

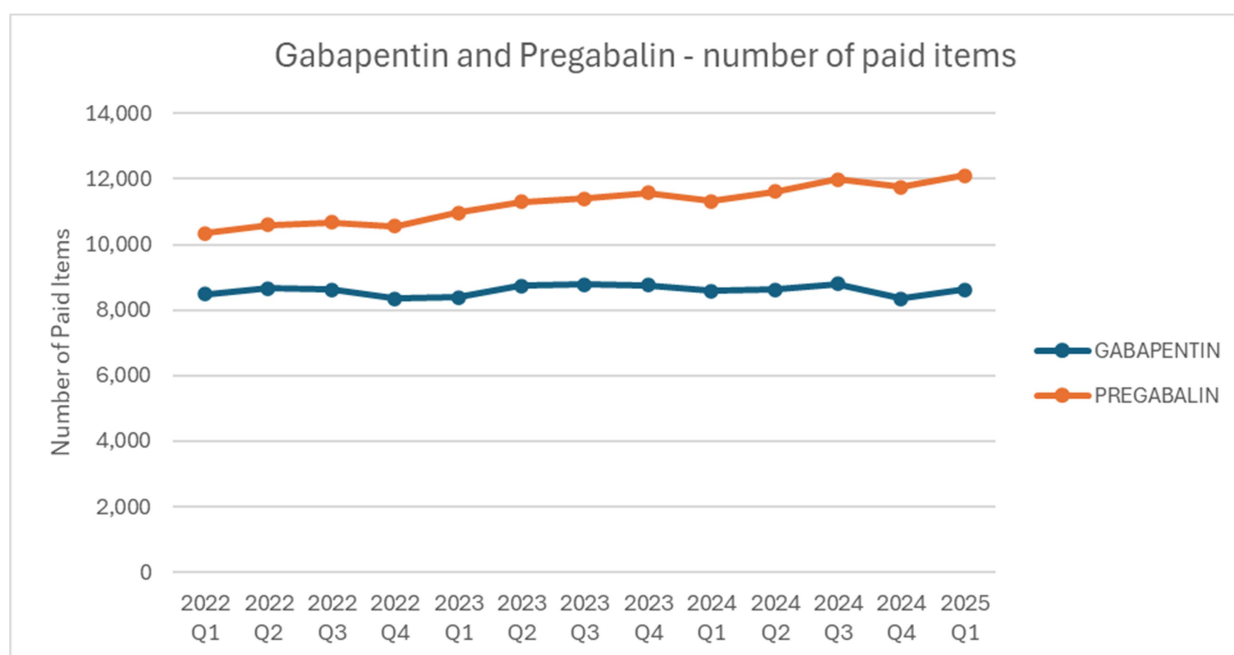
## Pregabalin / Gabapentin

### Drug-Related Deaths

In 2008, National Records of Scotland (NRS) recorded two drug-related deaths in which gabapentin was implicated or partially contributed; pregabalin was not considered to have been implicated in any drug-related deaths that year.<sup>1</sup> During 2024, the number of deaths involving gabapentinoids (gabapentin and/or pregabalin) had risen to 374, with these drugs implicated in 37% of all drug-related deaths in Scotland that year.<sup>2</sup> While this represents a significant increase, the overall volume of gabapentinoid prescribing across Scotland has also grown over the same period, which is a relevant context when interpreting this trend.

Within the Highland Council area during the five-year period 2020 – 2024, 31% of drug-related deaths (49/157) involved gabapentin and/or pregabalin.

**Prescribing trends for prescriptions prescribed and dispensed in primary care for Highland HSCP and Argyll and Bute HSCP shows the following:**



- In 2024, the total number of gabapentinoid items dispensed in primary care across Highland HSCP and Argyll and Bute HSCP was 81,014.
- The dispensed item figures show a small 1% increase in gabapentin prescriptions and a more significant 10.6% increase in pregabalin items from 2022 to 2024.
- The projected dispensing figures for 2025 indicate an expected further rise of pregabalin prescriptions by approximately 15% from 2022 to 2025.

<sup>1</sup> NRS introduced the category 'implicated or partially contributed' within its drug-related death reports in 2008.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/drug-related-deaths-in-scotland-2024/> - last accessed 9<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

Both medications have a recognised street value. The Know the Score website (<https://www.knowthescore.info/>) recognises the potential for inappropriate or unintended use, noting that these drugs can cause relaxation, calmness and euphoria, as well as enhance the effects of other drugs such as opiates. The Erowid website/dataset (<https://erowid.org/>) (which allows people to report on their drug using experiences) includes comments varying from “it helps with opiate withdrawal” and “social lubricant and increased motivation” to “mellow happy and sociable – ask your GP”. The potential for inappropriate or unintended use has also been recognised nationally and internationally. Many NHS organisations nationwide have responded by issuing prescribing guidance for the prescribing of these medicines. In NHS Highland, prescribers are advised to:

- Be aware that gabapentin and pregabalin are not first-line treatments for either generalised anxiety disorder or peripheral neuropathic pain.
- Be alert to reports of respiratory failure and coma in patients taking pregabalin and other CNS depressant medicines such as opiates or benzodiazepines, especially in those with underlying respiratory conditions.
- Use caution when co-prescribing opioids with pregabalin or gabapentin. Morphine increases the bioavailability of gabapentin, and when morphine is used with pregabalin it may enhance the effects of morphine.
- The use of non-prescription opiates should be explored with individuals before issuing prescriptions for gabapentinoids
- Recognise the risk of inappropriate or unintended use, and dependence with gabapentin and pregabalin in people with or without a previous history of substance use.
- Consider the street value of these medicines and be vigilant for requests for dose increases, larger quantities, early repeats or replacement ‘lost’ prescriptions.

