

One chance to get it right:

Securing hospice and palliative care for the future

The next Scottish Government must make palliative care a national priority by:

- ▶ Delivering a long-term, **sustainable funding** model for hospice care, including fully implementing pay parity between NHS and hospice care staff
- ▶ Establishing an **independent review of palliative care** to drive urgent system reform and identify investment needed to meet rising population need, expand community-based care and reduce avoidable hospital use for those at the end of life
- ▶ Legislating to deliver a **right to palliative care**, so that everyone receives the care they need at the end of life

Palliative care can't wait. The next Scottish Government must take decisive action to make palliative care a national priority and secure the vital contribution of hospice care.

Scotland's next parliament must confront a society-defining challenge: how to deliver not just the best start in life, but the best care at the end of life.

Scotland is facing a demographic crisis. As our population ages, demand for palliative care is soaring – but our health and care system is failing. Too many Scots, of all ages, are dying without the support they need. And too many are spending their final weeks in hospital beds – not because they need to be there, but because the system gives them no other choice.

The future of palliative care requires transformation, not tweaks. Without urgent action, rising demand will mean overfull wards, more delays and more patients stuck in hospital. All of this will drive up the cost to the public purse – and let down those who need care the most.

Hospice care supports adults and children to stay at home, reducing hospital stays. It eases pressure on the NHS and saves money. The majority of hospice care is delivered in people's own homes. These services could – and should – be growing to meet rising demand. But in fact they're shrinking. Surging costs and insufficient statutory funding mean hospice care is on the brink. Hospice care is vital and Scotland cannot afford to let it fail.

The assisted dying debate has exposed deep inequities in access to palliative care across Scotland. Regardless of the outcome of the current bill, investing in hospice and palliative care isn't optional: it is critical to ensure choice, dignity and compassion at the end of life.

Palliative care is at a cross-roads. There is only one chance to get care right when someone is dying. If we truly believe in dignity, compassion and fairness at the end of life, then palliative care must become a national priority. Anything less is letting down those who need us most, when they need us most.

The next Scottish Government must make palliative care a national priority by:

1. Reforming and investing in palliative care to meet growing population need

- ▶ Deliver a long-term, **sustainable funding** model for hospice care, including fully implementing pay parity between NHS and hospice care staff
- ▶ Establish an **independent review of palliative care** to drive urgent system reform and identify investment needed to meet rising population need, expand community-based care and reduce avoidable hospital use for those at the end of life
- ▶ Ensure **national workforce planning** delivers sufficient, appropriately skilled staff in the right roles and locations to meet Scotland's growing need for high-quality palliative care

2. Ensuring access to palliative care for all

- ▶ Legislate to deliver a **right to palliative care**, so that everyone receives the care they need at the end of life
- ▶ **Tackle inequities** in palliative and end of life care, especially in rural and island communities, for those facing financial hardship, and for young people moving from children's to adult services

3. Driving forward quality and innovation

- ▶ Establish a **Minimum Service Specification and Standards** for palliative care to improve outcomes for patients and families
- ▶ Deliver on commitments to ensure all patients, carers and health and care staff have access to a **24/7 palliative care helpline** to get support and specialist advice
- ▶ **Modernise hospice care regulation** by eliminating duplication between Healthcare Improvement Scotland and the Care Inspectorate, reducing inefficiency and unnecessary costs

Hospice and palliative care in numbers



£1.3bn

spent a year on healthcare for people in Scotland in their last year of life

£1.1bn

of which is spent on hospital care¹



Over 60,000

Scots die each year⁴

Up to 90%

could benefit from palliative care³



76,000

Visits made by hospice care staff to people in their own homes in 2024-25⁵



1,170

Clinical and care staff employed by hospice care organisations⁶



1 in 3

people in Scottish hospitals are in their last year of life²



10,000

more people will need palliative care each year, by 2048³



20,000

People supported by hospice care in 2024-25⁵



48,000

Days and nights of inpatient care provided by hospices in 2024-25⁵



£12m

Cost for Scottish hospices to keep pace with NHS pay uplifts in 2026-27⁷

1. Nuffield Trust, Health Economics Unit, Marie Curie, Public expenditure in the last year of life, London: Nuffield Trust; 2025.

2. Clark D, Armstrong M, Allan A, Graham F, Isles C, Watson M. Hospital care in the last year of life. BMJ. 2015;351:h4266.

3. Marie Curie. How many people need palliative care? Updated estimates of palliative care need across the UK, 2017-2021. Data and evidence briefing. [Internet]. Marie Curie; 2023.

4. National Records of Scotland. Vital Events Reference Tables 2024: Deaths. Edinburgh: NRS; 2025.

5. Data taken from Hospice UK's Hospice Activity and Demographic survey, 2024-25.

6. Data taken from Hospice UK's Clinical Workforce Survey, 2022-23.

7. Recurring cost of £5m previously allocated by Scottish Government + cost of matching NHS 25/26 pay awards + cost of matching 26/27 NHS pay awards

About Hospice UK

Hospice care eases the physical and emotional pain of death and dying. Letting people focus on living, right until the end. But too many people miss out on this essential care. Hospice UK fights for hospice care for all who need it, for now and forever. Hospice UK represents the community of more than 200 hospices across the UK.

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About the Scottish Hospice Leadership Group

The Scottish Hospice Leadership Group brings together hospice leaders in a collaborative, self-governing forum for peer leadership, shared learning, collective advocacy, and strategic action to improve palliative and end of life care in Scotland.



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