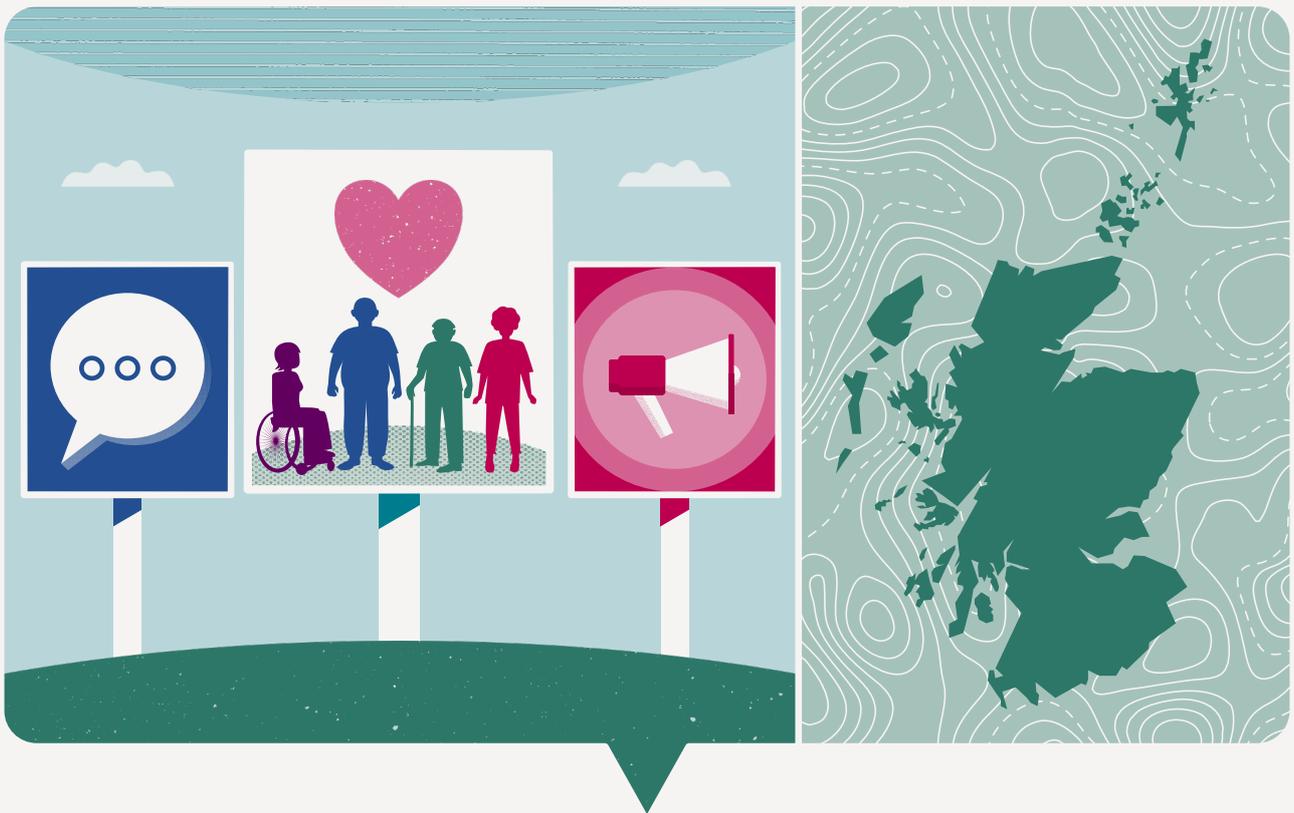


# Our

# Collective

# Voice



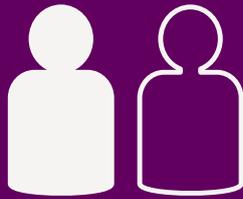
**The ALLIANCE 2026 Scottish  
Parliament election manifesto  
for a fairer, healthier Scotland**

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# Introduction



Half of adults in Scotland have a long term condition, and 39% say their condition limits their activities.<sup>1</sup>

**39%**

**15%**

Around 15% of adults and 30,000 young people aged under 18 are unpaid carers.<sup>2</sup>

**30,000**

An estimated 3 in 5 people are likely to become an unpaid carer at some point in their lives.<sup>3</sup>



Health and social care third sector organisations provide essential support at the national, regional and local levels and are an invaluable part of the Scottish economy.<sup>4</sup>



The 2026 Scottish Parliament election takes place in the context of serious, overlapping challenges. Half of adults in Scotland now live with a long term condition and the number of unpaid carers continues to rise. Ongoing pressure on public finance negatively impacts the delivery of essential public services and the third sector is stretched to breaking point. At the same time, our everyday rights are under increasing threat.

However, the challenges Scotland faces are not insurmountable if we collectively rise to meet them. In this manifesto, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) set out our solutions to these challenges and call on Scotland's political parties to offer a vision of hope for the next five years. We have a vision of Scotland as a human rights leader, with fair finances and an equitable economy. A Scotland where in equal partnership with the third sector, we renew social care and deliver public services for everyone, rooted in effective prevention, early intervention, and lifelong support.

Ahead of the 2026 Scottish Parliament election, the ALLIANCE and our members call for all political parties to make the following commitments:

## Scotland as a human rights leader

### Incorporate human rights

- Pass a Scottish Human Rights Bill that incorporates a range of international human rights and accountability directly into Scots law.
- Maximise the capacity for incorporating human rights in Scotland, following the Supreme Court ruling on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Incorporation Act.
- Enhance the powers of the Scottish Human Rights Commission and ensure it has adequate and sustainable resources.

