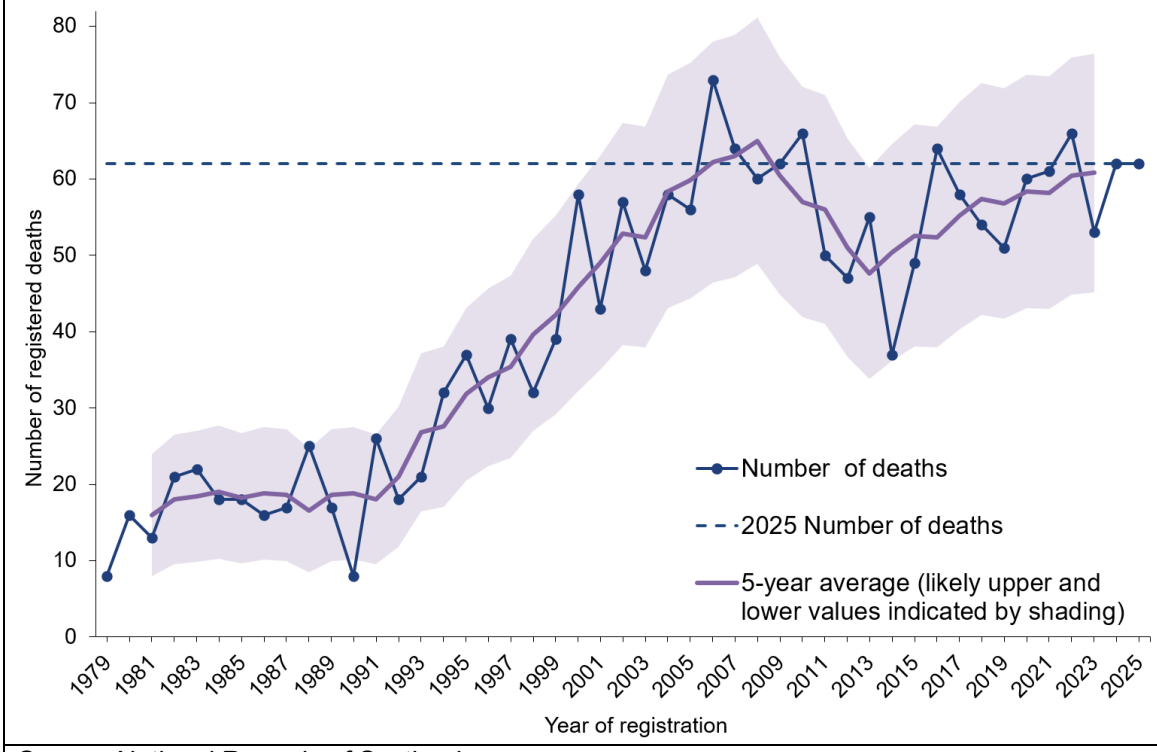
- Nationally, the number of alcohol-specific deaths have generally risen since 2012, remaining stable in recent years with a decline to 1,152 deaths registered in Scotland in 2025, which is a decrease of 3% (33 deaths) compared with 2024.
- 62 alcohol-specific deaths were registered in Highland in 2025, which is the same number of deaths registered in 2024.
- The annual average number of deaths for the five-year period 2021-2025 is 61, an increase of 13 deaths (27%) on the 2011-2015 average of 48 deaths;
- Highland has an alcohol-specific death rate of 22.6 per 100,000 population, which is just above the national death rate of 21.7 per 100,000 population. This measure is for the five-year period 2021-2025 and takes into account the differences in size and age-structure of the population between areas;
- Nationally between 2021 and 2025, male deaths continued to account for around two thirds (67%) of alcohol-specific deaths compared with 74% of deaths in Highland.
- In Scotland, the age profile has become older over time, with the average age at death increasing to 59 years or slightly above for the past decade. The average age at death in Highland remains fairly consistent at 60 years for the same period.
- In 2025, alcohol-specific death rates among people living in the most deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD 1) were 4.8 times as high as among those living in the least deprived areas (SIMD 5). For all causes of death, death rates for people in the most deprived areas are twice as high as those in the least deprived areas. Although the gap between alcohol-specific mortality rates in the most and least deprived areas has narrowed over time, alcohol-specific deaths have consistently been more common in more deprived areas.

