

Probable suicides

2023

Published on 13 August 2024

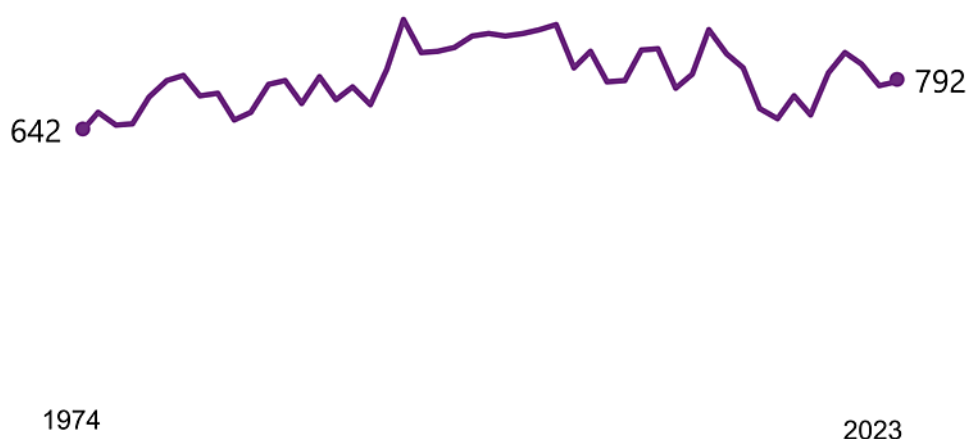


This statistical report details information on the number of deaths that were registered in Scotland in 2023 which were probable suicides. It also includes breakdowns by sex, age, cause of death, deprivation and method.

Number of suicides in 2023 increased to 792 deaths

The number of probable suicides has risen from 762 in 2022 to 792 in 2023. This is the second year in a row seeing an increase in suicide numbers after a period of declining numbers in 2020 and 2021.

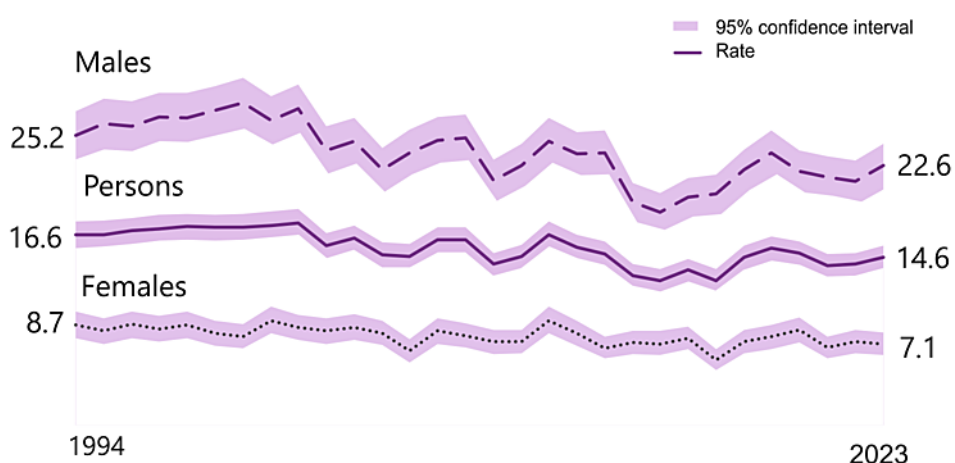
Number of deaths



Suicide rates in Scotland are slightly higher in 2023 compared to previous year

The mortality rate for suicides has increased slightly in 2023 for people overall and when broken down by sex.

Age standardised mortality rate (deaths per 100,000 people)



Average age of suicide deaths decreased in latest year

The average age for suicide deaths dropped to 45.9 after a short period of rise in 2020-2021. The average age has decreased since 1974 but it has generally been rising since 2000 when it dropped to its lowest level at 41.2.

Average age at death (years)

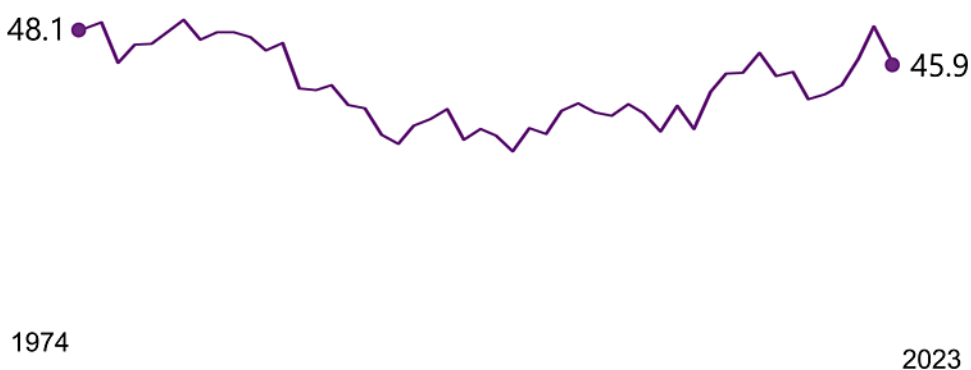


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1. Main points

- In 2023, there were 792 probable suicide deaths in Scotland, an increase of 30 (4%) on the previous year.
- Male suicides increased by 34 to 590 deaths in 2023, while female suicide deaths decreased by 4 to 202 deaths in the latest year.
- The rate of suicide mortality in males was 3.2 times as high as the rate for females. Rates have been consistently higher for males throughout time, ranging from 2.6 to 3.6 times as high since the series began.
- The rate of suicide mortality in the most deprived areas in Scotland was 2.4 times as high as in the least deprived areas in Scotland. This is higher than the deprivation gap of 1.8 times for all causes of death.
- Over half of all probable suicide deaths in 2023 were due to hangings, strangulations or suffocations. Almost 1 in every 4 probable suicides were due to poisonings.

