

Alcohol, drug and suicide-related deaths across West Sussex

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Lizzie Vass

West Sussex Public Health and Social Research Unit



Background

Initially employed by Case and Deyton in 2015, the term “deaths of despair” is routinely used to referred to deaths associated with drug overdose, suicide and alcohol-related diseases such as cirrhosis of the liver. These deaths have been linked to unemployment, economic insecurity and community breakdown. Consequently, deaths of despair are disproportionately prevalent among socially deprived communities, including areas in the North of England, and coastal communities. They also account for almost half of all deaths among the homeless population.

Deaths of despair are frequently considered to be a direct consequence of inequitable resource distribution and highlight the links between economic and health disparities. Their prevalence has been steadily increasing over recent decades, and in the period between 1998 and 2013, they served to offset the declining mortality rates for cancer and heart disease. It is worth noting that the disadvantage associated with deaths of despair has been found to accumulate across generations.

For further information on sources referred to in this background section, [refer to the references section of this briefing](#).

This briefing aims to update previous analysis carried out by colleagues within the research unit, which examined deaths in West Sussex from all causes and ‘deaths of despair’ (deaths related to alcohol, drugs or suicide) registered in 2021-23. This was based on a paper by Camacho et al (2024) which explored the spatial patterns of deaths of despair in England. [Read Camacho et al’s \(2024\) paper in full](#).

Methodology

This analysis uses an extract of mortality data from the Primary Care Mortality Database (PCMD) maintained by NHS Digital, which focused on the number of deaths of West Sussex residents registered in West Sussex between 2022-2024.

To calculate the directly standardised rates for causes contributing to death of despair, deaths were classified to non-overlapping categories of drug-related death, alcohol-specific death, and suicide, based on ICD-10 codes. A breakdown of directly standardised rates by categories is provided in Appendix A.

To control for age differences across the county, the mortality rates were age-standardised using the European Standard Population 2013 (ESP 2013) which allows us to compare across different areas and time periods more accurately (European Union, 2013).

Good to know

It is important to note that the PCMD extract used for this analysis may not fully capture all deaths that occurred during this period due to delayed or incomplete registrations.

This analysis focuses on deaths registered (rather than occurrence) within a certain time period and excludes deaths of non-residents (where upper-tier local authority was outside of West Sussex/not provided).

Mortality

This briefing explores death from all causes and ‘deaths of despair’ (deaths related to alcohol, drugs or suicide) registered in 2022-24. As this analysis uses registered deaths within a certain period, it will not be subject to revision as deaths with a delayed registration will be recorded in the year in which they are registered. It would only be subject to revision if date of occurrence was used instead. For further information about the impact of registration delays, [read this Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) article](#).

Deaths from all causes

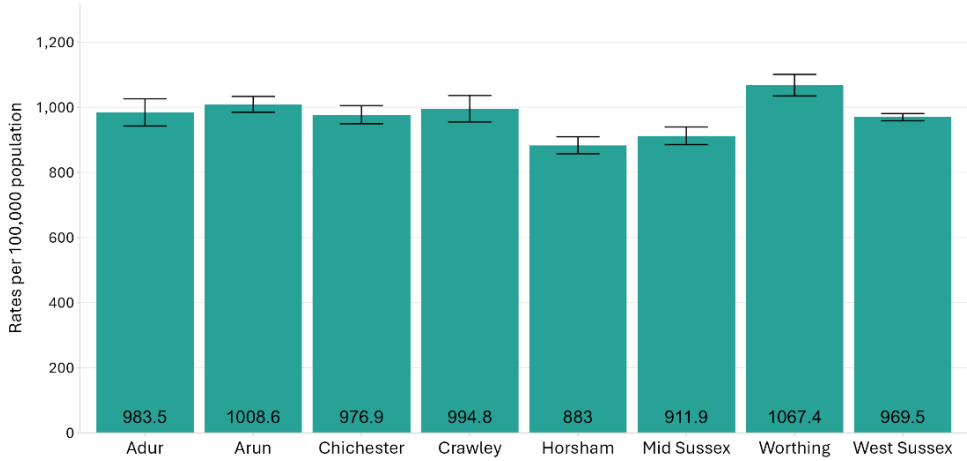
Between 2022 and 2024, the average annual directly standardised rate of death from all causes in West Sussex was 969.5 per 100,000 population (95% CI: 958.4–980.7). There was variation across the county, as seen in Table and Figure 1:

- Arun and Worthing had significantly higher mortality rates than West Sussex.
- Horsham and Mid Sussex had significantly lower mortality rates than the West Sussex.