### Act, monitor and report on human rights

- Prioritise implementation of Scotland's second National Action Plan for Human Rights (SNAP 2).
- Proactively respond to UN human rights recommendations through appropriate action planning and resource allocation.
- Ensure that robust, disaggregated equality and human rights data is systematically gathered, analysed, and used to inform decision making.
- Improve human rights monitoring and reporting, underpinned by a national human rights tracker tool that includes data from a range of sources.

### Realise the right to health

- Ensure equality and rights are explicitly mainstreamed and embedded within all public services.
- Take action to support a Right to Rehab approach through local and community services.
- Embed a Right to Palliative Care approach across services.

# Fair finances and an equitable economy

## A sustainable third sector as an equal partner

- Embed and deliver fair funding for the third sector across all public sector funders, including sufficient multi-year funding.
- Reimburse Scottish third sector organisations for the increased cost of employer National Insurance Contributions.
- Formally acknowledge the third sector as an economic investment and contributor, including them as an equal partner in public service reform and financial decision making.
- Include the third sector in the Scottish Government's contributions to ongoing development of the UK-EU relationship.

## A human rights and wellbeing approach to finance and the economy

- Embed human rights budgeting and Wellbeing Economy approaches across all areas of fiscal policy, including through a tax system that raises sufficient revenue to sustain services.
- Carry out robust equality and human rights data gathering and analysis to measure and assess the impact of public finance decisions.

## A progressive approach to social security

- Deliver further improvements to the Scottish social security system including greater flexibility for unpaid carers.
- Implement the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Adult Disability Payment to deepen the human rights basis for social security.
- Ensure that all devolved payments are set at adequate values.

# Renew social care

## Deliver social care reform

- Develop national oversight and scrutiny of social care to end the postcode lottery and improve standards, access, quality and accountability.
- Reform commissioning and procurement to take a collaborative and human rights based approach.
- Abolish non-residential care charges.
- Substantially increase financial investment in social care, to ensure demand is met and third sector providers are adequately funded.

## Build a valued service where everyone has a voice

- Provide equal rights and support for all Integration Joint Board (IJB) members, ensuring that voting rights for lived experience, unpaid carer and third sector representatives translate into meaningful input and influence.
- Actively involve people with lived experience and the third sector in the health and social care reform process.
- Improve pay and conditions for social care staff and address institutionalised gender bias.



# Public services for everyone

## Meet everyone's communication and access needs

- Develop a new See Hear Strategy and create a Scottish Government Sensory Policy Unit for a prioritised, joined-up approach.
- Provide a clear legal right to inclusive communication.
- Pass a Digital Inclusion Bill to realise the vision of Scotland as an ethical digital nation.

## Services that work for people of all ages

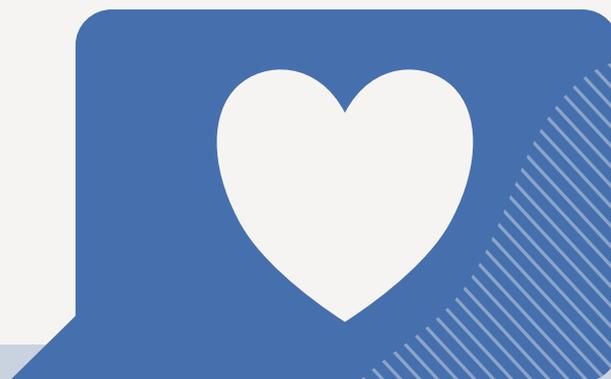
- Refocus attention on the importance of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), whilst strengthening implementation, data gathering and reporting.
- Introduce an older people's health and social care strategy and action plan.

## Improve and invest in tackling women's health inequalities

- Drive the systemic change needed to ensure all women across Scotland enjoy their right to timely, accessible, suitable, and good quality healthcare.

## Better support people with learning disabilities, autism and neurodiversity

- Pass a Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodiversity Bill.



# Strengthen prevention and lifelong support

## Strengthen prevention

- Ensure policy intent on prevention is implemented.
- Protect and increase investment in the Community Links Worker approach.
- Commit to maintaining the Self Management Fund and the innovative projects it supports.

## Deliver effective and lifetime support for long term conditions

- Ensure that any overarching framework complements rather than replaces condition-specific action.
- Invest in greater support for people with long term conditions.
- Develop a supportive approach to health and work.

## A reenergised approach to mental health

- Develop rights based mental health and incapacity law by implementing the recommendations of the Scottish Mental Health Law Review.
- Invest in mental health services, including renewed funding for the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund.
- Roll out the Living Well: Emotional Support Matters approach to support the mental health and wellbeing of people with long term conditions and the third sector organisations that work for and with them.





# Scotland as a human rights leader

## Incorporate human rights

- Pass a Scottish Human Rights Bill that incorporates a range of international human rights and accountability directly into Scots law.
- Maximise the capacity for incorporating human rights in Scotland, following the Supreme Court ruling on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Incorporation Act.
- Enhance the powers of the Scottish Human Rights Commission and ensure it has adequate and sustainable resources.

During the 2021-2026 term of parliament, the Scottish Government and civil society worked hard to develop a Scottish Human Rights Bill. Following the prior incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), this would have incorporated further treaties into Scots law: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). It would also have incorporated the right to a healthy environment.