How are probable suicides defined?

Deaths with an underlying cause of one of the following ICD-10 categories are counted as probable suicides:

- X60-84 Intentional self-harm
- Y10-34 Events of undetermined intent
- Y87.0 Sequelae of intentional self-harm
- Y87.2 Sequelae of events of undetermined intent

The terms probable suicide and suicide are used interchangeably throughout this report.

Note: Sequelae refers to death occurring one year or more after the originating event.

If you are a journalist covering these statistics in the media, please consider following the [guidelines issued by Samaritans](#) on the reporting of suicide.

If you are struggling to cope, help is available.

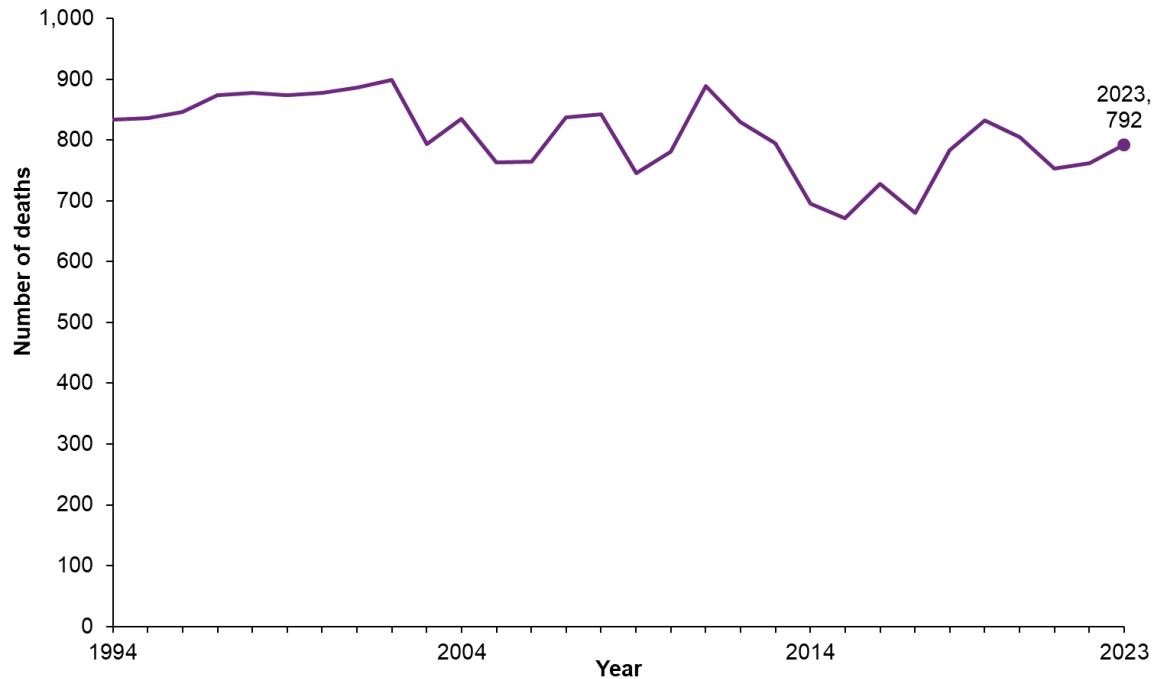
[NHS inform has a list of resources](#) available to anyone, with many of these available 24 hours a day.

Samaritans can be called for free on 116 123 (UK and Republic of Ireland) or contacted via email at jo@samaritans.org. Visit the [Samaritans website](#) for more information.