Table 1 Mortality rate from all causes in West Sussex between 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.

Area	Number	Directly standardised rate	95% LCI	95% UCI
Adur	2,198	983.5	942.4	1,026.0
Arun	6,997	1,008.6	984.4	1,033.1
Chichester	4,932	976.9	949.3	1,005.1
Crawley	2,371	994.8	954.7	1,036.0
Horsham	4,503	883.0	857.2	909.4
Mid Sussex	4,445	911.9	885.2	939.3
Worthing	4,138	1,067.4	1,034.8	1,100.9
West Sussex	29,584	969.5	958.4	980.7

Figure 1 Mortality rate from all causes in West Sussex between 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.



Deaths of despair

This briefing provides the average annual directly standardised rates of deaths of despair overall, rather than by specific categories (e.g., alcohol, drugs and suicide). Supplementary tables, which show rates by category, are available in Appendices A–F.

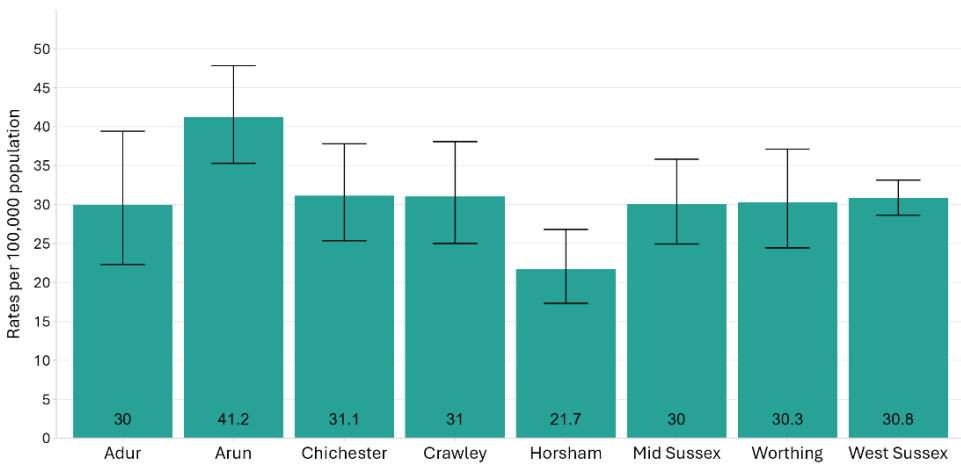
Between 2022 and 2024, the average annual directly standardised rate of deaths of despair in West Sussex was 30.8 deaths per 100,000 population (95% CI 28.6-33.1). Alcohol-specific deaths were the predominant contributor to deaths of despair, consistent with Camacho et al’s (2024) paper.

Arun had a significantly higher mortality rate for causes contributing to deaths of despair than West Sussex, as shown in Table 2 and Figure 2.

Table 2 Mortality rate from causes relating to deaths of despair of residents of West Sussex between 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.

Area	Number	Directly standardised rate	95% LCI	95% UCI
Adur	52	30.0	22.3	39.4
Arun	184	41.2	35.3	47.8
Chichester	106	31.1	25.3	37.8
Crawley	95	31.0	25.0	38.1
Horsham	87	21.7	17.3	26.8
Mid Sussex	125	30.0	24.9	35.8
Worthing	94	30.3	24.4	37.1
West Sussex	743	30.8	28.6	33.1

Figure 2 Mortality rate from causes relating to deaths of despair of residents of West Sussex between 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.



Proportion of deaths of despair

Between 2022 and 2024, the proportion of deaths of despair in West Sussex was 3.2%. Across the county, this ranged from 2.1% in Chichester to 4% in Crawley, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Proportion of deaths of despair (as a proportion of all deaths) in West Sussex between 2022-24.