The ALLIANCE, our members and partners across civil society are deeply disappointed that the Bill has not yet been introduced. This was a missed opportunity to improve accountability and actionability for rights in Scotland, and to act on the evidence and experience shared by so many rights holders, human rights defenders, and organisations. Incorporation should make it easier for duty bearers to plan for and fulfil their obligations, and for people to access justice and receive redress when their rights have been breached. **The next Scottish Government must prioritise passing a Human Rights Bill, taking a maximalist approach to incorporation within the constraints of the devolution settlement.**

Those constraints have been tightened by what legal expert Professor Aileen McHarg describes as the “incoherent” and “unexpected” judgement of the UK Supreme Court in relation to the UNCRC Incorporation Act.<sup>5</sup> This judgement has complicated the devolved incorporation of human rights in a way that cannot have been intended when the Scotland Act was originally drafted. **The next Scottish Government must work with the UK government to amend the Scotland Act and remove these unintended and unworkable limitations. It should also consider alternative solutions to widen the scope of incorporation, like consolidating and re-enacting pre-devolution legislation.**

The Bill should also consider the role of the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC), Scotland's National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). The ALLIANCE have repeatedly called<sup>6</sup> for the SHRC's powers to be expanded, including the right to raise proceedings in their own name. In addition, growing demand for group or theme specific Commissioners is understandable given persistent service failures, but the Scottish Parliament considers this growth unsustainable. **The SHRC could potentially meet these demands if structured and resourced accordingly. The next Scottish Government must ensure the SHRC has the powers, funding and capacity to meaningfully fulfil its role as an NHRI.**

### Act, monitor and report on human rights

- Prioritise implementation of Scotland's second National Action Plan for Human Rights (SNAP 2).
- Proactively respond to UN human rights recommendations through appropriate action planning and resource allocation.
- Ensure that robust, disaggregated equality and human rights data is systematically gathered, analysed, and used to inform decision making.
- Improve human rights monitoring and reporting, underpinned by a national human rights tracker tool that includes data from a range of sources.

Transparency and accountability are essential to the full realisation of human rights. Governments at all levels must clearly set out what actions they will take to meet their human rights obligations, and how those outcomes will be measured and monitored. At the same time, a recurring issue that the ALLIANCE and many of our members and other third sector organisations encounter is lack of accessible and comprehensive data. How and what data is gathered is essential to understanding whether and how governments are delivering on their obligations.

Scotland's second National Action Plan for Human Rights (SNAP 2) was published in March 2023.<sup>7</sup> Intended to run until 2030, it sets out the actions needed to help build "a Scotland where everyone can live with human dignity." As yet, however, the Scottish Government has not shared a clear plan or outlined how it will progress relevant SNAP 2 actions. **The next Scottish Government must prioritise the implementation of SNAP 2 and ensure adequate resources are invested in the delivery of each action.**

The UK and Scotland are party to UN oversight processes in respect of human rights, like Universal Periodic Reviews and Treaty Bodies (Committees.<sup>8</sup>) These scrutinise the implementation of rights and issue recommendations for further action. In 2025, the ICESCR Committee made several recommendations in devolved areas including mental health, housing and budgeting, and the current government published a high-level action plan for acting on these recommendations. **The next Scottish Government must prioritise a proactive response to UN human rights recommendations, including specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound action plans and adequate resourcing.**

Given the diversity arising from personal characteristics and circumstances, including ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age and income, there must be mechanisms for capturing and learning from differing experiences. To understand whether actions and decisions have been successful, it is essential to know how diverse groups of people have been affected. **The next Scottish Government must ensure that robust, disaggregated equality and human rights data is systematically gathered, analysed, and used to inform decision making. This includes data in relation to people's communication needs, access to and experience of public services, as well as incidence and prevalence figures for long term conditions and diseases like cancer.**

Similarly, there is a need for improved human rights monitoring and reporting. The ALLIANCE has welcomed the work underway by the current Scottish Government to design and develop a tracker tool however it must use evidence that is independent and impartial to avoid concerns that public sector duty bearers are 'marking their own homework'. **The next Scottish Government must deliver improvements in human rights monitoring, including through completing the process of delivering a national human rights tracker tool. This tool should include data generated by a range of sources with human rights duties and expertise, including the public and third sectors.**

## Realise the right to health

- Ensure equality and rights are explicitly mainstreamed and embedded within all public services.
- Take action to support a Right to Rehab approach through local and community services.
- Embed a Right to Palliative Care approach across services.

The right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, or, for brevity, the right to health, is a key ICESCR right. As the United Nations notes, it is an inclusive right that extends to the social determinants of health as well as timely access to appropriate healthcare.<sup>9</sup> In recent years, the ALLIANCE has focused on how the right to health is understood and realised in Scotland's health and social care systems. This includes a 10-year partnership with Public Health Scotland and the University of Strathclyde, as well as research that found a lack of understanding of this right amongst the public and workforce.<sup>10</sup>

Work by the ALLIANCE and our members highlights the importance of explicitly mainstreaming human rights throughout service design and delivery, as well as taking a health in all policies approach. When accessing health and social care services, it should be clear to the public what they have a right to expect, and what to do if they are concerned or know that their rights have not been respected. Equally, the workforce should be appropriately educated and trained in human rights based practice. **The next Scottish Government must progress equality and human rights mainstreaming and ensure that all public services respect, protect and fulfil the right to health.**

An important component of the right to health is that it is to “the highest attainable standard”. This recognises that although the state cannot be responsible for unconditional health, it is nonetheless obliged to ensure the conditions are in place so that everyone’s right to health is respected, protected and fulfilled. The ALLIANCE are a member of Scotland’s Right to Rehab coalition, which calls for everyone to have access to rehabilitation. **The next Scottish Government must take action to support a Right to Rehab approach, ensuring no one is excluded by “no rehab potential” and that their needs are met through appropriate local and community services.**

Similarly, the health and wellbeing of people with terminal and life-limiting conditions benefit enormously from access to good quality palliative care. The ALLIANCE have backed calls by our members and partners for a Right to Palliative Care. **The next Scottish Government must deliver a Right to Palliative Care approach through developing national standards and increasing the availability of palliative care. It should also ensure palliative care has adequate strategic recognition, alongside education and communications which help to improve support and experiences of serious illness, dying and bereavement.**



# Fair finances and an equitable economy

## A sustainable third sector as an equal partner

- Embed and deliver fair funding for the third sector across all public sector funders, including sufficient multi-year funding.
- Reimburse Scottish third sector organisations for the increased cost of employer National Insurance Contributions.
- Formally acknowledge the third sector as an economic investment and contributor, including them as an equal partner in public service reform and financial decision making.
- Include the third sector in the Scottish Government's contributions to ongoing development of the UK-EU relationship.