2. Probable suicide deaths in Scotland

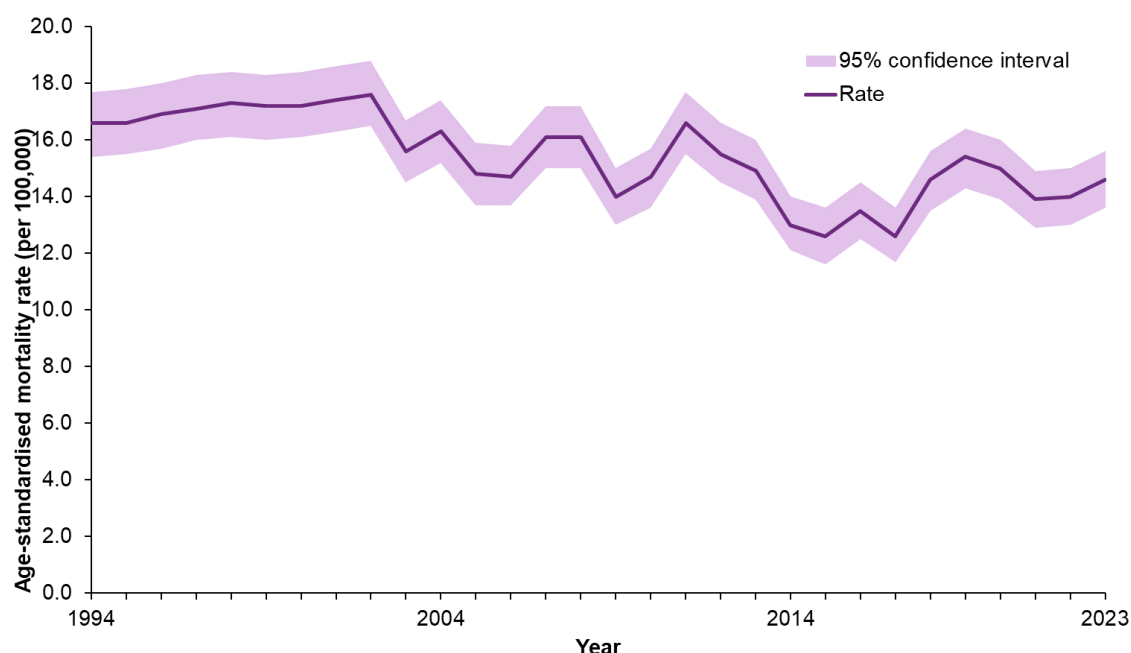
In 2023, there were 792 probable suicide deaths in Scotland, an increase of 30 (4%) on the previous year ([Figure 1a](#)).

Figure 1a: Number of probable suicide deaths, 1994-2023



The rate of mortality from suicides in Scotland was 14.6 per 100,000 people in 2023 ([Figure 1b](#)). This is a slight increase to the rate of 14.0 per 100,000 people in 2022, however, this increase is not statistically significant.

Figure 1b: Age standardised mortality rate for probable suicide deaths, 1994- 2023



What are age-standardised rates?

Age-standardised mortality rates are a better measure of mortality than numbers of deaths, as they account for the population size and age structure and provide more reliable comparisons between groups or over time.

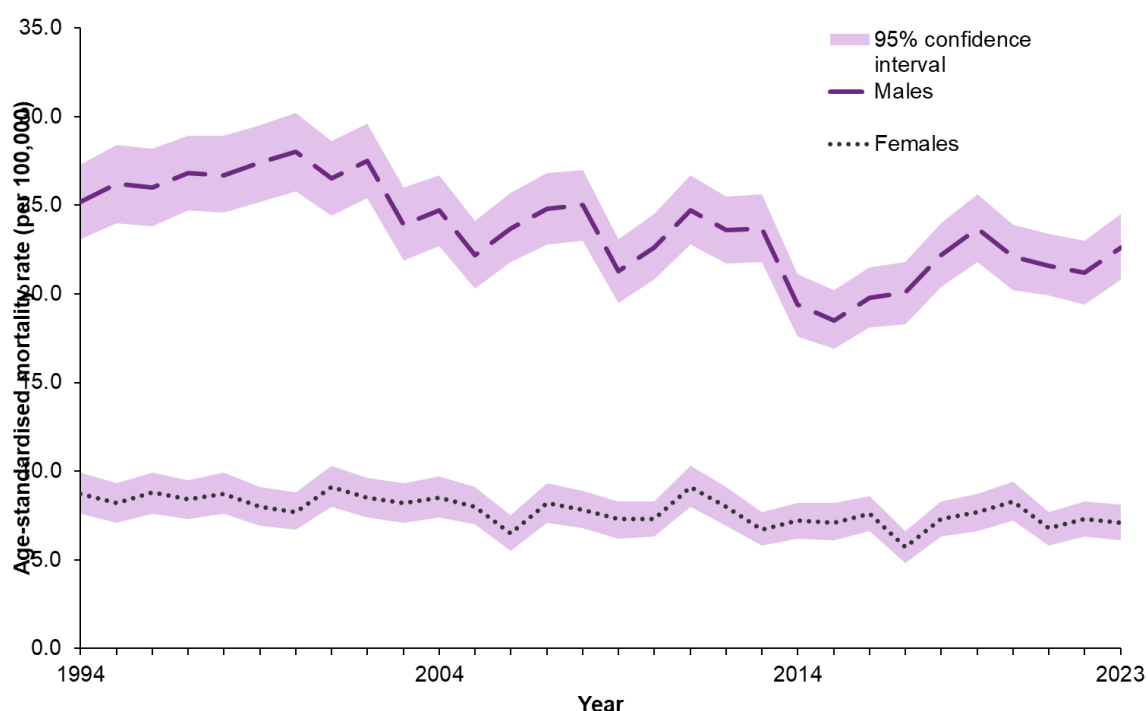
More information on the calculation of [age-standardised mortality rates](#) is available on our website.

3. Probable suicide deaths by age and sex

In 2023, there were 590 male suicide deaths, up by 34 (6%) compared to the previous year. There were 202 suicide deaths among females, 4 (2%) less than 2022.