Area	Proportion of death of despair (based on proportion of deaths)	95% LCI	95% UCI
Adur	2.4%	1.8%	3.1%
Arun	2.6%	2.3%	3%
Chichester	2.1%	1.8%	2.6%
Crawley	4%	3.3%	4.9%
Horsham	1.9%	1.6%	2.4%
Mid Sussex	2.8%	2.4%	3.4%
Worthing	2.3%	1.8%	2.8%
West Sussex	2.5%	2.3%	2.7%

Deprivation

This briefing used the Indices of Deprivation (IoD 2025) which measures relative deprivation for small areas (2021 lower super output areas or LSOAs) in England, to analyse differences in deaths of despair by deprivation.

The IoD25 includes data from seven domains: Income, Employment, Education, Health, Crime, Barriers to Housing and Services and Living Environment (Francis-Devine, 2025). These domains are combined and weighted together to form the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD25), which is the official measure of deprivation in England (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2025).

Each small area is ranked from most to least deprived according to their level of multiple deprivation relative to that of other areas and commonly grouped into 5 (quintiles) or 10 equal groups (deciles).

To provide consistency with previous work undertaken by the team, this briefing will refer to IMD deciles: decile 1 refers to the most deprived nationally and decile 10 refers to the least deprived (Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government, 2025). These deciles are then aggregated into two broad categories to represent the more deprived areas (IMD deciles 1-5) and less deprived areas (IMD deciles 6-10).

Table 4 and Figure 4 provide an overview of the directly standardised mortality rates by IMD deciles 1-5, 6-10 and for West Sussex overall. For further information by

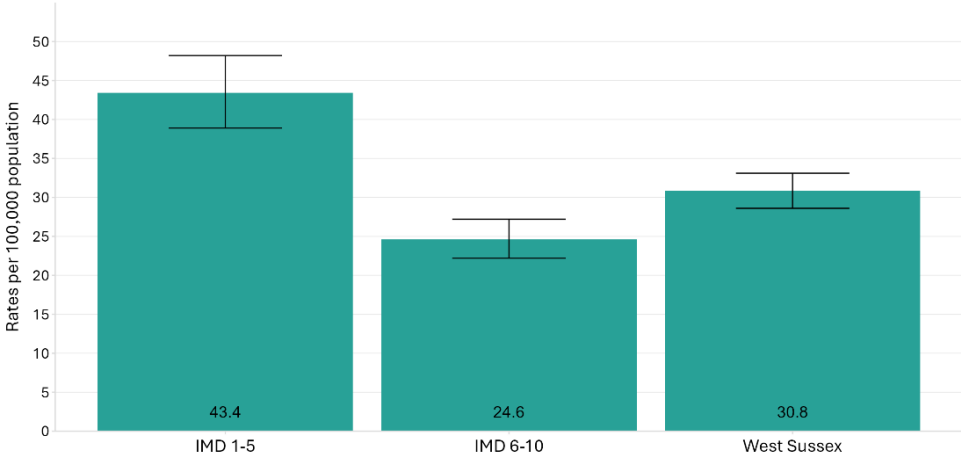
Between 2022 and 2024, the population living within IMD deciles 1-5 experienced a significantly higher mortality rate from deaths of despair (43.4 per 100,000, 95% CI 38.9 to 48.2) than West Sussex overall (30.8 per 100,000, 95% CI 28.6 to 33.1).

The population living within IMD deciles 6-10 experienced a significantly lower mortality rate from deaths of despair (24.6 per 100,000, 95% CI 22.2 to 27.2) than West Sussex overall.

Table 4 Mortality rate from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex by deprivation; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.

Category	Death of despair (counts)	Directly standardised rate	95% LCI	95% UCI
IMD 1-5	345	43.4	38.9	48.2
IMD 6-10	398	24.6	22.2	27.2
West Sussex	743	30.8	28.6	33.1

Figure 3 Mortality rate from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex by deprivation; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.



Coastal

This briefing used the 2020 Office for National Statistics definition of coastal towns which classifies built-up areas and built-up area sub-divisions as coastal towns if they have populations between 5,000 and 225,000, as of the 2011 Census, and a direct coastal boundary (West Sussex County Council, 2024).