The third sector makes a vital contribution to the Scottish economy and an invaluable contribution to Scottish society. Around 5% of the Scottish workforce is employed by the third sector, and hundreds of thousands more volunteer. The third sector had a collective turnover of over £9 billion in 2023,<sup>11</sup> and organisations large and small provide a wide array of essential and innovative services in every corner of the country. Third sector services and support have been lifelines for many people and were critical in responding deftly and at pace to both the COVID-19 pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

Despite widespread recognition and praise for the role of the third sector, long term and systemic funding challenges remain a serious threat to the viability of many organisations and services. The commitments given to fairer funding by the current Scottish Government are welcome, but progress so far has been unacceptably slow. Third sector organisations continue to experience unsustainable budget cuts, short-term funding cycles, late payments, and poor communication. **The next Scottish Government must increase the pace of implementing fair funding for the third sector, ensuring all public sector funders deliver multi-year funding that meets the costs of service provision, offers appropriate inflationary uplifts, and is settled in a timely manner.**

A recent additional pressure on third sector finances has been the UK Government's increase to employer National Insurance Contributions. The failure to exempt charitable organisations is estimated to cost the Scottish third sector £75 million per year going forward.<sup>12</sup> Unlike commercial organisations, the third sector is not profit-seeking and can only meet this increase via reductions in services, staff or reserves. **The next Scottish Government must keep the pressure up on the UK Government to compensate the third sector for changes to employer National Insurance Contributions and ensure that its own funding meets those costs in the meantime.**

Despite its size and scope, the third sector is too-often overlooked and excluded by public sector bodies in both national and local planning processes. The sector deserves greater and more formal recognition as an economic investment and contributor and should be fully included in relevant making. **The next Scottish Government must ensure that the third sector is treated as an equal partner throughout ongoing processes of public service and finance reform, offering meaningful voice and representation.**

The UK's departure from the European Union has had, and will continue to have, significant social and economic impacts. The EU has taken a leading role in consumer health and environmental protection through regulation of the common market, and this progress should not be lost because of Brexit. **The next Scottish Government must fully include the third sector and wider civil society in their contributions to the UK-EU relationship, particularly in relation to key determinants of health like food and energy.**



## A human rights and wellbeing approach to finance and the economy

- Embed human rights budgeting and Wellbeing Economy approaches across all areas of fiscal policy, including through a tax system that raises sufficient revenue to sustain services.
- Carry out robust equality and human rights data gathering and analysis to measure and assess the impact of public finance decisions.

The overall shape of Scotland's economy and how the Scottish Government chooses to spend its budget have an enormous impact on society. However, those impacts are not evenly distributed, and systemic economic inequalities directly contribute to other forms of inequality, particularly in health. The longstanding approach of combining aspirations for growth in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) alongside redistributive policies has largely failed in recent years to reduce those inequalities. It is more important than ever to move beyond this approach and instead build a more equitable economy underpinned by public services that help to progress and realise human rights.

The ALLIANCE advocate for a human rights budgeting approach<sup>13</sup> to be adopted across all areas of public spending, helping to meet Scotland's obligations to make maximum use of available resources to deliver on rights. We also support the principles of a Wellbeing Economy:<sup>14</sup> "an economy designed to deliver good lives on a healthy planet." **The next Scottish Government must ensure that human rights, wellbeing and reducing inequalities are embedded in economic and financial planning, including through a tax system that raises sufficient revenue to sustain services.**<sup>15</sup>

As part of these approaches, the efficacy and impact of public finance decisions must be fully and adequately evaluated. Robust equality and human rights data gathering and analysis is necessary to measure and assess those impacts, identifying where spending has made a positive contribution to realising positive rights outcomes, and where there is need for further action. **The next Scottish Government must put in place data gathering and analysis structures that will ensure there is accountability and transparency for their public spending decisions.**



## A progressive approach to social security

- Deliver further improvements to the Scottish social security system including greater flexibility for unpaid carers.
- Implement the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Adult Disability Payment to deepen the human rights basis for social security.
- Ensure that all devolved payments are set at adequate values.

Since the powers were devolved in the Scotland Act 2016, Scotland's social security system has been gradually transformed. The passage of the Social Security (Scotland) Act 2017, which embedded human rights as a key principle; the establishment of Social Security Scotland; the replacement of intrusive and dehumanising assessments with a lighter touch application process; the creation of the Scottish Child Payment; all of these represent positive steps towards a fairer, kinder and more human rights based system.

As the process of devolving payments nears its conclusion, the next Scottish Government must be ambitious. The changes made so far are welcome but cannot be the end of the story and must not replicate the cuts approach of successive UK Governments. In the first instance, further changes that have already been proposed should be rapidly progressed, for example to the Carer Support Payment. **The next Scottish Government must fulfil pledges to increase the earnings limit for the Carer Support Payment above the UK level and to increase the length of time the payment will be made after a caring role comes to an end.**

Further changes should also follow from the recommendations of the 2025 Independent Review of Adult Disability Payment (ADP).<sup>16</sup> Whilst the primary focus was on ADP, there are recommendations that would improve the operation of Social Security Scotland generally, whilst others would also apply in principle to the Child and Pension Age Disability Payments. **The next Scottish Government must commit to timely implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review of ADP. Arbitrary rules around the distance people can walk and the incidence of fluctuating conditions should be reformed as soon as possible, and greater recognition given to the effects of pain and exhaustion.**

The issue of adequacy was a notable omission from the scope of the Independent Review of ADP, and it remains unclear what the basis is for the value of disability payments. Even the maximum value of ADP, amounting to approximately £812 per month in 2025/2026, is significantly below Scope's estimate of £1,095 for the average monthly additional costs of disability.<sup>17</sup> **The next Scottish Government must ensure that the devolved social security system has a clearly established basis for the value of payments and that all payments provide adequate support, including for disabled people and unpaid carers.**

# Renew social care

## Deliver social care reform

- Develop national oversight and scrutiny of social care to end the postcode lottery and improve standards, access, quality and accountability.
- Reform commissioning and procurement to take a collaborative and human rights based approach.
- Abolish non-residential care charges.
- Substantially increase financial investment in social care, to ensure demand is met and third sector providers are adequately funded.