The mortality rate for suicides in 2023 was 3.2 times as high for males as it was for females. The rate for males has been consistently higher than females, ranging from 2.6 to 3.6 times as high since the series began in 1994 ([Figure 2](#)).

Figure 2: Age-standardised mortality rate for probable suicide deaths, by sex, 1994-2023

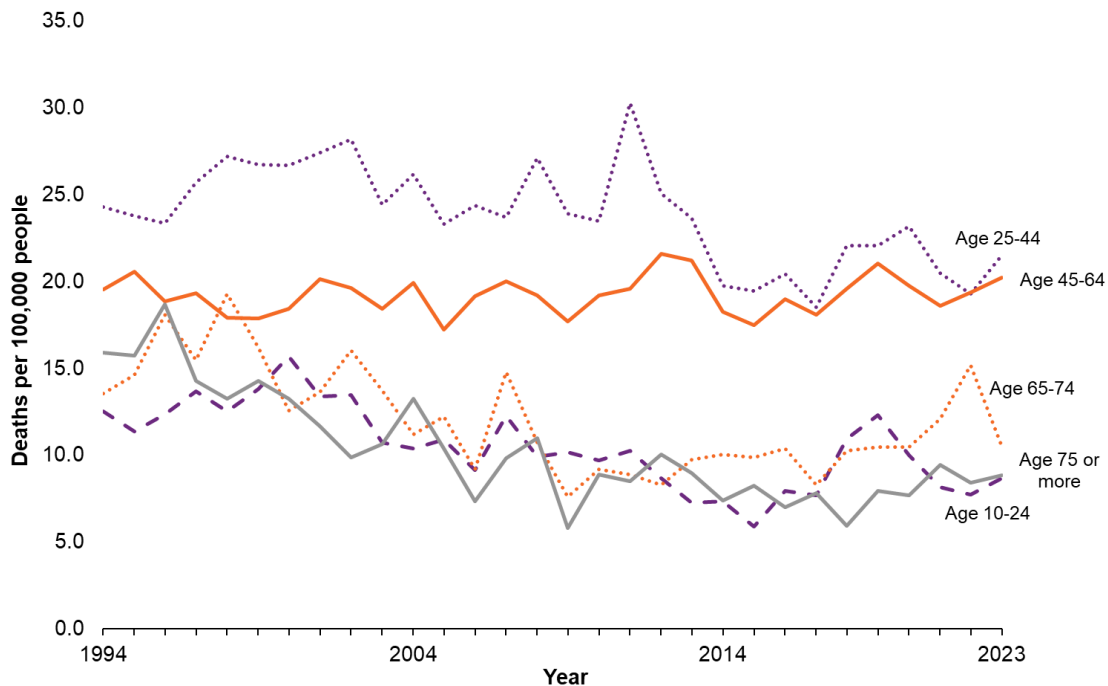


Age-specific mortality rate refers to the total number of deaths per 100,000 people of a given age group. It is used because it allows comparisons between specified age groups.

The age-specific rate of suicides in Scotland is highest in age groups 25-44 and 45-64. The rate at age 25-44 continues to be at a lower level than at its peak in 2011. The rate for age 45-64 has been fairly consistent over time. The rate of suicides in age 65-74 had been increasing each year since 2018, however, it has decreased to 10.5 in 2023 down from 15.2 in the previous year ([Figure 3](#)).

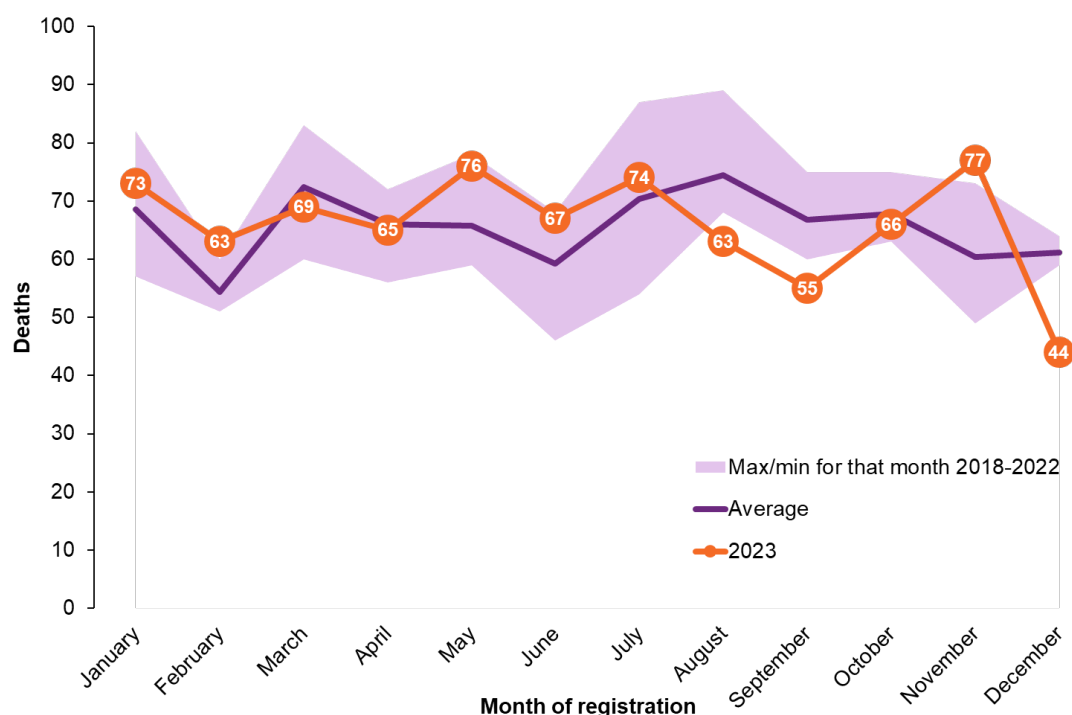
Since 2000, the average age of death for suicides has generally increased, from a low of 41.9 years in 2000 to 46.6 years in 2023.

