

THE GLOVES ARE OFF

**It's time to value
nursing properly**

Because Scotland's
health depends on it.

BRIEFING:
Palliative and
end of life care



Nursing staff across the NHS, independent and third sector services play a crucial role in the delivery of palliative and end-of-life care services, in a variety of settings including hospitals, individuals' homes, care homes and hospices.



However, too many people are dying without the support they need and there is an urgent need to improve access to palliative care across Scotland and to secure the vital contribution of Scotland's hospices. During the debate on assisted dying in the Scottish Parliament, there was widespread consensus on the need for sustained investment in palliative and end-of-life care services.

This issue should be addressed quickly in the next parliamentary session.

Those in need of care should experience a service which is delivered in a timely and seamless manner, accessing person-centered care in a coordinated and compassionate way.

The case for change



Marie Curie reports that almost one in three people in Scotland die with unmet palliative care needs. This represents around 18,500 people in Scotland each yearⁱ.

As well as leading to significantly poorer outcomes for individuals and their families, this creates avoidable pressure on Scotland's health and care services. When community palliative care cannot meet their needs, people with a terminal illness too often have no choice but to turn to unplanned emergency care, including ambulance services and A&E. Many end up spending their final days in hospital, despite not needing or wishing to be there.

Hospice UK reports that, of the £1.3 billion spent on healthcare for people in their last year of life in Scotland, £1.1 billion was spent on hospital careⁱⁱ.

With an ageing population and increasing numbers of people living with multiple serious illnesses, the gap between need and service provision is set to widen even further.

By 2040 an extra 10,000 people across Scotland are likely to need access to palliative and end of life care each year. More people, with more complex needs, will require community-based palliative and end of life careⁱⁱⁱ.



The case for change

Palliative and end-of-life care is provided by a range of organisations, including care homes and third sector organisations. Hospices make an invaluable contribution, yet they rely on charitable donations to run essential services. This is not sustainable, with many hospices facing severe financial difficulties. In 2023, Hospice UK reported that hospices in Scotland face a collective deficit of £16 million^{iv} and many hospices have already had to make significant service reductions, such as closing inpatient beds or reducing community care, in response to financial pressures.

Increasing investment to secure the future of the hospice sector must take into account the need to fund pay increases in the sector. Staff working in hospice care and the third sector deserve to be recognised for the safety-critical care they provide and should receive comparable pay, terms and conditions to those working in the NHS. Funding hospice providers to provide pay parity is vital for supporting staff recruitment and retention. While the Scottish government's allocations towards pay parity in the last two budgets are a welcome step, they do not address the much larger and ongoing funding gap that threatens the sustainability of hospice services across Scotland.

It's clear that a proper review of these challenges, and significant investment, are needed to meet current unmet need and rising population need, expand community-based care and reduce avoidable hospital admissions.

If the next Scottish government fails to act, increasing numbers of people will die without the support they deserve, adding further strain to Scotland's already overcrowded hospitals.





Our manifesto calls for:

- A sustainable funding model for hospice and end of life care to increase access to these vital services and help address the current high levels of unmet need .
- Nursing staff working in social care and the third sector, should have comparable pay, terms and conditions to those working in the NHS. Achieving parity is vital for addressing the recruitment and retention challenges in these sectors.

The next Scottish government must ensure everyone who needs it can benefit from specialist palliative and end-of-life support. Exceptional palliative and end-of-life care can be life changing for all involved, with long lasting effects for family members and nurses delivering the care. We must ensure that services are funded sustainably, staffed safely, and that nurses are properly valued and equipped with the tools and resources needed to deliver the high-quality care they are committed to providing .

References:

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<https://hospiceuk-files-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2025-10/HUK%20SHLG%20manifesto%20asks%20FINAL.pdf>
- iii. A right to palliative care: Time to fix palliative and end of life care in Scotland, Marie Curie
<https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/document/a-right-to-palliative-care>
- iv. Hospices in Scotland face collective deficit of £16 million, Dec 2023, Hospice UK
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