

Introduction

This Scottish Budget comes at a time when our health and care services are under as much pressure as they have ever been. Our members are continuing to highlight significant pressures and concerns about patient safety across hospital, community and social care services.

We are also hearing extremely concerning reports about the level of efficiency savings or budget cuts that health boards are facing, as well as on some of the approaches health boards are looking at to deliver these savings.

At a time of unprecedented demand, any decisions that impact negatively on staffing levels will bring significant patient safety risks.

As we've seen before, blanket approaches, such as recruitment freezes, are short sighted and will cause more harm and increase costs in the long run. As will reducing the skill mix, replacing the safety critical registered nurse role with nursing support workers or individuals from other professions. Safe nurse staffing levels should be non-negotiable and cutting registered nurse numbers doesn't make economic sense.

The need to invest in nursing

If we are to see significant improvements in staff retention, increases in the number of people choosing to study nursing, and Scotland's NHS and social care services reaching a point where safe nurse staffing levels are the norm rather than the exception, long term investment is required.

The RCN recently surveyed its members about the impact of cost-of-living challenges. The results for Scotland show:



75% of respondents say they are financially worse off compared to 12 months ago



49% say that, in the next 5 years, it is likely or very likely that they will leave nursing altogether

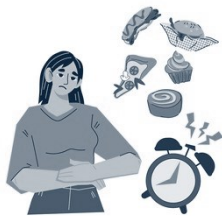


Of the **62%** who have thought about changing their current role due to the cost of living, **60%** have considered leaving nursing



38% of respondents report that they are just about able to meet essential living costs but have not budgeted for unexpected costs

Meanwhile **22%** are struggling with their living costs and increasingly worried about their financial situation



23% have gone without food or skipped meals



7% have withdrawn or reduced contributions from employer's pension scheme



60% have used credit or savings for essential living costs

Nursing is a safety critical profession and with around 5,300 unfilled nursing posts in the NHS alone, Scotland cannot afford to lose any more nursing staff.

RCN Scotland is calling on the Scottish Government to make the following commitments:

- 1) Deliver the funding required to implement the recommendations from the Agenda for Change (AfC) Review quickly and in full.
 - In May our members narrowly voted to accept the NHS Scotland pay offer. At that time, we made it clear to Scottish government that it would need to stay committed to the Agenda for Change review, which was part of the deal. We said it was essential that the review delivered positive change for our members on the reduced working week, protected time for learning and the review of Band 5 nursing roles.

- Over the summer and autumn, we worked with colleagues from the other health trade unions, NHS employers and Scottish government officials to develop and agree implementation plans for these three elements of the review. These plans were submitted to the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care at the end of November.
- We are disappointed and frustrated that the Cabinet Secretary has not yet given a formal response to the content of the recommendations and that we are still waiting for the timescale for implementation.
- The Scottish government must provide reassurance that it will deliver on its commitments to our profession and confirm the timetable for full implementation of these vital elements of the pay deal.

2) Provide the financial resources to deliver the recommendations that emerge from the Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce and to deliver safe staffing

- The Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce, chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for NHS Recovery, Health and Social Care, is looking at ways to: improve retention of experienced staff; attract new nurses and expand routes into nursing; improve workplace culture and environments; increase staff wellbeing; and improve access to education and development.
- We are clear that the Taskforce must deliver funded, meaningful and sustainable actions that make a positive difference for the nursing profession and tackle the persistently high vacancy rates, including a nursing retention strategy.
- This will require investment and we were disappointed that the budget is light on detail on how the Scottish government plan to address the current nursing workforce crisis. Ministers must commit to the investment needed to support and retain our existing nursing workforce and to set out how we can grow and develop the nursing workforce of the future.
- Scotland's safe staffing legislation comes into force in April 2024. However, this ground-breaking legislation will only make a long-term positive difference if services have the nursing establishment they need. The Act needs to be accompanied by increased investment in services to enable providers to tackle vacancies and recruit and retain the workforce that Scotland needs.

- 3) **Boost the financial package for nursing students to enable them to prioritise their education, cope with the rising cost of living, and finish their studies without falling into financial hardship.**
- We [surveyed](#) our student members last year and found that nursing students across Scotland are facing serious financial pressures that are having a significant impact on their education and physical and mental wellbeing. 66% have considered dropping out of their course due to financial concerns.
 - We're calling on the Scottish government to implement a cost-of-living increase to the bursary and establish a regular review to make sure it rises in line with the cost of living.
 - Nursing is a fantastic career choice, full of variety and opportunity. It's a hugely diverse profession attracting people of all ages and from all walks of life, often as a second career. However, being a nurse should not be at the expense of personal wellbeing and financial security.
 - For the second year in a row, the number of places on nursing degrees have not been filled. The number of acceptances onto Scottish nursing courses for 2023 is 3,520; a significant shortfall of over 800 students compared to the number of places funded by Scottish government. This means the gap between the number of registered nurses that are needed, and the number entering the workforce, is set to widen even further.
- 4) **Deliver fair pay for nursing staff across health and social care.**
- The Scottish Government must work with STAC to secure a mechanism for the future AfC pay negotiations.
 - We are working with other trade unions on submitting a joint pay claim calling for at least an above inflation pay increase to recognise the continuing cost of living challenges and to take some steps towards restoring the pay lost during the years of austerity.
 - Reform of the social care sector must deliver fair pay, terms and conditions for nursing staff employed within the independent sector. We support the establishment of a sectoral bargaining system and for nursing staff to have pay, terms and conditions at least equal to equivalent roles in the NHS.