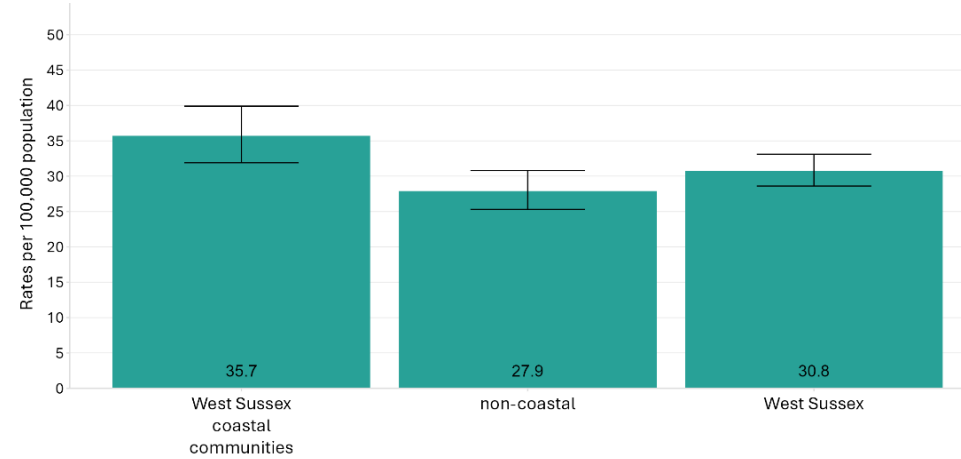
Table 5 and Figure 5 provide an overview of the directly standardised mortality rates by coastal and non-coastal geography, alongside for West Sussex overall.

The population living within coastal communities experienced a significantly higher mortality rate from deaths of despair (35.7, 95% CI: 31.9 to 39.9) than those from non-coastal communities (30.8, 95% CI: 25.3 to 30.8). However, neither rate was significantly different from West Sussex overall (30.8 per 100,000, 95% CI: 28.6 to 33.1).

Table 5 Mortality rate from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex by coastal vs non-coastal geography; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000.

Category	Death of despair (counts)	Directly standardised rate	95% LCI	95% UCI
West Sussex coastal communities	324	35.7	31.9	39.9
non-coastal	419	27.9	25.3	30.8
West Sussex	743	30.8	28.6	33.1

Figure 4 Mortality rate from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex by coastal vs non-coastal geography; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.



Potential Years of Life Lost

Potential years of life lost is a measure of premature mortality which estimates the number of years a person would have lived had they not died before a predetermined age (Gardner & Sanborn, 1990), typically 75 years (ONS, 2025). This measure can help us assess the impact of different causes of death (e.g., suicides) on society (NHS Digital, 2022).

Good to know

Previous sections of this briefing have focused on mortality rates from all causes and causes relating to deaths of despair which looks at the number of deaths per 100,000. Potential years of life lost looks at the number of years of life lost per 100,000 which highlights the burden of early deaths (Gardner & Sanborn, 1990)

To align with previous analysis undertaken by the team, a predetermined ‘cut-off’ age of 80 years was used to reflect the increased life expectancy of the population. Registered deaths of residents aged 10-74 were included in this analysis and potential years of life lost was calculated as years between age at death and 80 years. This means if someone died at 50, they would have lost 30 potential years of life.

The values were summed for all causes and those contributing to deaths of despair and reported as an age-standardised rate per 100,000 population.

Deaths from all causes

Between 2022 and 2024, the average annual directly standardised rate for potential years of life lost in West Sussex was 5,878 per 100,000 population (95% CI 5,845.7 to 5,910.4).

There was variation across the county:

- Arun, Crawley, and Worthing had significantly higher rates of potential years of life lost than West Sussex overall.

