



VOX Scotland Manifesto

Scottish Parliament Elections 2026

*Ambitious, Innovative, Bold: lived experience
priorities for transforming mental health in Scotland*

[Voices of Experience \(VOX\) Scotland](#) is Scotland's national organisation for collective advocacy for people living with mental illness and mental ill-health. We are a membership-led charity run for and by our members, all of whom have living or lived experience of mental ill health. We represent our members' views to Scotland's politicians, health professionals and other bodies to try to ensure mental health policy and practice reflect our members' needs and interests.

Our work includes engaging with government consultations and parliamentary calls for evidence, producing research, working with education and service providers to improve understanding of mental ill health among health practitioners, and organising participatory events for members to connect, learn, and have their voices heard.

Through this, our aim is to ensure people with lived experience of ill mental health:

- Shape Scotland's laws;
- Influence service design and delivery;
- Promote a better understanding of mental illness in wider society;
- Advance the interests of people with mental ill-health.

As Scotland's national organisation for collective advocacy for people living with mental illness and mental ill-health, we are uniquely placed to engage and work with government and service providers across the mental health sector to help improve the lives of all those with enduring mental illness. Our manifesto has been informed by the views of our members and the work we undertake on their behalf and aims to inform and shape mental health policy and practice across Scotland.

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Context

Scotland's growing mental health crisis is well documented with demand for care at unprecedented levels, putting immense pressure on services, many of which are already severely stretched. This has given rise to the current scenario where many people across Scotland cannot receive the ongoing care and support they need when they need it. While this has been acknowledged by government and across the wider sector, VOX Scotland members believe there needs to be a renewed emphasis from the next Scottish Government on mental illness and mental ill-health and on tackling the crisis, with increased resources targeted to relieve areas of acute pressure in the short-term and a longer-term coherent strategy to fundamentally address the disparity and future delivery of mental health services across the country.

“We need a complete rethink on how services are delivered. It appears to me that we have just added into old models of care that are now diluted beyond recognition.”

VOX Scotland member



Transformational Change



STRATEGY

VOX Scotland members welcomed the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the recommendations of the Mental Health Law Review but progress on their implementation has been too slow and too patchy.

To have the system we all want to see, all parts of the system need to work well, but there is a significant lack of co-ordination. Scotland is a small country, and this should be achievable.



FUNDING



SERVICES

The lack of timely, accessible and quality care is not hypothetical, it is something our members and many others across the country experience every day impacting their ability to live well and flourish.



WORKFORCE

VOX Scotland believes that transformational change is required to address both the short- and medium to long-term challenges Scotland faces in terms of improving population mental health and supporting those with mental illness.

To achieve this, Government needs to be **bolder, more ambitious and more innovative** in their approach across strategy, funding, service provision, and workforce.

Strategy

Mental Health policy must be based on human rights, be person-centred at its core and recognise the need to support those with mental illness whilst simultaneously improving the well-being of the wider population. To this end, we call on the next Scottish Government to provide:

- a greater focus on mental health and, specifically, mental illness, ensuring the drive to improve prevention is matched by a commitment to the increasing number of people living with enduring mental illness and the provision of care required, both in terms of crisis care and ongoing support to help people stay well;
- an outcome-based approach to policy to drive tangible progress, aligned to the [Core Mental Health Standards](#), designed and audited with lived experience input, making visible progress for those providing and those accessing services;
- a commitment to updating mental health law and implementing the [Scottish Mental Health Law Review](#), alongside work to effect greater alignment of existing mental health strategies to improve cumulative impact;
- appoint a trained Lived Experience Advisor for mental health, supported by VOX Scotland, within government to ensure lived experience and user involvement are at the core of decision-making, service design and workforce planning, advancing progress towards a more holistic, person-centred system;

- work with health boards to better target investment to reduce waiting times and offer a face-to-face appointment with a mental health support worker to those who have waited longer for referred support than the target time;
- a renewed commitment to tackle the enduring stigma and discrimination around mental ill health which continues to act as a barrier to people presenting for and/or receiving the support they need.
- investment in collating better data (including patient feedback) measuring patient outcomes to monitor, evaluate and improve services, ensuring data is accessible and provides national oversight of mental health services, including data sharing across different health boards, local authorities, public sector services and the third sector.