Figure 3: Age-specific mortality rates of probable suicide deaths by age group, 1994-2023



The number of suicides deaths were above the monthly average of the last five years in January, February, May, June, July, and November of 2023. In comparison, the number of suicide deaths in August, September, and December 2023 were lower than in those months of any of the previous five years ([Figure 4](#)).

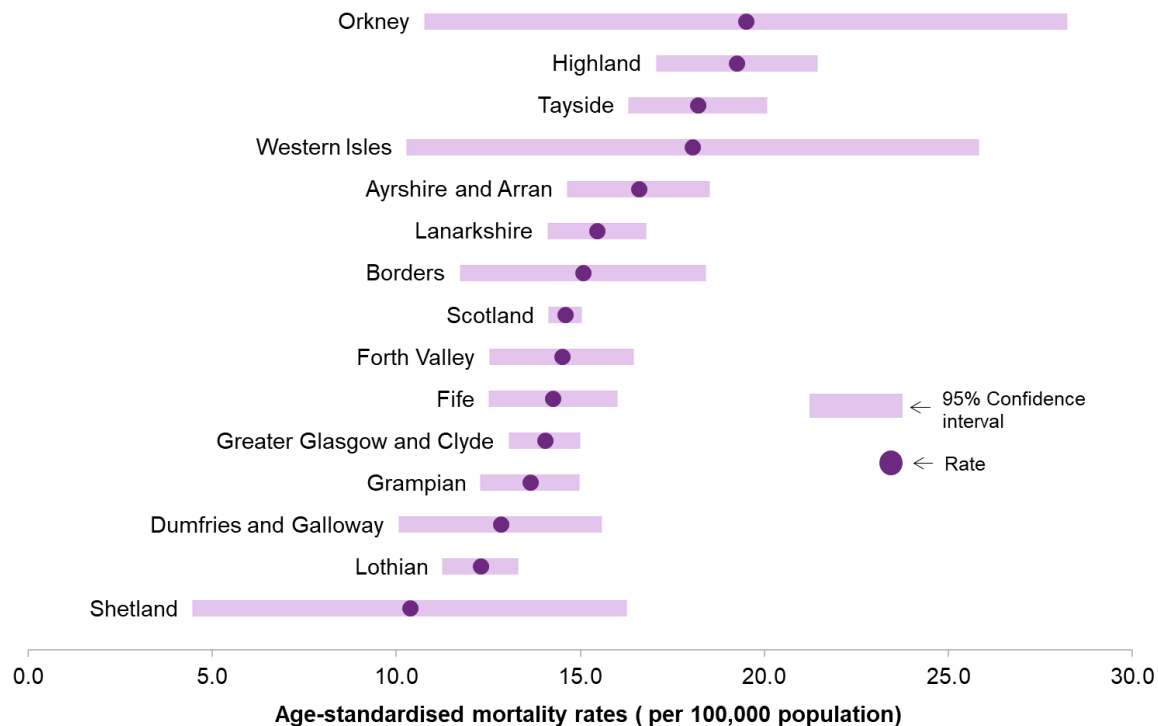
Figure 4: Probable suicide deaths by month of registration



4. Probable suicide deaths in Scottish areas

In 2023, the five-year average rate of suicide mortality at health board level was significantly higher than the Scottish average in Highland and Tayside ([Figure 5](#)). Another five areas had an average rate higher than the Scottish average, however, this difference was not statistically significant. Some of the areas, such as Orkney and Western Isles, which had high rates also had very wide confidence intervals due to the relatively smaller populations in these areas.