In 2021, just before the last Scottish Parliament election, the Independent Review of Adult Social Care in Scotland<sup>18</sup> was published, setting out a clear vision for reform, centred on a National Care Service (NCS). Despite the urgent need for reform, a consensus that change was needed, and exhaustive input from disabled people, people with long term conditions, unpaid carers and the third sector, the review remains largely unimplemented.

What should have been a transformational NCS Bill became the less ambitious Care Reform Act. Although containing some positive steps, this reduction in ambition was deeply disappointing, and it cannot and must not be the final word on social care reform. The ALLIANCE and partners have shared key thinking and priorities for what further transformation in social care should involve.<sup>19</sup>

Scotland needs more accountability for and consistency in social care. There remains an unacceptable level in the variation of availability and quality of social care in different parts of Scotland, which is incompatible with a human rights based approach. **The next Scottish Government, alongside local government, must develop an effective system for national oversight and scrutiny of social care. This should include binding national standards and improvements in access, quality and accountability of social care services.**

At the same time there is a need to reform the current approach to social care commissioning and procurement, which has entrenched a cost-cutting, time and task based approach. This has negative impacts on the people both accessing and providing care and drives a competitive rather than collaborative approach amongst providers. The ALLIANCE welcome the work underway on ethical commissioning, though questions remain about the definition and scope. **The next Scottish Government must reform commissioning and procurement to take a collaborative and human rights based approach that helps to improve experiences of accessing and providing social care.**

The ALLIANCE have also repeatedly called on the Scottish Government to abolish non-residential care charges, as it pledged to do during the 2021-2026 parliamentary term. These charges have increased substantially in several council areas and contribute to deepening financial hardship and poverty amongst people accessing social care. Social care is a fundamental necessity to fully realise people's human rights, including the right to independent living, which charging risks seriously infringing. **The next Scottish Government must make abolishing non-residential care charging an immediate priority, fulfilling the pledge unmet in this term.**

Overall, there is a clear need to increase the financial investment in social care. Work remains to be done to first identify the prevalence of, and address, unmet need. At the same time, third sector providers face extreme financial hardship. **The next Scottish Government must substantially increase financial investment in social care, ensuring that demand is fully met, and that third sector providers receive fair, sustainable and adequate funding.**

### Build a valued service where everyone has a voice

- Provide equal rights and support for all Integration Joint Board (IJB) members, ensuring that voting rights for lived experience, unpaid carer and third sector representatives translate into meaningful input and influence.
- Actively involve people with lived experience and the third sector in the health and social care reform process.
- Improve pay and conditions for social care staff and address institutionalised gender bias.

The scrapping of most legislative aspects of the NCS from the Care Reform Act did not just represent the loss of proposals for structural change. It also meant that much of the time, expertise and effort that disabled people, people with long term conditions, unpaid carers and the workforce invested in the process were left with very little to show for it. This has jeopardised trust in the system as well as the process, called into question how meaningful the co-design approach was, and failed to deliver promised reforms that would strengthen people's voices.

Amongst the many proposals dropped from the final Care Reform Act were plans to give all members of Integration Joint Boards (IJBs) voting rights. This was promised to lived experience and unpaid carer representatives as part of ensuring their expertise was properly valued and listened to, alongside strengthened support to help them carry out that role. **The next Scottish Government must urgently progress equal voting rights for lived experience, unpaid carer and third sector representatives on IJBs and ensure that adequate time and resource is available to enable their equal and effective participation.**

As wider health and social care reform continues to progress, people with lived experience and the third sector must have a seat at the table. If the diverse perspectives they can bring to the process are not heard and given equal weight, then that risks taking forward actions and entrenching systems which do not fully meet everybody's needs. **The next Scottish Government must ensure that there is fair and equal representation for lived experience and third sector representatives throughout all aspects of the health and social care reform programme.**

Recruitment and retention are serious challenges for the social care sector, particularly for third sector providers. Despite recent pay increases and the skilled nature of the role, care work remains low paid with limited potential for meaningful career advancement. It is no coincidence that 80% of the adult social care workforce are women,<sup>20</sup> reflecting a longstanding and structural undervaluing of women's work. **The next Scottish Government must continue to address this gendered bias, ensuring that pay and conditions for social care workers fully reflect the value of that work, support people to enter and remain in the workforce, and offer rewarding career progression.**



# Public services for everyone

## Meet everyone's communication and access needs

- Develop a new See Hear Strategy and create a Scottish Government Sensory Policy Unit for a prioritised, joined-up approach.
- Provide a clear legal right to inclusive communication.
- Pass a Digital Inclusion Bill to realise the vision of Scotland as an ethical digital nation.

Public services must be accessible to anyone who needs them, yet too many people struggle to do so or find information about them. Publications and communications are not always readily available in fully accessible formats, leaving people with sensory impairments or learning disabilities lacking essential information. Meanwhile the growing shift to digital service provision provides new routes for many to access services they couldn't previously, however it leaves those who lack digital access, skills, and confidence behind. A consistent approach that recognises a range of communication requirements and offers meaningful choice is needed.