“We need to get the law changed, we need a new model of mental healthcare... implementation of the recommendations of the mental health law review remains my number one priority.

Until we get the law, the rules right, nothing else will stick.

Yes training and education are vital but without the stick (consequences) the rest is just so much hot air.

There is absolute no point in talking unless someone is listening”

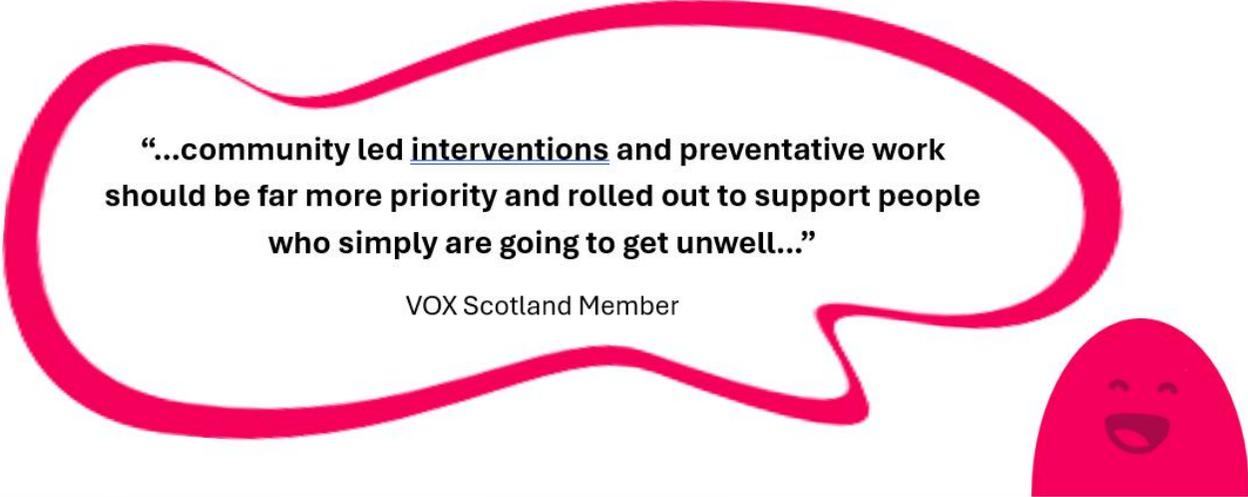
VOX Member



Funding

The increase in the prevalence of mental ill health and mental illness necessitates a substantial increase in government funding. Whilst we recognise the challenging fiscal environment in which government and public services are operating, transformational change cannot be achieved without the required investment. To this end, we call on the next Scottish Government to:

- develop a needs-based system for mental health funding based on the prevalence of severe and enduring mental illness, measured through the reinstatement of the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Study, AND moderate mental ill-health among the wider population as ascertained by the annual GHQ-12 questionnaire, with increased spending reflecting the growing need as a relative proportion of NHS expenditure;
- commit to working with partners to provide a continuum of care to ensure individuals are appropriately supported throughout their illness, moving away from the 'part helped' approach which is neither effective for the individual nor efficient for the system;
- ensure budgets deliver quality services more efficiently, aligned to national strategy, with local buy-in where health boards, IJBs and HCSPs are encouraged to work increasingly with an enfranchised third sector, carers and service users to direct funding where it will be most impactful and reduce pressure on NHS services;
- ringfence funding for advocacy to improve awareness and understanding of advocacy rights to build and level up provision of advocacy across the country, ensuring access to a choice of **collective and individual** services at a local level;



“...community led interventions and preventative work should be far more priority and rolled out to support people who simply are going to get unwell...”