The recent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA, 2026) Drug Safety Update on improving information supplied with gabapentinoids, benzodiazepines and Z-drugs, alongside Public Health England’s (2014) guidance on the risks associated with the inappropriate or unintended use of pregabalin and gabapentin, provide prescribers with highly practical, safety-focused support across multiple clinical settings. Links to both of these are provided at the end of this briefing note. Together, these documents help clinicians make more informed decisions by clearly outlining the risks of dependence, inappropriate or unintended use, diversion and overdose—particularly relevant in general practice, pain and palliative care, and psychiatry. The MHRA update offers timely, evidence-based recommendations on safe prescribing, communication with patients and the importance of monitoring, while the PHE guidance provides a foundational understanding of population-level harms and high-risk behaviours associated with gabapentinoids. For prescribers managing complex patients, these resources reinforce best practice, promote consistent risk-mitigation strategies, and support safer, more accountable prescribing across NHS services.

## **Local Support**

### **Osprey House – Drug & Alcohol Recovery Service**

This is the single point of referral for those living in Inverness who wish to address their drug or alcohol use. Referrals, or referrals from professionals/agencies, can be made via telephone or in person. Please contact Osprey House for further information.

Address: Raigmore Avenue, Inverness, IV2 3DZ (Raigmore Hospital site)  
Telephone: 01463 716888 (Mon-Sat; 8am-8:30pm)  
Website: <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/your-services/all-services-a-z/drug-and-alcohol-recovery/drug-and-alcohol-recovery-highland/>

### **HADASS – Highland Alcohol & Drug Advice & Support Service**

HADASS provides support for individuals using drugs and alcohol wishing to make changes, including:

- Harm reduction advice & safer injecting advice
- Overdose & naloxone training
- BBV testing & wound care
- Image and performance enhancing drug clinics
- Support for families & referrals into treatment

Address: David Whyte House, 57 Church Street, Inverness, IV1 1DR  
(Drop-in clinics available Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday; 10am-2pm)  
Telephone: 01463 717594  
Website: <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/signposts/alcohol-and-drug-recovery/highland-alcohol-and-drug-advice-and-support-service/>

## **WithYou**

WithYou is a drug, alcohol and mental health support charity. With more than 80 services across England and Scotland, they provide free, confidential support to over 100,000 people each year. In Highland, With You are commissioned by NHS Highland and Highland Alcohol and Drugs Partnership (HADP).

In Highland, anyone aged 16 or over who uses alcohol or drugs, and family and friends worried about a loved one's use, can access support by phone, video or webchat from anywhere in the region. Designed to make it easy for people anywhere in Highland to get information.

WithYou are available to chat online from 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. They can also arrange evening and weekend appointments to suit clients' needs. You can get in touch by email or phone. WithYou aim to respond within 24 hours.

Email: [highlandanywhere@wearewithyou.org.uk](mailto:highlandanywhere@wearewithyou.org.uk)  
Telephone: 0808 168 0860  
Website: <https://www.wearewithyou.org.uk/local-hubs/highland>

## **Highland Overdose Prevention and Engagement (HOPE) app**

The Highland Overdose Prevention and Engagement (HOPE) app is a source of information for people who use drugs or alcohol problematically, as well as for their families or friends.

It helps prevent overdose and encourages engagement with services that can help.

Download the HOPE app on:

Android: <https://bit.ly/3tawMkA>

Apple: <https://apple.co/39XfjEi>

## **Further reading**

### **Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (2026)**

Improving Information Supplied with Gabapentinoids (Pregabalin/Gabapentin), Benzodiazepines and Z-Drugs - [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/695f7f7747867b8e14f764bb/DSU\\_Dependency\\_Review\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/695f7f7747867b8e14f764bb/DSU_Dependency_Review_FINAL.pdf)

### **Medicines and Health Care products Regulatory Authority (2021)**

Drug Safety Update. Pregabalin (Lyrica): reports of severe respiratory depression. February 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/pregabalin-lyrica-reports-of-severe-respiratory-depression>

### **Medicines and Health Care products Regulatory Authority (2017)**

Drug Safety Update. Gabapentin (Neurontin): risk of severe respiratory depression. October 2017. <https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/gabapentin-neurontin-risk-of-severe-respiratory-depression#advice-for-healthcare-professionals>

**Public Health England (2014)** Advice for prescribers on the risk of the misuse of pregabalin and gabapentin.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7eaffded915d74e33f1ca9/PHE-NHS\\_England\\_pregabalin\\_and\\_gabapentin\\_advice\\_Dec\\_2014.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7eaffded915d74e33f1ca9/PHE-NHS_England_pregabalin_and_gabapentin_advice_Dec_2014.pdf)

**Choice and Medication** patient information on pregabalin

(<https://www.choiceandmedication.org/nhs24/medication/pregabalin/>) and gabapentin

(<https://www.choiceandmedication.org/nhs24/medication/gabapentin/>)

**Know the score** – Substance Use advisory service funded by Scottish Government. Information on pregabalin

(<https://www.knowthescore.info/drug/pregabalin/>) and gabapentin

(<https://www.knowthescore.info/drug/gabapentin/>)

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