

PROTECT THE FUTURE OF NURSING

Stand up for safe and effective care
rcn.org.uk/protect

Scottish Government debate: National Care Service

The Scottish Government is proposing significant changes to the way in which health and care services are delivered in Scotland at a time when services are seeking to recover and remobilise after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Nursing staff have been at the forefront of tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and the past 17 months have highlighted the unique value of nursing as a safety critical profession like never before. The nursing contribution to social care must not be overlooked and the impact of these proposals on community nursing must be properly considered and adequately resourced.

RCN Scotland is concerned that with such a significant proposal, policy makers do not lose sight of other priorities. For any health and social care reforms to be effective, the Scottish Government must first address workforce pressures by implementing the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019 and deliver fair pay for nursing staff working in all settings.

National Care Service Consultation

RCN Scotland [responded](#) to the Independent Review of Adult Social Care and will be engaging with our members to inform our response to the Scottish Government's consultation. This briefing outlines RCN Scotland's key concerns but our discussions with RCN members will continue throughout the consultation process, and in any subsequent development of policy.

Nursing Contribution to Adult Social Care

- RCN Scotland is concerned about what appears to be a gap in the thinking in the reform process - the nursing contribution in social care.
- With a long-term trend of people using social care services having increasingly complex needs, including clinical needs, it is imperative that system reform takes this into account and nursing is at the forefront of the process. Registered nurses have the clinical knowledge and skills to assess and respond to individuals' changing needs, managing medication, monitoring deterioration and overseeing infection control. They also provide leadership and oversight to support wider teams.
- Those with lived experience who contributed to the Independent Review demonstrated that health and social care needs cannot be separated and nursing is fundamental in helping to meet these needs.

PROTECT THE FUTURE OF NURSING

Stand up for safe and effective care
rcn.org.uk/protect

Impact on Community Services

- Clearer proposals about the relationship between the NHS and the National Care Service are needed. The proposals represent the most significant reforms to both community health and social care for decades and will have a significant impact beyond, including on the wider NHS.
- Community Nursing was highlighted by the RCN's [Protect the Future of Nursing manifesto](#) as an area in particular need of greater resourcing and support. District Nursing in particular has a higher vacancy rate (6.8%) and a higher age profile (25% of District Nurses are over 55) compared to other nursing specialisms. The potential disruption to these services, which are already under pressure, should not be underestimated.

Workforce Pressures

- Recruitment of nursing staff in adult social care is a challenge. In Scotland, 18% of registered care services report having nursing vacancies and the level is significantly higher in care homes for older people, with 40% reporting nursing vacancies. As has been reported, we are also hearing from our members that recruitment is now even more challenging than these figures suggest.
- The RCN is concerned that these proposals will distract from and delay implementation of the Health and Care (Staffing) (Scotland) Act 2019. This Act is an opportunity to help ensure that care homes are supported to deliver safe, quality care to residents with increasingly complex health needs. Implementing this legislation is urgently needed to address the workforce crisis in the sector and to ensure care homes are better equipped to meet the needs of residents.

Fair Work

- The opportunity must be taken to implement fair work for staff in adult social care. For nursing staff, that means pay, terms and condition which are equivalent to those in the NHS.
- RCN members tell us that other disincentives to working in adult social care are the lack of opportunity to undergo training at work, as well as a perception that there are few opportunities for career progression. These lead to recruitment difficulties and staffing shortages so must be addressed by the new frameworks that result from this consultation.
- RCN Scotland will be looking closely at whether the proposals for an opt-in 'Fair Work Accreditation Scheme' will go far enough in achieving fair work for our members.
- Access to robust nursing workforce data for social care must be improved. The best available data are SSSC estimates, which show that, despite increasing clinical needs of residents, the number of registered nurses working in care homes has fallen by nearly 10% since 2015.

PROTECT THE FUTURE OF NURSING

Stand up for safe and effective care
rcn.org.uk/protect

Member feedback

- Members of RCN Scotland are able to provide their lived experience anonymously via a tool called Sensemaker. Since nurses have started using this tool, one of the most consistent themes of their experience is concern about staffing levels, including in social care. From July 2021 alone, the following stories were shared:
 - From a Registered Nurse working in a Care Home in Ayrshire & Arran: *“I have been the only registered nurse for 52 residents, two of which have been at the very end of life. I felt I have not had time to spend with any resident or their family. I feel so sad as I feel privileged to be caring for such a wonderful client group. I have a heavy heart.”*
 - From a member working in a care home in Lanarkshire: *“We have been so short staffed in our care home I know my residents care is compromised.”*
 - Another member working in Lanarkshire’s story is simply entitled *“Is there a future for care homes?”* and the member goes on to explain that they work in a care home with poor skill mix, staff shortages, low morale and high turnover and sickness rates.

Mental Health Services

- The section on mental health lacks detail, particularly given the wider policy focus of the Scottish Government on improving mental health service provision.
- The consultation asks what mental health care the National Care Service should be responsible for but does not describe the current system for mental health services provision currently in place, meaning that only people who know the structures already in place will be able to respond. The implications for mental health provision will require greater thought and the people who use and deliver those services deserve a more detailed consideration of the current situation and the options available to improve access and outcomes.

Further information:

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world’s largest professional organisation and trade union for nursing staff, with members in the NHS, independent and voluntary sectors. RCN Scotland promotes patient and nursing interests by campaigning on issues that affect our members, shaping national health policies, representing members on practice and employment issues and providing members with learning and development opportunities. With over 40,000 members in Scotland, we are the voice of nursing.

If you would like any further information please contact Ross Sanderson, Senior Public Affairs Officer, via ross.sanderson@rcn.org.uk or 0131 662 6197.

[END]