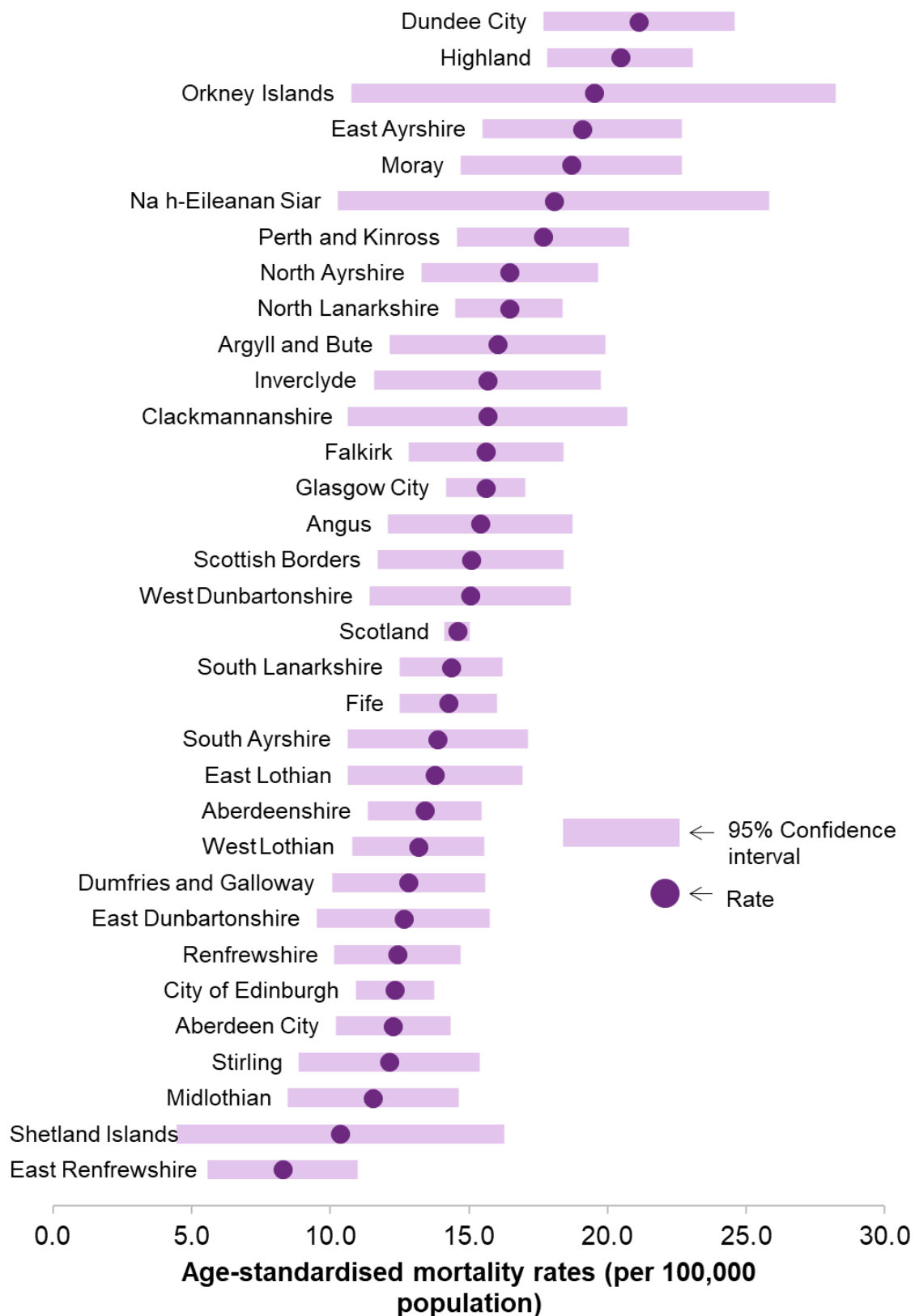
Figure 5: Age-standardised mortality rates of probable suicide deaths by NHS board area, 2019-2023 average



At council level, the rate was higher (statistically significant) than the Scottish average in Dundee City, Highland, and East Ayrshire ([Figure 6](#)), which was similar to the previous year.

Orkney Islands, Moray, and Na h-Eileanan Siar also had high rates, but the difference is not statistically significant. The estimates for these areas have very wide confidence intervals due to the relatively smaller populations in these areas. These areas have been above the Scottish average several times over recent years, so this trend has remained consistent despite the difference not being statistically significant. It should be noted that the wide confidence intervals for these areas make it unlikely that they would have a rate that is significantly different from the Scottish average, which explains the consistent trend.

