



We must **Keep The Promise** for families in recovery to help **reduce drugs harm** for women and their children across Scotland

11%

increase in drug-related deaths in Scotland in the past year.

15 x

more likely to die as a result of drugs in Scotland's most deprived areas

510

children will have lost their mother or father to drugs in 2025

5%

decrease in women's drug deaths in 2025

Scotland has the highest drug related deaths in Europe with an increase of 11% in the past year¹. Drugs harms are rooted in inequality, with those from the most deprived areas in Scotland 15 times more likely to die as a result of drugs.

Findings show that around 510 children will have lost their mother or father to drugs in 2025 which is unimaginable loss and grief for those families.

Drivers of substance use

Substance use is a direct risk factor in maternal deaths and women affected by substance use are at significant risk during the perinatal period, including from suicide. The drivers of substance use are complex, and for women these often include trauma, domestic abuse, poor mental health, poverty and debt.

Barriers to disclosing substance use and accessing services are particularly acute for mothers, often due to stigma and fear of their children being removed. Studies have also shown that mothers with addiction are six times more likely to have their children removed than fathers².

Last year 303 women in Scotland died as a result of drugs which represents a 5% decrease from the previous year.

This suggests that having targeted women-specific services, including for women and their babies, is beginning to have an impact by responding to the specific needs of women and providing the vital support they need to reduce drugs harm for them and their children.

6x

Mothers with addiction are six times more likely to have their children removed than fathers.

¹ [Drug-related deaths in Scotland, 2025 - National Records of Scotland \(NRS\)](#)

² Gender, Addiction and Removal of Children into Care, 2022

Impact of parental substance use on children

Estimates by the Scottish Government indicate that 40-60,000 children may be impacted by alcohol and drugs use within families in Scotland. Children have a right to grow up at home with their family and access the support they, and their families, need.

To Keep The Promise we must deliver support which keep mothers and children together where it is safe to do so and prevent children from being taken into care.

40,000- 60,000

children in Scotland may be impacted by alcohol and drug use within families.

Mother and child specific services – both community-based family support and residential rehabilitation and recovery services – are vital to reduce drugs harm affecting mothers and their children.

Aberlour's Services



1 Intensive Perinatal Support

Giving children the best possible start in life is at the heart of everything Aberlour does. Aberlour's Intensive Perinatal Services support mothers affected by substance use during pregnancy and up to their baby's first birthday through intensive, whole-family, community-based support.

We offer practical and emotional support tailored to each family's needs and work with other agencies to maximise opportunities for new babies to remain safely in the care of their mother and family.



2 Mother and Child Recovery Houses

Scotland now has two dedicated Mother and Child Recovery Houses which each support up to four women at a time to help them with their drug and alcohol recovery journey. We enable children, up to the age of five, to stay with their mums during their recovery.

We offer 24/7 therapeutic and emotional support before, during and after the women come and stay in the house.

Aberlour Mother and Child Recovery Houses: to date (since 2022)

 **39**

women supported

 **39**

babies supported

 **16**

local authority areas
across Scotland

100%

of the babies were at risk of
being removed from their
mother's care

273

referrals from 25 local
authority areas in Scotland
and 1 in England

£7.25m

estimated care costs
avoided for local authorities
per year



We currently operate a waiting list across both houses.



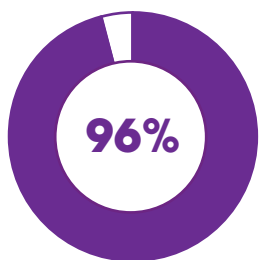
"If this was a rehab where you couldn't bring kids, I think I would have left before now... It's so lovely for her here as well."

- Mum supported by Aberlour

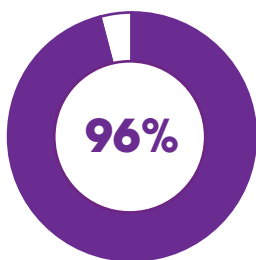
A whole-family approach to recovery support

A one-sized fits all approach to recovery services fails to recognise the multiple and complex needs of mothers and children affected by substances. To meet the needs of mothers and their children recovery services must be trauma-informed, relationship-based, and focused on improving outcomes for both mothers and their children.

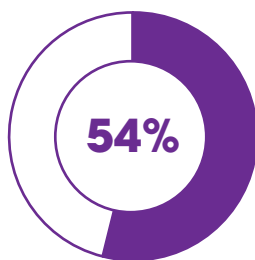
Aberlour's recent Families Voices research project¹ which highlighted the experiences of women who have accessed our recovery services showed that of the mother we support:



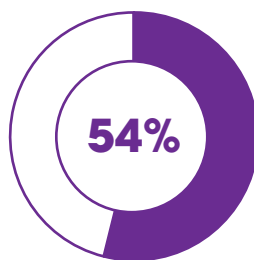
have been impacted
by domestic abuse



have had children
previously removed
from their care



have been involved in
criminal activity



have had formal care
experience



have experienced
trauma

¹ [Aberlour Children's Charity - Families Voices Project - December 2025](#)

Scaling up that works: a Scotland-wide approach to supporting mothers and their children

8 of 574

Out of the 574 of residential rehabilitation places available in Scotland, only 8 of these are women-only spaces for mothers and their babies. This simply does not reflect the level of need for dedicated specialist recovery support for mothers in Scotland.

Evidence is clear that properly resourced and dedicated residential rehabilitation and recovery for women and their children does work and is playing a vital role in our drive to reduce drug harm for women and their children in Scotland. Scotland must build on approaches which have been shown to work to reduce drug harms.

Scotland needs more investment in women-specific services – both community-based support and residential services – to increase capacity and expand available and accessible support to further reduce drug harm affecting women and their children and to help keep families together.

Actions Needed:

- 1** Develop a national approach to trauma-informed, whole-family, specialist support for mothers in recovery, keeping families together when it is safe to do so.
- 2** Address the specific barriers mothers face to accessing community-based and residential recovery support, including ending stigma around substance use.
- 3** Further investment by the Scottish Government working in partnership with local authorities to deliver accessible intensive perinatal services and women-specific residential rehabilitation services for mothers and their children across Scotland.
- 4** Expand community intensive perinatal services beyond a child's first birthday.
- 5** Relentlessly focus on tackling child poverty to reduce likelihood of alcohol and drugs harm and related deaths amongst women.



“If this house hadn't of been here, my daughter would have been taken away from me at the hospital until I was 'fixed'. And that would have taken a long time. All that time we wouldn't have had a bond. That would break my heart. And maybe I'd have relapsed.”

- Mum supported by Aberlour

For more information, please contact:

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