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The Scottish Government must urgently embark on a new drugs strategy after figures revealed deaths had doubled in the past decade.

Statistics released today showed there were 827 drug-related deaths north of the border in 2016, an increase of almost a quarter from the previous year.

The report said Scotland's drugs death rate was now two-and-a-half times that of the rest of the UK.

And while the Scottish Government claimed last month it would "refresh" drugs strategy, shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said that was not enough, and a full parliamentary review was needed.

Methadone, the substance prescribed by the NHS to get addicts off heroin, contributed to 42 per cent of the deaths, a new record.

And legal highs, or new psychoactive substances, were present in 286 of the fatalities recorded last year.

Males accounted for the majority of deaths, with 35 to 44 being the age group most affected.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"These figures are nothing short of appalling.

"Every year hundreds of lives in Scotland are being wasted because of a drugs culture that's been allowed to escalate out of control.

"People will be stunned that the death rate here is more than twice that of the rest of the UK, and that poses some extremely tough questions for the Scottish Government.

"For decades now we've had a drugs policy that simply parks people on methadone programmes, offering them zero hope of ever beating addiction completely.

"Not only is that methadone leaving vulnerable individuals in limbo, but it's killing hundreds of people too.

“We now want a change to get people out of a life of drug and substance addiction.

“Cuts to alcohol and drugs partnerships need to be reversed now, and people need more direct access to physical support.

“A strategy refresh won’t cut it. We need a full parliamentary review of drugs policy in Scotland.

“Holyrood can implement policies that make a real difference to people’s lives, yet those who have been marginalised and forgotten the most are drug users.

“These statistics must serve as an abrupt wake-up call for the SNP.”

To see the full report, visit:

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/drug-related-deaths/drd2016/16-drug-rel-deaths.pdf>