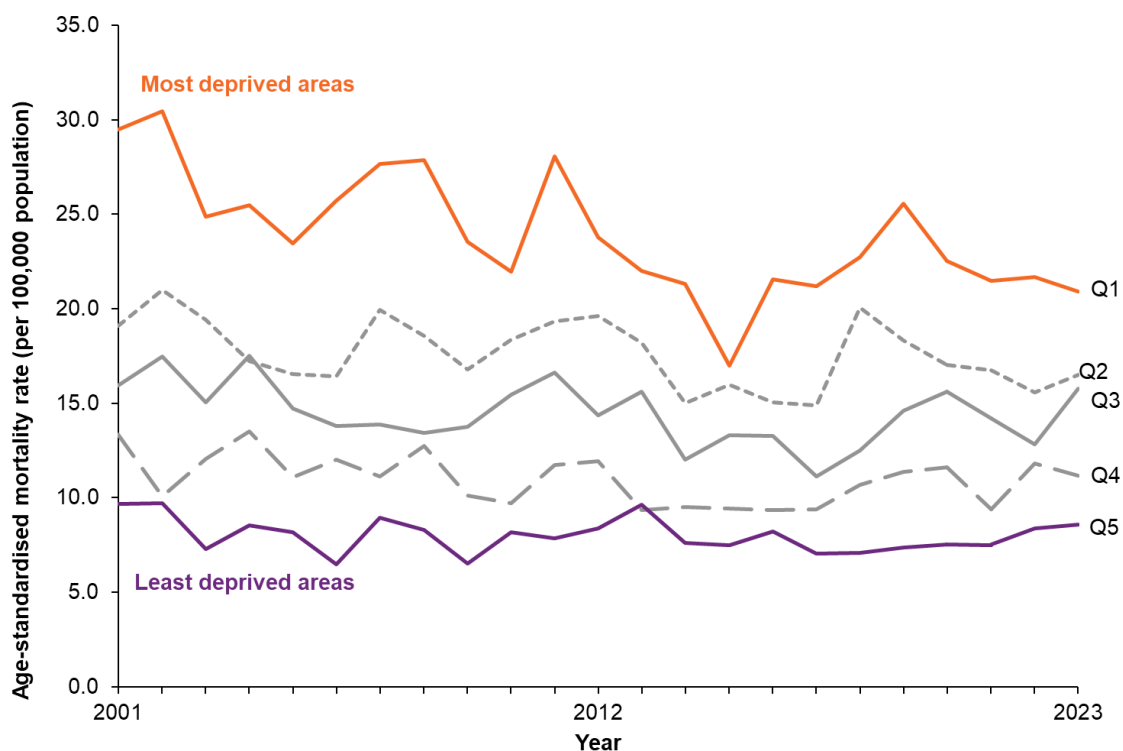
Figure 6: Age-standardised mortality rates of suicide deaths by council area, 2019-2023 average



5. Probable suicides by multiple deprivation and urban rural

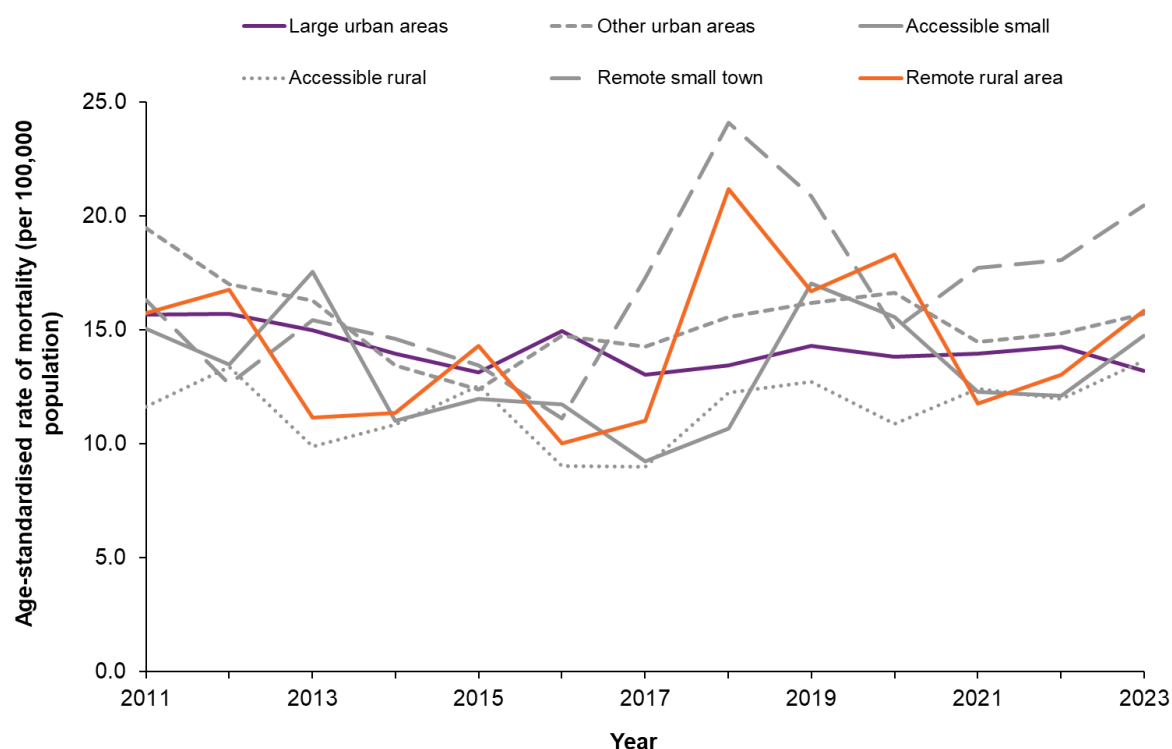
The rate of suicide mortality in the most deprived areas in Scotland was 2.4 times as high as in the least deprived areas in Scotland. This is higher than the deprivation gap of 1.8 times in 2023 for all causes of death. For the most deprived areas, the mortality rate in 2023 is 1.4 times lower than it was in 2001. This difference in mortality rate by deprivation has been fairly stable since 2001 ([Figure 7](#)).