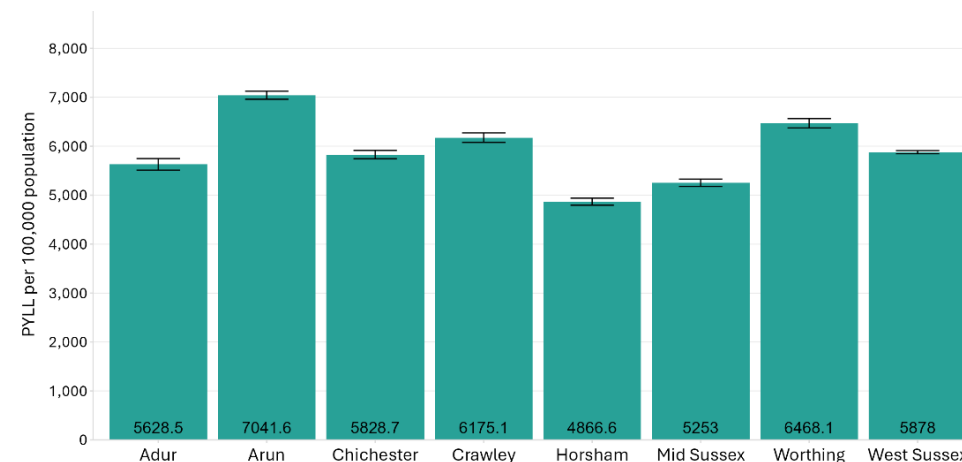
- Adur, Horsham and Mid Sussex had significantly lower rates of potential years of life lost than West Sussex overall.

Table and figure 6 provide an overview of the directly standardised rate of potential years of life from all causes for both the district and boroughs and county overall.

Table 6 Potential years of life lost from all causes in West Sussex; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.

Area	Potential Years of Life Lost (PYLL) – All Causes	PYLL Directly standardised rate	95% LCI	95% UCI
Adur	8,874	5,628.5	5,511.2	5,747.7
Arun	29,382	7,041.6	6,959.6	7,124.4
Chichester	18,826	5,828.7	5,744.0	5,914.2
Crawley	16,214	6,175.1	6,078.6	6,272.7
Horsham	18,030	4,866.6	4,795.1	4,938.9
Mid Sussex	19,400	5,253.0	5,178.9	5,328.0
Worthing	17,777	6,468.1	6,373.0	6,564.3
West Sussex	128,503	5,878.0	5,845.7	5,910.4

Figure 5 Potential years of life lost from all causes in West Sussex; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP (based on deaths occurring under between 10-74 and PYLL to 80).



Deaths of despair

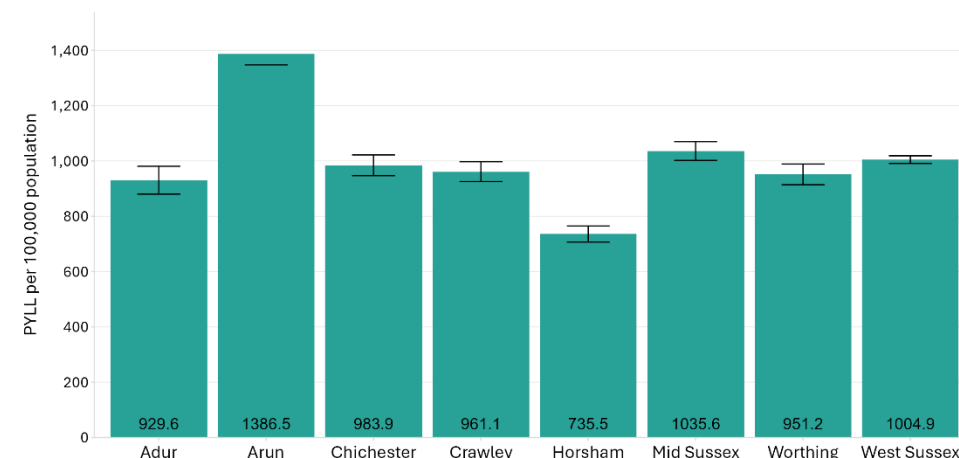
Between 2022 and 2024, the average annual directly standardised rate for years of potential life lost from deaths of despair in West Sussex was 1,004.9 per 100,000 population (95% CI: 991.1 to 1,018.8).

As shown in Table 7 and Figure 7, rates of potential years of life lost from deaths of despair varied across the county. Arun had significantly higher rates than West Sussex whereas Adur, Horsham and Worthing had significantly lower rates than West Sussex.

Table 7 Potential years of life lost from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex; 2022-24; Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.