The ALLIANCE and our sensory sector members and partners were deeply disappointed when the refresh of the 2014 "See Hear" strategy was abandoned in 2025. The lack of an up-to-date strategy risks further entrenching an already disjointed approach to supporting people with sensory impairments. **The next Scottish Government must develop a successor to the See Hear Strategy, underpinned by adequate, sustainable investment in support. We also urge the creation of a dedicated Sensory Policy Unit within Scottish Government to lead and coordinate joined-up, cross-sector implementation of the strategy and support innovative, preventative support.**

Most of us will need some form of communication support in our lifetimes; inclusive communication lets us live well and participate equally in our communities. Unfortunately, people who are Deaf, Deafblind or have Visual Impairments often experience unfair and unnecessary obstacles to public services. Everyone in Scotland should have a right to communication support, when they need it, where they need it. **The next Scottish Government must act to recognise the importance of inclusive communication. This right should be protected in legislation, and work should be undertaken alongside expert groups and people with lived experience to co-produce training, data collection, monitoring and evaluation frameworks.**

As more public services shift to digital delivery, they must continue to work for everyone. Digital should always be a choice, not an obligation. Further work is needed to address digital exclusion, not just through the provision of devices and data, but also support and training in how to use them. People should also feel confident about the security of, and have control over, their personal data. **The next Scottish Government must pass a Digital Inclusion Bill that commits to binding actions and funding to support inclusion, whilst protecting the right to access in-person services and the security of personal health and social care data.**



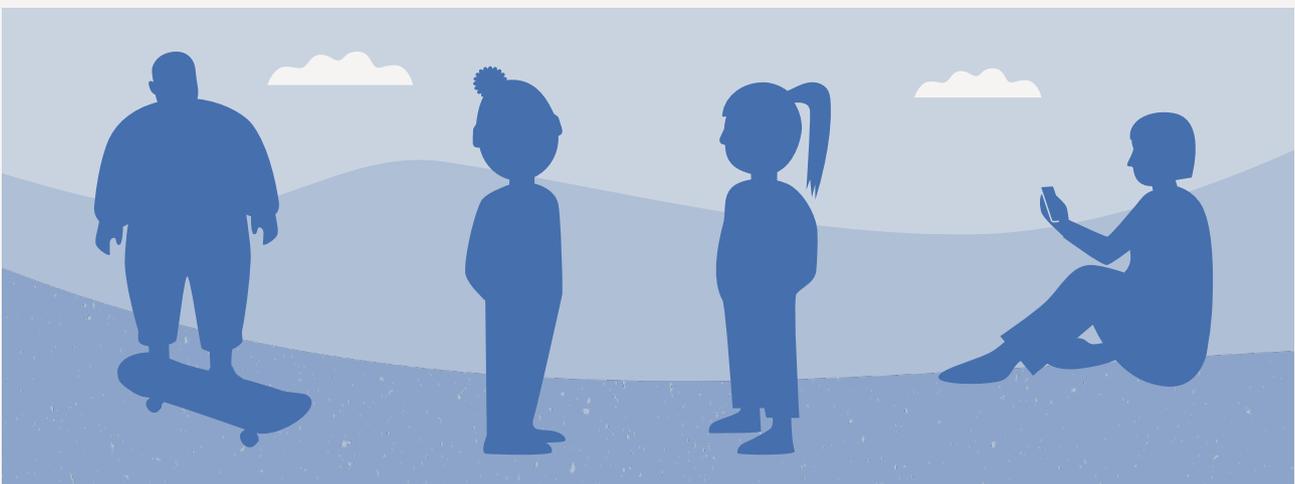
## Services that work for people of all ages

- Refocus attention on the importance of Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC), whilst strengthening implementation, data gathering and reporting.
- Introduce an older people's health and social care strategy and action plan.

The Scottish Government have been working towards an aspiration to make Scotland the best place to grow up. Through the Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) approach and, more recently, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Incorporation Act, the rights and voice of children and young people are increasingly centred in decision making. At the same time, Scotland's population is ageing through a combination of longer lifespans and smaller families. Whilst this generally reflects positive and welcome advancements in healthcare and reproductive autonomy, it also requires a policymaking approach that keeps pace with changing demographics.

2026 will mark 20 years of the GIRFEC approach to promoting, supporting and safeguarding the wellbeing of children and young people. However, there is a need to more clearly evidence how GIRFEC is embedded across all policy and legislation that impacts a child, particularly disabled children, children with long term conditions, and those experiencing poverty. **The next Scottish Government must strengthen implementation of GIRFEC at all levels through a cross-policy framework which embeds children's rights and robust data gathering and reporting, whilst better considering the groups of children whose rights are most at risk.**

Although Scotland's population is ageing, healthy life expectancy has reached a ten-year low,<sup>21</sup> driven by persistent health inequalities that most severely affect the least affluent segments of the population. Longer life spans should mean that older people can continue making valuable contributions to society, but poor health outcomes limit many older people's potential for employment and leisure. **The next Scottish Government must develop a dedicated older people's health and social care strategy, and accompanying action plan, setting out how public services will contribute to reducing inequalities and support everyone to achieve a longer, healthier life.**



## Improve and invest in tackling women's health inequalities

- Drive the systemic change needed to ensure all women across Scotland enjoy their right to timely, accessible, suitable, and good quality healthcare.