[1] National Records of Scotland *Alcohol-specific deaths in Scotland, 2025*; (2026) https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/alcohol-specific-deaths-2025/
[2] National Records of Scotland *Alcohol-specific deaths: Methodology*; (2025) https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/media/yu5hrox0/alcohol-specific-deaths-methodology.pdf

3. Highland Numbers

In comparison with 2024, the number of alcohol-specific deaths in Highland has remained the same in 2025 at 62 deaths while the number of deaths for Scotland has decreased by 33 deaths (3%) from 1,185 in 2024 to 1152 deaths in 2025.
The numbers of alcohol-specific deaths each year are statistically relatively small in Highland and this means they are subject to year on year fluctuations, as shown in Figure 1. A more reliable indication of the longer-term trends is provided by using five-year annual averages, which 'smooth out' the effects of annual variation and are shown in Figure 1 with a thick solid line. Following a significantly increasing trend since the early nineties, the overall trend in alcohol-specific mortality in Highland was reducing from 2007 up to 2014. There has been an overall increasing trend in alcohol-specific mortality from 2014 to 2024 although the increase has become more gradual in recent years with the number of deaths remaining the same in 2025 as for 2024.

Figure 1. Number of Alcohol-specific deaths for Highland Council area, annual number and 5 year annual moving averages; 1979 to 2025



Source: National Records of Scotland
Note: 5 year annual moving averages have been shown against the middle year in the time period.

4. Comparison with Scotland

In 2025, there were 1,152 alcohol-specific deaths registered in Scotland, a decrease of 3% (33 deaths) compared with 2024. Deaths in 2025 are the lowest number of alcohol-specific deaths registered in any year from 2020 onwards. After adjusting for age, there were 20.2 alcohol-specific deaths per 100,000 people in Scotland in 2025, a slight decrease compared with 2024 (20.9 per 100,000). The latest decrease in the number of alcohol-specific deaths was not seen across all areas of Scotland. The number of alcohol-specific deaths decreased in sixteen local authority areas, increased in eleven areas and was unchanged in five areas.

Highland has an age standardised death rate of 22.6 per 100,000 population for 2021-2025 which is slightly above but not statistically significantly higher than the national average of 21.7 per 100,000 population (Table 1).

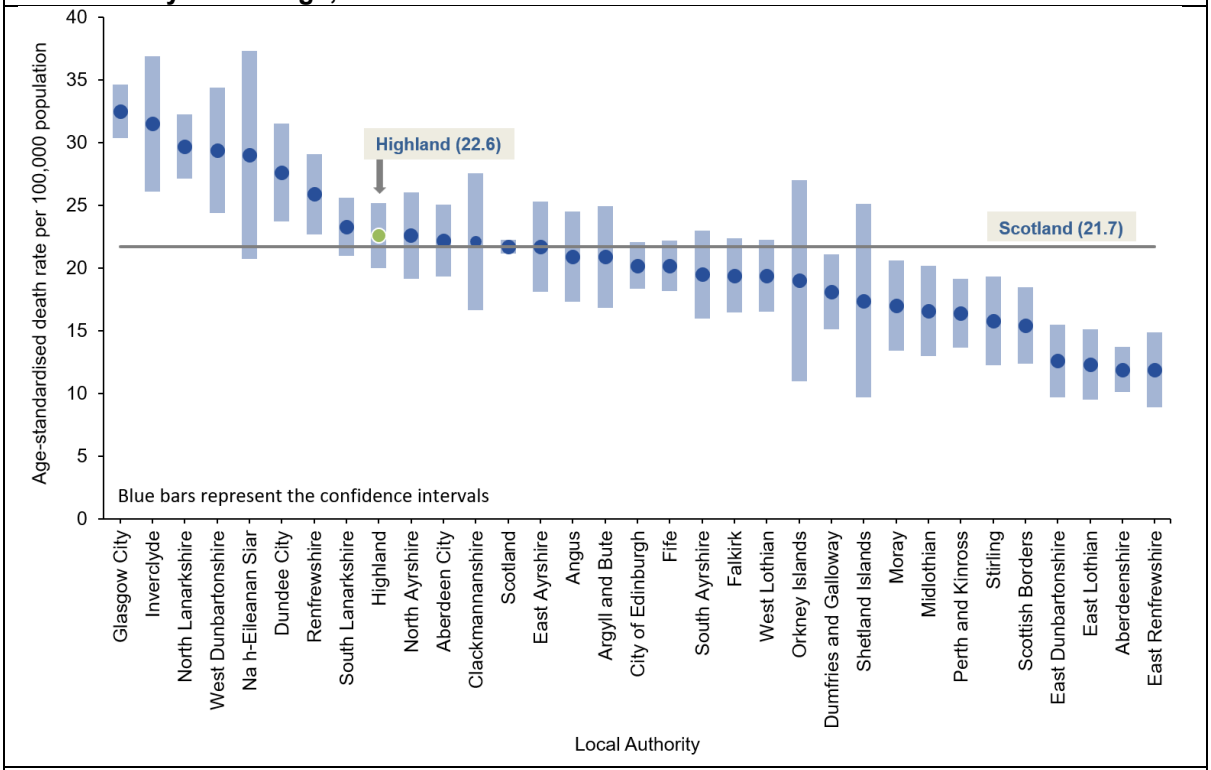
Table 1: Alcohol-specific deaths: total deaths, annual average number and age-standardised rate per 100,000 population, all ages