Area	Potential Years of Life Lost (PYLL) – deaths of despair	PYLL Directly standardised rate	95% LCI	95% UCI
Adur	1,350	929.6	880.1	981.0
Arun	4,894	1,386.5	1,347.5	1,426.4
Chichester	2,740	983.9	946.9	1,022.0
Crawley	2,861	961.1	925.7	997.4
Horsham	2,519	735.5	706.8	765.1
Mid Sussex	3,702	1,035.6	1,002.0	1,069.9
Worthing	2,530	951.2	914.3	989.2
West Sussex	20,596	1,004.9	991.1	1,018.8

Figure 6 Potential years of life lost from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex; 2022-24; Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.



Deaths of despair as a proportion of the total

Between 2022-24, Crawley and Mid Sussex had a significantly higher proportion of deaths of despair compared to West Sussex (16%, 95% CI: 15.8% to 16.2%), as shown by Table 8.

Table 8 Proportion of potential years of life from deaths of despair (as proportion of total potential years of life lost) in West Sussex; 2022-24

Area	Proportion of PYLL from death of despair (based on proportion of total PYLL)	95% LCI	95% UCI
Adur	15.2%	14.5%	16%
Arun	16.7%	16.2%	17.1%
Chichester	14.6%	14.1%	15.1%
Crawley	17.6%	17.1%	18.2%
Horsham	14%	13.5%	14.5%
Mid Sussex	19.1%	18.5%	19.6%

Area	Proportion of PYLL from death of despair (based on proportion of total PYLL)	95% LCI	95% UCI
Worthing	14.2%	13.7%	14.8%
West Sussex	16%	15.8%	16.2%

Population refers to the ONS 2023 mid-year estimates multiplied by 3.

Deprivation

Between 2022 and 2024, the population living within IMD deciles 1-5 had a significantly higher rate of years of potential life lost from deaths of despair per 100,000 population than West Sussex (1,004.9, 95% CI 991.1 to 1,018.8).

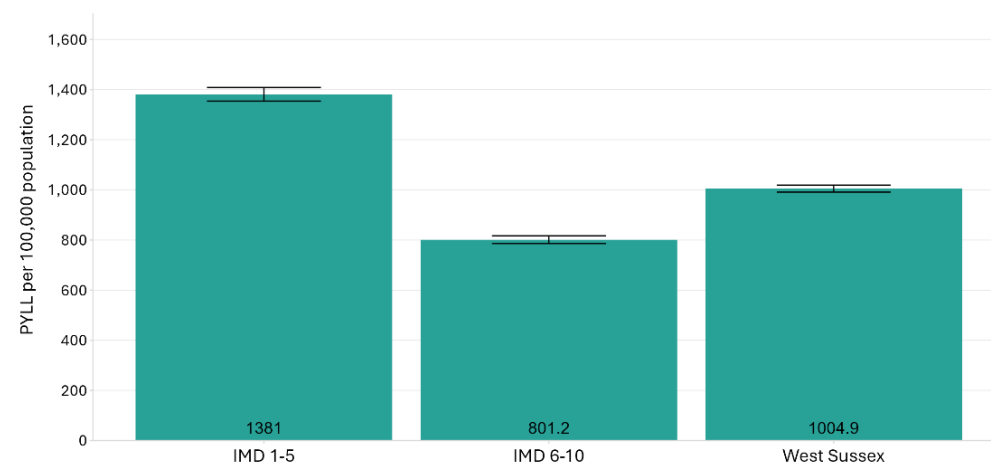
Table 9 and Figure 8 provide an overview of the directly standardised rate of potential years of life from causes relating to deaths of despair for deciles 1-5, 6-10 and West Sussex overall.

The population living within IMD deciles 6-10 had a significantly lower rate for years of potential life lost from deaths of despair per 100,000 population than West Sussex.

Table 9 Potential years of life lost from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex by deprivation; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.

Category	Potential years of life lost due to deaths of despair	Directly standardised rate	95% LCI	95% UCI
IMD 1-5	9,984	1,381.0	1,354.0	1,408.5
IMD 6-10	10,612	801.2	785.9	816.8
West Sussex	20,596	1,004.9	991.1	1,018.8

Figure 7 Potential years of life lost from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex by deprivation; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.