VOX Scotland Member

- continue to invest in modernising facilities, ensuring well-equipped, safe and (where feasible) green spaces improving the care environment for both practitioners and service users;
- commit to multi-year funding for third sector organisations to provide greater stability within the organisations and ensure continuity of the vital services they provide;
- introduce a fund akin to the Community Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund focusing on those with severe and enduring mental ill-health;
- continue funding for an on-going national anti-stigma programme to tackle the enduring stigma and discrimination around mental ill health (as documented in [The Scottish Mental Illness Stigma Study](#)) in both society and among health care providers, which continues to act as a barrier to people presenting for and/or receiving the support they need.

Service Provision

VOX Scotland welcomes the move to shift the balance of services into the community where more people can access the right support, at the right time, in the right place with the third sector and lived experience playing an increasing role in the co-design of service provision. However, it is essential that the reorganisation of resources is not used as an opportunity to scale back services and that the shift to greater prevention does not leave those with severe and enduring illness behind. It is also fundamental that service provision aligns with the Core Mental Health Standards, is person-centred and holistic, with a systematic shift in enabling rights from the individual to service providers. To these ends, we call on the next Scottish Government to:

- work with partners to develop and invest in accessible and sustainable pathways for those with severe and enduring mental illness, including non-clinical services where appropriate, with an emphasis on on-going support and monitoring through six-monthly follow-ups with a mental health practitioner;
- establish community hubs across the whole country, in accordance with the [Scottish Mental Health Law Review](#), where people can self-refer to help prevent crisis and support post-crisis, and improve provision of unscheduled care for crisis support;
- ensure sufficient in-patient beds in mental health wards to provide hospital care when needed, recognising that hospital may sometimes be the best and safest option, in addition to the rollout of community hubs - one is not a substitute for the other;

- resource and integrate the enablement of human rights as set out in the [Scottish Mental Health Law Review](#) and establish a mechanism to audit the implementation of the [Core Mental Health Standards](#) and provide baseline indicators from which to measure progress;
- commit to fully implementing the right to independent advocacy (collective and individual) in law and obligate and, crucially, resource decision-makers and service providers at all levels to ensure people are informed of and can exercise their rights;
- Implement mandatory recording of all instances where Restraint and Seclusion is used and assign the Mental Welfare Commission a regulatory role to monitor its use and compliance, provide guidance, and make recommendations to Government.

“People are under the radar and completely missed – the suicide rate is so high because of that. Need consistent help from community mental health teams, or GPs and support groups/drop-in centres to stop it getting to that stage, and stop for the most part, the police being called.”

VOX Scotland Member

“Being part of collective advocacy gave me a sense of being able to value myself a bit but also being able to find that my lived experience is of value... ..it is very very healing, it might be purposeful and productive but it’s got to be positive, and we need to make the benefits of collective advocacy more visible”