There is growing recognition of the need to improve women's access to and experiences of healthcare. Women's health needs are not always the same as men's; not just in relation to reproductive health, but also to differences in presentation and treatment of disease. Their experiences of accessing healthcare are too often more negative, and disproportionately so if they are disabled, live rurally, or belong to an ethnic minority. Prevalence of long term conditions is notably gendered, with women (43%) more likely than men (32%) to report living with a long term condition.<sup>22</sup>

The Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan 2021-2024<sup>23</sup> was a welcome step forward, and the ALLIANCE worked to create opportunities for women to engage with the Plan.<sup>24</sup> While this first plan delivered some progress, more action is urgently needed to tackle the deep-rooted and systemic health inequalities faced by women, particularly the most marginalised. **To support the progressive realisation of women's right to health, the next Scottish Government must increase investment in research and evidence-led policy and practice, improve rights based intersectional data collection and analysis, and develop national standards and gender-competent, rights based professional development.**

## Better support people with learning disabilities, autism and neurodiversity

- Pass a Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodiversity Bill.

Neurodiverse people and people with learning disabilities face a range of barriers to full and equal inclusion in society. For example, inappropriate use of restraint in educational settings is an ongoing issue, and progress away from institutionalisation towards independent living has stalled for too many people with learning disabilities. There is a clear need to improve the rights and protections afforded under the law, which is the context in which the Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodiversity (LDAN) Bill was proposed by the current Scottish Government. However, this Bill was delayed pending further developments in other areas.

The ALLIANCE support a legislative definition and framework for supporting neurodivergent people and people with learning disabilities. The current inclusion of people with autism and learning disabilities under mental health law is inappropriate, stigmatising and leads to poor outcomes. At the same time, neurodiversity continues to be poorly understood and supported in too many circumstances. **The next Scottish Government must bring forward a Learning Disabilities, Autism and Neurodiversity Bill, addressing input from the previous consultation and aligning with both the Mental Health Law Review and Human Rights Bill.**

# Strengthen prevention and lifelong support

## Strengthen prevention

- Ensure policy intent on prevention is implemented.
- Protect and increase investment in the Community Links Worker approach.
- Commit to maintaining the Self Management Fund and the innovative projects it supports.

The need for greater investment in preventing health inequalities is widely recognised, particularly as healthy life expectancy falls and Scotland's population continues to age. However, progress on delivering that investment has been slow. Whilst there will always be a need for acute, emergency services, preventing people from needing these in the first place is better for their own wellbeing as well as more cost effective. Crucially, preventative approaches must go beyond primary prevention of incidence. Secondary and tertiary prevention through early intervention and ongoing management is essential to ensure that people with long term conditions are not forgotten.

A significant shift is needed to ensure that welcome policy intent on prevention is implemented, taking a whole system and cross-sector collaborative approach. A wide range of preventative work is being successfully delivered by the third sector across primary, secondary and tertiary levels, but this is not always recognised and requires sustainable, sufficient resources to continue. Furthermore, prevention is complex and cannot be achieved by the public sector alone. **The next Scottish Government must ensure that the policy intent on prevention is implemented through sufficient financial investment and implementation plans, including in the third sector, and commitment to fully involve people, communities and the third sector in equal decision making.**

One highly successful secondary prevention initiative is the provision of Community Links Workers (CLWs), particularly in Deep End GP practices.<sup>25</sup> Through a social prescribing approach CLWs help to address the wider determinants of health and reduce pressure on GPs, who may be a natural point of contact but are not necessarily equipped to help. However, despite the proven success of this approach, funding can be unacceptably insecure and has repeatedly come under threat. **The next Scottish Government must commit to protecting existing Community Link Worker provision, and to increase investment to ensure long term stability and wider availability.**

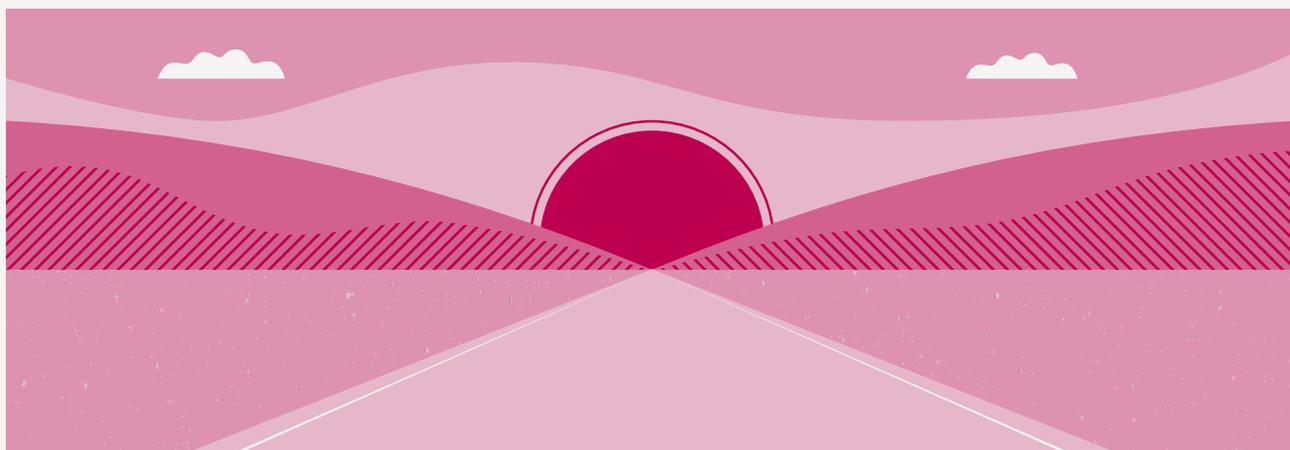
Many successful examples of third sector tertiary preventative approaches are also seen through the Self Management Fund, which the ALLIANCE has administered on behalf of the Scottish Government since 2009.<sup>26</sup> The fund has distributed money to hundreds of projects that reduce barriers to accessing health and social care services and enhance people's ability to self manage. Through supported self management people can improve their quality of life, prevent or slow progression and improve management of flareups. **The next Scottish Government must commit to continued provision of the Self Management Fund, supporting future rounds of innovative self management projects.**

### Deliver effective and lifetime support for long term conditions

- Ensure that any overarching framework complements rather than replaces condition-specific action.
- Invest in greater support for people with long term conditions.
- Develop a supportive approach to health and work.