Coastal

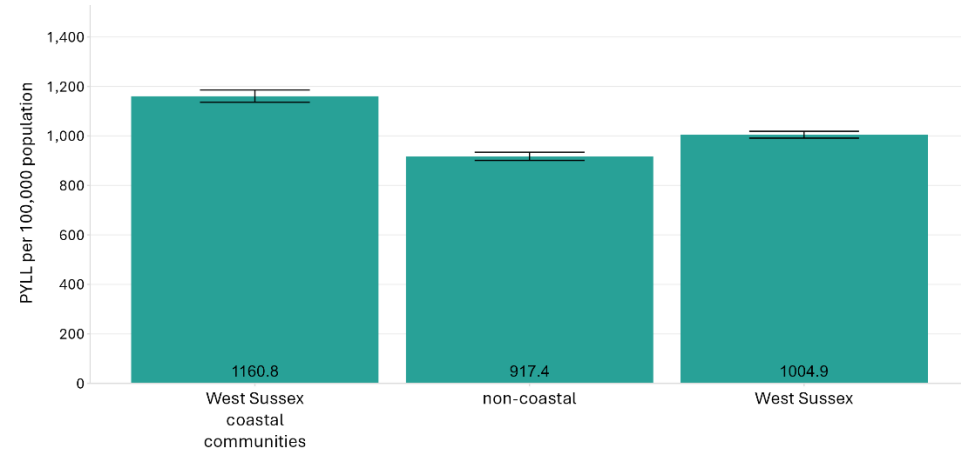
Between 2022 and 2024, the population living within coastal communities experienced a significantly higher rate for years of potential life lost from deaths of despair than West Sussex (1,004.9, 95% CI: 991.1 to 1,018.8).

The population living in non-coastal communities experienced a significantly lower DSR of PYLL from deaths of despair than West Sussex, as shown in Table 10.

Table 10 Potential years of life lost from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex by coastal and non-coastal geographies; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.

Category	Potential years of life lost due to deaths of despair	Directly standardised rate	95% LCI	95% UCI
West Sussex coastal communities	8,640	1,160.8	1,136.2	1,185.7
non-coastal	11,956	917.4	901.0	934.1
West Sussex	20,596	1,004.9	991.1	1,018.8

Figure 8 Potential years of life lost from causes relating to deaths of despair in West Sussex by coastal vs non coastal geography; 2022-24. Directly standardised rate per 100,000 ESP.



Conclusion

This briefing provided an updated summary of deaths of West Sussex residents from all causes and ‘deaths of despair’ (deaths related to alcohol, drugs or suicide) registered in 2022-24.

Over this period, the average annual directly standardised rate for causes contributing to deaths of despair in West Sussex was 30.8 deaths per 100,000 population (95% CI 28.6-33.1). Alcohol-specific deaths were the predominant contributor to deaths of despair, consistent with findings from Camacho et al’s (2024) paper.

Across the county, Arun had a significantly higher mortality rate for causes contributing to deaths of despair than West Sussex.

Alongside rates at county and district level, this analysis also explored the potential impact of social determinants such as relative deprivation, based on the latest index of multiple deprivation (IMD 2025), and living in coastal vs non-coastal areas. Mortality rates from deaths of despair were significantly higher amongst populations living in deciles 1-5 than West Sussex overall.

Coastal communities also experienced a significantly higher mortality rate from deaths of despair than those from non-coastal communities, although this was not significantly different when compared to West Sussex overall. Reports from [Public Health England](#) and the [Chief Medical Officer \(CMO\)](#) have highlighted that people living in coastal areas are more likely to face poorer health outcomes than those in other areas (Barton, et al., 2025). For example, the CMO report identified that coastal communities have higher rates of risk factors for poor health which are strongly correlated with deprivation, such as obesity, smoking and excess alcohol use (Barton, et al., 2025).

This analysis contributes to new knowledge on the variation of deaths of despair across West Sussex and the importance of considering social and geographical inequalities.