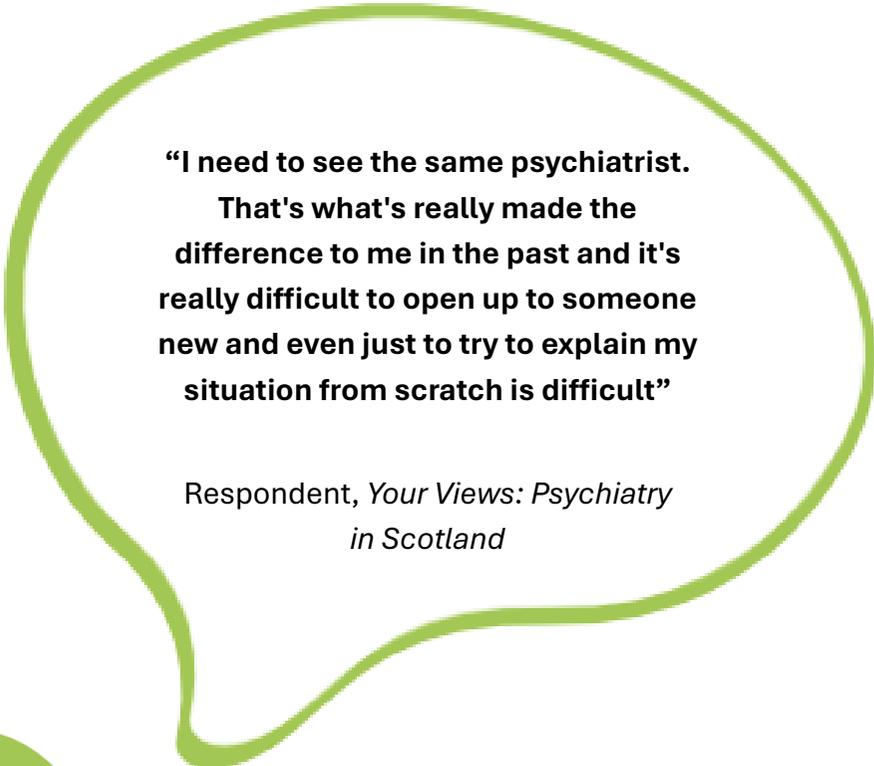
VOX Scotland Member



Workforce

NHS staff working in mental health are under immense pressure, faced with an increasing demand for their services, with fewer staff to provide them. In addition, the Third Sector, which is increasingly responsible for providing essential services in the community, is progressively under and short-term resourced, resulting in a loss of knowledge and experienced staff and sustainable services. Staff and service providers need to be fully resourced, trained and valued to provide the wide range of person-centred care and support required to help people achieve the best mental health possible. To this end, we call on the next Scottish Government to:

- implement the recommendations set out in the [Scottish Government Psychiatry Recruitment and Retention Working Group Final Report](#) (to which our report [Your Views: Psychiatrists in Scotland](#) contributed), to improve the quality and continuity of care for those referred to psychiatry services: reducing the use of locum psychiatrists across Scotland and increasing the number of permanent psychiatrist staff through improved provision of medical and specialist psychiatry training places, and a stronger recruitment and retention strategy;



**“I need to see the same psychiatrist.
That's what's really made the
difference to me in the past and it's
really difficult to open up to someone
new and even just to try to explain my
situation from scratch is difficult”**

Respondent, *Your Views: Psychiatry
in Scotland*



- develop a new approach to the workload of mental health care practitioners allowing staff sufficient time to do their job and undertake necessary training, enabling them to provide better quality and continuity of care;
- provide more and better trauma-informed training for clinical and non-clinical staff, including emergency services, informed by lived experience, for health care staff and students to improve understanding and empathy and enable better delivery of person-centred care without stigma and discrimination;
- increase the provision of peer support workers and specialist mental health nurses in the community (as per our members' contribution to the [Scottish Mental Health Nursing Review](#)) based on population needs, to work alongside GP practices and Community Link Workers to ensure timely provision of appropriate support and ongoing monitoring for those referred with mental health concerns;
- work with the wider sector to encourage more people to choose a career in mental health, ensuring all roles are equally supported and addressing the stereotyping and stigma attached to mental health;
- create new pathways and develop training to enable qualified practitioners to transition to vacant roles and increase opportunities for people with lived experience within a peer workforce and peer leadership.

“I’ve had a good experience because I’ve just had two CPNs in 23 years, that consistency, and they’ve been really good. We know each other well, I would see them regularly for my depot and have a talk, and I can phone them when I need to. It’s been a collaborative decision and I asked to be discharged. They talk to you like a normal person.”

“It does help you – that regular contact with someone trained to understand what you need. I had a CPN for 15 years, it was consistent, I knew and could trust them. They used to say themselves ‘it takes at least a year to get to know each other’ (patient and nurse) – building relationships takes time.”

VOX Scotland members

Summary

The experiences of VOX Scotland's members are many and varied but their collective voice tells us the current system is piecemeal and too often is not meeting their needs. There is no doubt that transformational change is needed and this can only be achieved through funding which corresponds to the increased prevalence of mental ill-health and demand for services, alongside a bolder, more ambitious and more innovative approach to policy and delivery.

This manifesto sets out how this can be achieved specifically in relation to those with enduring mental illness and we look forward to working with the next Scottish Government, Parliament and the wider sector to improve the lives of our members and all those with lived experience of mental ill-health.





www.voxscotland.org.uk

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