Figure 7: Age-standardised mortality rates in SIMD quintiles, 2001-2023



There is less of a distinctive trend in urban-rural areas, in comparison to deprivation. However, remote small towns have had the highest mortality rates for most of the last decade ([Figure 8](#)). In 2023 the highest suicide rates were in remote small towns (20.5 deaths per 100,000 population), as expected given the longer-term trend. The lowest rates were found in large urban areas (13.2 deaths per 100,000 population).

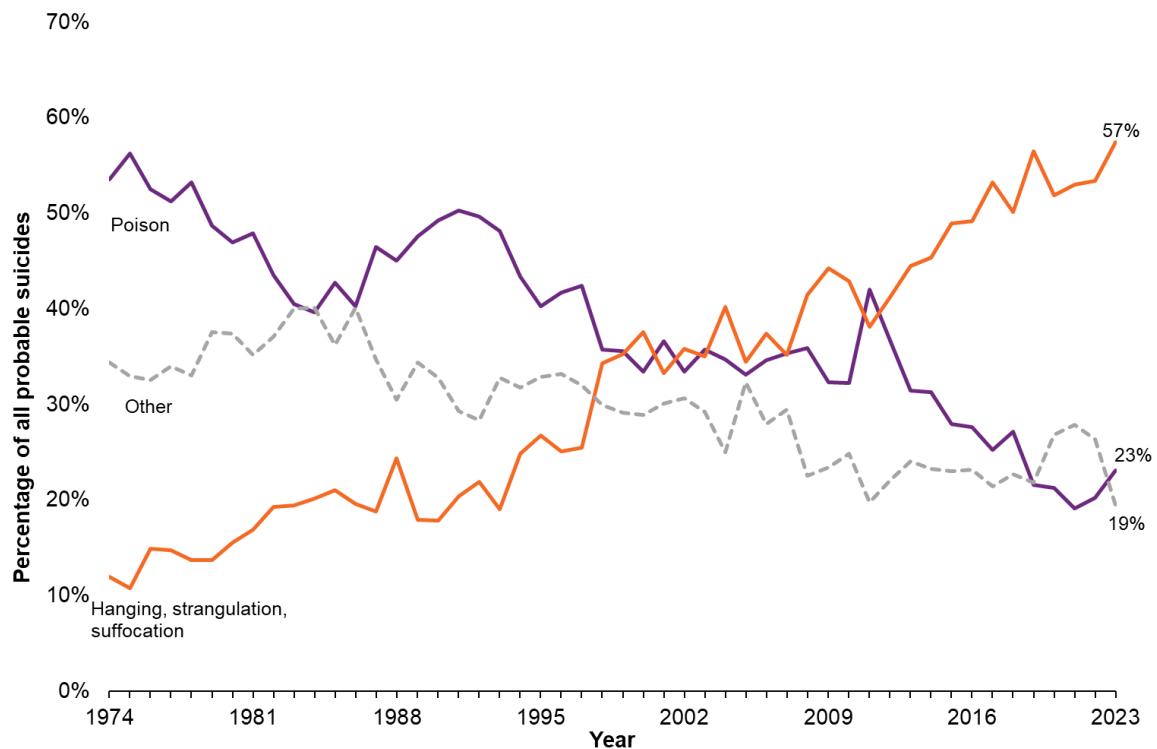
Figure 8: Age-standardised mortality rates by urban rural classification, 2011-2023



6. Method of suicide

Over half of all probable suicide deaths in 2023 were due to hangings, strangulations or suffocations. This is consistent with the trend over the last six years and it has also been the most common cause for most of the last two decades. Poisoning was the most common method between 1974 and the beginning of the new century. In 2023, almost 1 in every 4 suicides were due to poisoning ([Figure 9](#)).

Figure 9: Method of suicide (percentage of all probable suicides), 1974-2023



7. Suicides in the UK

Comparable suicide statistics for the rest of the UK for 2023 are yet to be released. Based on 2022 data, Scotland had the highest rate of suicide deaths of all countries in the UK (14.0 deaths per 100,000 population), followed by Wales (12.5 deaths per 100,000) and Northern Ireland (12.3 deaths per 100,000). England (10.5 deaths per 100,000) had the lowest rate of suicides of all countries in the UK.

Probable suicide death statistics in the rest of the UK are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Links to the latest versions of these are available below.

- [Suicide deaths: England and Wales \(ONS\)](#)
- [Suicide deaths: Northern Ireland \(NISRA\)](#)

8. Other information

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9. Notes on statistical publications

Accredited Official Statistics

The designation of these statistics as Accredited Official Statistics was confirmed in August 2011 following an independent review and compliance check by the [Office for Statistics Regulation](#). They comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics and should be labelled ‘accredited official statistics’.

In June 2024 the Office for Statistics Regulation introduced the new accredited official statistics badge, to denote official statistics that have been independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and judged to meet the standards in the Code of Practice for Statistics. The new badge replaces the current National Statistics badge, though the meaning is the same.

Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the [Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007](#).

It is National Records of Scotland’s responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of accredited official statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Office for Statistics Regulation promptly. Accredited official statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored

Information on background and source data

Further details on data source(s), timeframe of data and timeliness, continuity of data, accuracy, etc. can be found in the [metadata](#) that is published alongside this publication on the NRS website.

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