References

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References for background section

- [‘Deaths of despair’: a tale of two countries – with Professor Sir Angus Deaton and Sarah O’Connor](#)
- [The toll of ‘Deaths of Despair’ in England](#)
- [Deaths of Despair: Conceptual and Clinical Implications - PMC](#)
- [So-called 'deaths of despair' are rising in the UK. Labour must act](#)
- [‘Deaths of despair’: A term that needs to be retired - Darke - 2025 - Addiction - Wiley Online Library](#)
- [Risk factors for deaths of despair in England: An ecological study of local authority mortality data - ScienceDirect](#)

Appendix A

ICD-10 code categories for deaths of despair, used by Camacho et al (2024)

Category	ICD-10 codes
Deaths of despair attributed to alcohol	E24.4, F10, G31.2, G62.1, G72.1, I42.6, K29.2, K70, K85.2, K86.0, Q86.0, R78.0, X45, X65, Y15
Deaths of despair attributed to drugs	F11–F16, F18-19, X40-X44, X60-X64, X85, Y10–Y14
Deaths of despair attributed to suicide	X66-X84, Y16-34

Appendix B

Deaths of despair by deprivation, 2022-24. Average annual directly standardised rates (DSR) per 100,000 ESP.

Cat	Number	Alcohol			Number	Drugs			Number	Suicide		
		DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI		DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI		DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI
IMD 1-5	171	21.6	18.5	25.1	93	11.6	9.4	14.2	81	10.1	8.0	12.6
IMD 6-10	178	10.4	8.9	12.0	81	5.2	4.1	6.4	139	9.1	7.6	10.7
West Sussex	349	14.0	12.5	15.5	174	7.4	6.3	8.6	220	9.4	8.2	10.8

Appendix C

Deaths of despair by coastal vs non-coastal communities, 2022-24. Average annual directly standardised rates (DSR) per 100,000 ESP.

Area	Alcohol				Drugs				Suicide			
	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI
West Sussex coastal communities	158	16.6	14.1	19.5	89	10.1	8.0	12.4	77	9.0	7.1	11.3
non-coastal	191	12.4	10.7	14.3	85	5.8	4.6	7.2	143	9.7	8.2	11.5
West Sussex	349	14.0	12.5	15.5	174	7.4	6.3	8.6	220	9.4	8.2	10.8

Appendix D

Years of potential life lost from deaths of despair, 2022-24. Average annual standardised rates (DSR) per 100,000 ESP.

Area	Alcohol				Drugs				Suicide			
	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI
Adur	508	332.9	304.4	363.2	437	297.8	270.4	327.1	405	298.9	270.0	330.1
Arun	1,904	522.0	498.4	546.4	1,443	412.2	390.9	434.2	1,547	452.4	429.9	475.7
Chichester	1,105	361.3	339.9	383.6	461	185.0	168.4	202.7	1,174	437.7	412.8	463.7
Crawley	1,136	398.2	375.1	422.4	762	243.0	225.9	261.0	963	319.8	299.7	340.9
Horsham	795	224.0	208.6	240.3	640	200.2	184.8	216.6	1,084	311.3	292.9	330.5
Mid Sussex	1,320	343.2	325.0	362.3	836	233.0	217.3	249.6	1,546	459.3	436.2	483.2
Worthing	1,023	368.5	346.2	391.8	780	307.8	286.4	330.4	727	274.9	255.3	295.6
West Sussex	7,791	366.0	357.9	374.3	5,359	266.1	259.0	273.4	7,446	372.8	364.3	381.4

Appendix E

Years of potential life lost from deaths of despair by deprivation category; 2022-24. Average annual standardised rates (DSR) per 100,000 ESP.

Category	Alcohol				Drugs				Suicide			
	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI
IMD 1-5	4,010	558.5	541.3	576.1	3,065	422.1	407.2	437.4	2,909	400.5	386.0	415.4
IMD 6-10	3,781	264.5	256.1	273.2	2,294	180.8	173.4	188.4	4,537	355.9	345.5	366.5
West Sussex	7,791	366.0	357.9	374.3	5,359	266.1	259.0	273.4	7,446	372.8	364.3	381.4

Appendix F

Years of potential life lost from deaths of despair by coastal vs non-coastal communities. Average annual standardised rates (DSR) per 100,000 ESP.

Category	Alcohol				Drugs				Suicide			
	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI	Number	DSR	95% LCI	95% UCI
West Sussex coastal communities	3,490	450.5	435.6	465.8	2,594	357.1	343.4	371.2	2,556	353.2	339.5	367.2
non-coastal	4,301	318.7	309.2	328.3	2,765	214.8	206.9	223.0	4,890	383.9	373.2	394.9
West Sussex	7,791	366.0	357.9	374.3	5,359	266.1	259.0	273.4	7,446	372.8	364.3	381.4