	Total number of deaths in period		Average annual number of deaths		Age-standardised rate per 100,000 population	
	2011-2015	2021-2025	2011-2015	2021-2025	2011-2015	2021-2025
Highland	238	304	48	61	18.9	22.6
Scotland	5186	6135	1038	1227	19.6	21.7

Source: National Records of Scotland

Highland is one of twelve out of thirty-two local authority areas with rates above the Scotland rate (Figure 2). Six local authority areas have alcohol-specific death rates significantly higher than the Scotland rate: Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, West Dumbartonshire, Dundee City and Renfrewshire.

Figure 2. Number of Alcohol-specific deaths for Scotland and by local authority area, 5 year average; 2021 to 2025 with 95% confidence intervals



Source: National Records of Scotland

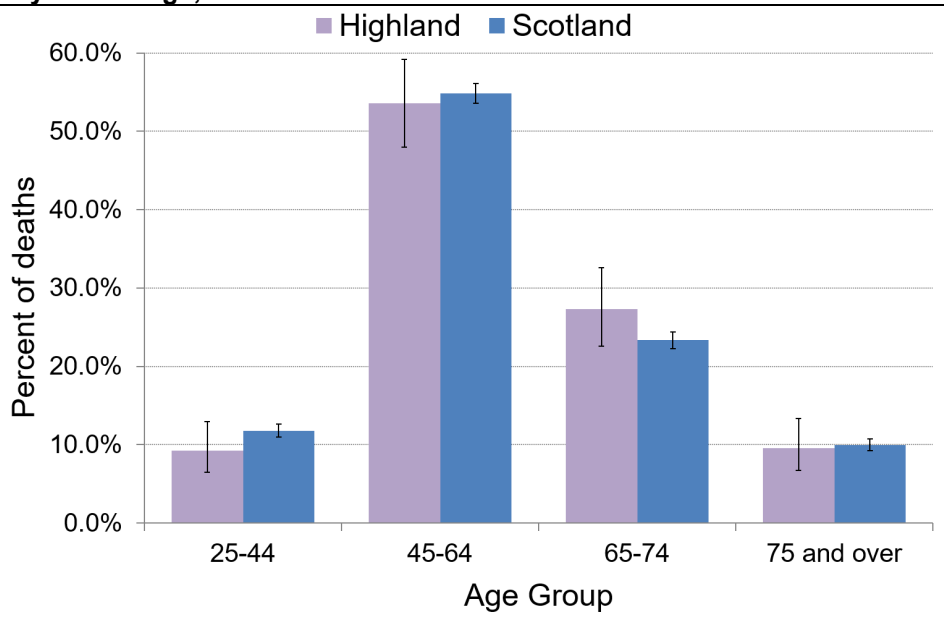
Nationally between 2021 and 2025, male deaths continued to account for around two thirds of alcohol-specific deaths (67%) compared with 74% of deaths in Highland. In Scotland, the age profile has become older over time, with the average age at death increasing to 59 years or slightly above for the past decade. The average age at death in Highland remains fairly consistent at 60 years for the same period.