The most recent Scottish Health Survey estimated that 39% of adults in Scotland live with a limiting long term condition.<sup>27</sup> This proportion is expected to continue rising due to the overall ageing of the Scottish population. Everyone has the human right to health, and it is vital that people with long term conditions can fully realise this right. It is therefore essential to ensure there is timely, accessible, effective support to live with and manage long term conditions. Quality support can also help more people to thrive and remain at work or volunteering.

As the current Scottish Government develops a broad-based Long Term Conditions Framework, it is important to get the balance right. Not all conditions are, or can be, covered by a dedicated plan and experiences such as pain and fatigue are widely shared, so there are some benefits in a cross-cutting approach. However, existing condition-specific work has led to demonstrable improvements in people's experiences and outcomes which is important to maintain. **The next Scottish Government must ensure that any overarching Long Term Conditions Framework complements rather than fully replaces condition-specific plans and actions which work successfully.**



The success of a new Long Term Conditions Framework will rely in part on the level of investment in support for people with long term conditions. Primary and secondary care pathways need to be improved, with wider access to community support for accompanying issues like mental health and chronic pain, as well as supported self management and peer support networks. **The next Scottish Government must provide sufficient investment in support for people with long term conditions, including via nationally administered grant funding for effective third sector services.**

Disabled people and people with long term conditions should not face unnecessary barriers to work. Without adequate understanding and support, however, people who would otherwise prefer to keep working may be forced to stop. In addition, where employers fail to make adequate adjustments for their workforce, otherwise manageable conditions can be exacerbated, leading to more working days lost to ill health. **The next Scottish Government must ensure that their Fair Work agenda incorporates support for disabled people and people with long term conditions to participate equally in the workforce, with clear guidance for and obligations on employers.**

### A reenergised approach to mental health

- Develop rights based mental health and incapacity law by implementing the recommendations of the Scottish Mental Health Law Review.
- Invest in mental health services, including renewed funding for the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund.
- Roll out the Living Well: Emotional Support Matters approach to support the mental health and wellbeing of people with long term conditions and the third sector organisations that work for and with them.

Awareness of the need to support everyone's mental health has never been greater, but the gap between rhetoric and action remains significant. Scotland's legislative mental health and incapacity framework is not fit for purpose, fails to fully respect human rights, and requires urgent modernisation. Despite increased demand for services, investment in mental health as a proportion of frontline NHS expenditure has hardly changed over this term of parliament, meaning the current target of 10% of frontline NHS expenditure may be missed.

In 2022 the Scottish Mental Health Law Review published their final report, setting out a wide range of recommendations for a human rights based approach to mental health. This included strengthening supported decision making, reducing coercion, and improved interactions with the criminal justice system. **The next Scottish Government must implement the recommendations of the Scottish Mental Health Law Review, and progress work to amend the Adults with Incapacity Act, to develop a human rights based legal framework that is fit for the future. It must also act on the earlier recommendations of the Rome Review by removing autism and learning disability from the definition of "mental disorder."**

The clear need for greater investment in mental health services is recognised via the existing expenditure target. However, even if achieved, that target should not be seen as an endpoint, nor should expenditure be limited to frontline NHS services. Investment through the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund has supported a variety of community mental health initiatives, including third sector services. **The next Scottish Government must deliver investment in frontline mental health support beyond the existing 10% target, whilst supporting community and third sector services including through renewing funding for the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund.**

In partnership with the Mental Health Foundation, the ALLIANCE delivered the “Living Well: Emotional Support Matters” programme. This supported third sector long term condition organisations to embed mental health across their work in response to the Covid-19 related rise in mental ill-health. Evaluation was highly positive, finding increased capacity, skills and confidence; emerging organisational culture change; and improvements in mental health and wellbeing. The programme generated £3.7 million in health and wellbeing impacts, a funding to impact ratio of £1:£8.60, whilst generating an estimated £0.2 million in cost savings. **The next Scottish Government must commit to supporting a wider roll out of the proven Living Well: Emotional Support Matters approach as part of their investment in mental health support.**



# Endnotes

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# About the ALLIANCE

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector membership organisation for the health and social care sector. We bring together over 3,500 people and organisations dedicated to achieving our vision of a Scotland where everyone has a strong voice and enjoys the right to live well, with dignity and respect. Our members are essential in creating a society in which we all can thrive, and we believe that by working together, our voice is stronger.

We work to improve the wellbeing of people and communities across Scotland by supporting change in health, social care and other public services so they better meet the needs of everyone in Scotland. We do this by bringing together the expertise of people with lived experience, the third sector, and organisations across health and social care to shape better services and support positive change.

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## The ALLIANCE has three core aims.

### We seek to:

- **Empower people with lived experience:** we ensure disabled people, people with long term conditions, and unpaid carers are heard and that their needs remain at the heart of the services and communities.
- **Support positive change:** we work within communities to promote co-production, self management, human rights, and independent living.
- **Champion the third sector:** we work with, support and encourage co-operation between the third sector and health and social care organisations.



**ALLIANCE**  
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE  
ALLIANCE SCOTLAND  
people at the centre

The ALLIANCE is committed to upholding human rights. We embed lived experience in our work and aim to ensure people are meaningfully involved at every level of decision-making.

Working together creates positive, long-lasting impact. We work in partnership with the Scottish Government, NHS Boards, universities, and other key organisations within health, social care, housing, and digital technology to manage funding and develop successful projects. Together, our voice is stronger, and we can create meaningful change.