There is a greatly increased risk of alcohol-specific death for people living in the most deprived areas of Scotland. In 2025, alcohol-specific death rates among people living in the most deprived areas of Scotland (SIMD 1) were 4.8 times as high as among those living in the least deprived areas (SIMD 5)[3]. For all causes of death, death rates for people in the most deprived areas are twice as high as those in the least deprived areas. The highest ratio nationally for alcohol-specific deaths was 8.7 times higher in 2002 and although this ratio has decreased over time, alcohol-specific deaths have consistently been more common in more deprived areas.

5. Age at Death

Between 2021 and 2025 there were 304 alcohol-specific deaths in Highland; 28 deaths of people aged 25-44 years (9.2%), 163 deaths in the 45-64 age group (53.6%), 83 deaths in the 65-74 age group (27.3%) and 29 deaths of people aged 75 years and over (9.5%). Figure 3 shows that there is little variation in the age at death between Highland and the national profile.

Figure 3. Alcohol-specific deaths percentage by age group, Highland and Scotland; 5 year average; 2021 to 2025



Source: National Records of Scotland

[3] Scottish Government. Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation: data and resources 2021 https://www.gov.scot/collections/scottish-index-of-multiple-deprivation-2020/

The age-specific rates of alcohol-specific deaths for Highland compared to Scotland are shown in Table 2 and Figure 4.

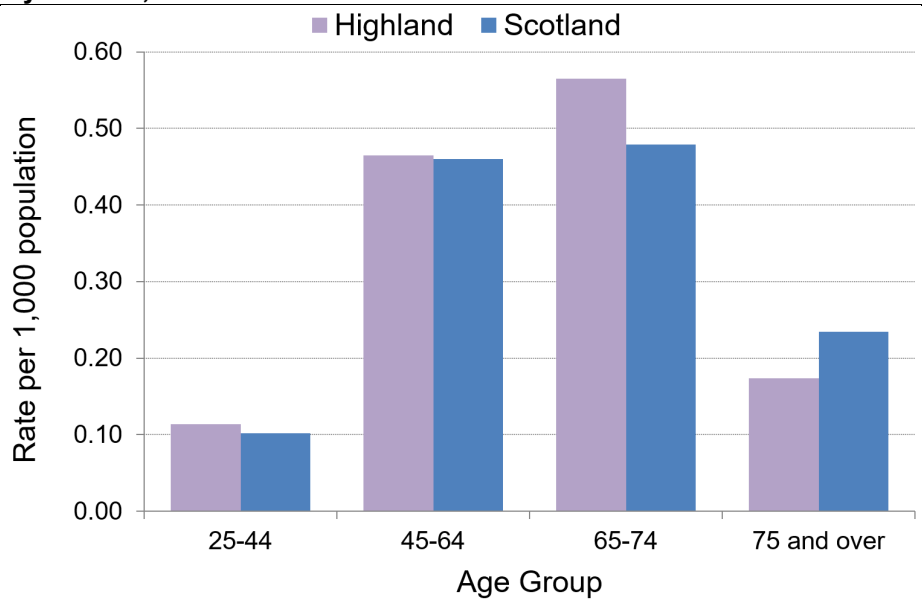
Table 2: Alcohol-specific deaths per 1000 population, total for 2021 to 2025

	Highland			Scotland		
Age Group	Deaths	Percent	Rate per 1000 population	Deaths	Percent	Rate per 1000 population
25-44	28	9%	0.11	724	12%	0.10
45-64	163	54%	0.46	3365	55%	0.46
65-74	83	27%	0.56	1432	23%	0.48
75 and over	29	10%	0.17	611	10%	0.23
All Ages	304	100%	0.26	6135	100%	0.23

Source: National Records of Scotland

Highland alcohol-specific mortality in the 65-74 age group is slightly higher than that of the overall Scotland rate (0.56 per 1,000 population compared to 0.48 per 1,000 population) and the Highland rate is lower in the 75 and over age group (0.17 per 1,000 population compared to 0.23 per 1,000 population).

Figure 4. Alcohol-specific deaths per 1000 population by age group, Highland and Scotland; 5 year total; 2021 to 2025



Source: National Records of Scotland

Further detail is provided in the National Records of Scotland Report.

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