

Equality

Mainstreaming

Report

Including Equality  
Outcomes (2025–2029)

April 2025

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# Foreword

We are pleased to present our Equality Mainstreaming Report and Workforce Data Report. This sets out how NHS 24 makes sure that equality, inclusion, and rights are embedded into our work. This report provides the information we are required to publish under the specific duties of the Equality Act 2010.

NHS 24 provides digital health and care services. These are delivered by phone and through a range of digital channels including online platforms.

Since we last reported in April 2023, we have launched our corporate strategy and embarked on an extensive and ambitious programme of service and digital transformation. This work aims to ensure that NHS 24 services: meet users' needs; are accessible and inclusive; digitally enabled; and designed for a sustainable future.

As part of our commitment to invest in the development of our staff, we now provide enhanced training across all levels of leadership. This is in addition to learning opportunities provided to all staff. We do this because we recognise the impact that quality learning and development has on knowledge, skills, staff retention, and ultimately patient care. There is good evidence that the expected outcomes are progressively being achieved.

Each of the activities we undertake underlines our commitment to making sure we engage effectively with the people of Scotland, including those from communities of interest and communities of place. This enables us to learn from them and involve them in the design and delivery of our services, driving forward improvements and meeting the needs of people across Scotland. We welcome the valuable contribution made by our staff and volunteers to achieve this goal, and we look forward to continuing to improve our approaches to embed and mainstream equalities across our organisation.

**Martin Cheyne**  
Chairman, NHS 24

**Jim Miller**  
Chief Executive, NHS 24

## The General Equality Duty

The general equality duty requires NHS 24, in the exercise of its functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and other conduct that is prohibited by the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

This duty covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. This duty also covers marriage and civil partnership, with regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination.

## The specific duties in summary

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (as amended) requires NHS 24 to:

- report on mainstreaming the equality duty
- report progress on the equality outcomes we set in 2021
- publish new equality outcomes for 2025 to 2029
- assess and review our policies and practices
- gather and use our employee information
- publish gender pay gap information
- publish a statement on equal pay between women and men, people who are disabled and people who are not, and people who fall into a minority racial group and people who do not
- consider award criteria and conditions in relation to public procurement
- use information on members or Board members gathered by the Scottish Ministers
- publish in a manner that is accessible.

Mainstreaming equality means taking steps to ensure that equality is considered within everything that we do, and by everyone who works, volunteers, or collaborates with us.

This report has been produced to demonstrate how we are meeting the specific duties. This report also provides an update on the progress we have made to achieve our equality outcomes set in 2021 (and reviewed in 2023), and information about the new outcomes we are setting for 2025 to 2029. Examples of the impact of our actions are also included, including the large increase in the number of page views for British Sign Language content on NHS inform. NHS inform is Scotland's national online health information service which provides people in Scotland with accurate and relevant information to help them make informed decisions about their own health and the health of the people they care for.

## The Fairer Scotland Duty

The Fairer Scotland Duty places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland, including NHS 24, to actively consider ('pay due regard' to) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage when making strategic decisions.

Examples of when NHS 24 has considered the Fairer Scotland Duty include embedding social values into the procurement process of the Digital Transformation Programme and considering the socio-economic impact of our decisions relating to our estates as part of the Estates Sustainability Plan Project Board.

At NHS 24 we seek to mainstream equality considerations across the range of work we do. In this section of our report, we provide information about the ways in which we do this.

## Clinical and Staff Governance Committees

Both the Clinical Governance Committee and Staff Governance Committee have a lead role in providing assurance to NHS 24 Board in respect of equality, inclusion, and rights. The Clinical Governance Committee and Staff Governance Committee comprise of members of the NHS 24 Board, the Executive Team, and staff side representation. Members of staff who support work related to equality and community engagement also report to the Clinical Governance Committee and Staff Governance Committee.

## The Executive Team

The Executive Team delivers visible leadership in relation to equalities through a number of activities. All work reported to the Executive Team must include information about how it contributes to our strategy and how our equality duties have been considered.

## Board Equality Inclusion and Rights Group

To strengthen governance across equality, inclusion, and rights, at a time when legislative and policy changes were anticipated approval was given for the establishment of the Equality Inclusion and Rights Group (EIRG) as a working group of the NHS Board, initially for a period of two years. The EIRG reports directly to the NHS 24 Board.

The EIRG has input from Board members, Executive leads, senior staff from the Transformation, Strategy, Planning & Performance (TSPP), Workforce and clinical directorates, and from members of the Public Partnership Forum.

## Stakeholder Engagement and Insights

The Stakeholder Engagement Team is responsible for the day-to-day management of community engagement, equalities, and human rights. This includes working within the framework set out by legislation and NHS Scotland standards.

Additionally, NHS 24 now uses service design principles to embed equality considerations into the development of services through the activities of the User Research Team.

The Stakeholder Engagement Team and the User Research Team work in partnership to help ensure that the diverse experiences of people who are often underrepresented in community engagement activities are fairly considered.

In July 2023, the User Research Team welcomed the addition of a Service Designer, bringing a new perspective to the team's work and building upon existing human-centred design practices.

NHS 24 values stakeholder input, particularly the views of members of the public, as we seek to ensure that all our services meet their diverse needs.

## Staff Experience Groups

In 2023, we relaunched Staff Experience Groups across our service. Their purpose is to support and promote staff experience, organisational culture and values across our organisation. Each group supports and promotes a culture that encourages behaviours that will help us to maintain a working environment in which everyone feels included, respected and valued.

## NHS Scotland Equality and Diversity Lead Network

NHS 24 continues to be part of the NHS Scotland Equality and Diversity Lead Network. This is a peer support network for equality leads from all the NHS Boards in Scotland. The group: shares best practice examples, discusses the current legal requirements relating to equality, and horizon scans for changes or new requirements.

## Public Protection

### Public health

Reducing inequalities has been a key focus of NHS 24 public health workstream. This has included ensuring a population health and health inequalities reduction lens underpins a range of work at NHS 24, such as the development of the new Organisational Strategy and the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Action Plan.

The new Workforce Strategy includes a commitment for NHS 24 to continue to be an inclusive employer, where our workforce reflects the communities we serve, to better deliver on our position as an Anchor Institution.

Work to improve the use of data and intelligence at NHS 24 has included a focus on the understanding and use of user demographics to support decision-making. We are also exploring potential future activities to support the National Care and Wellbeing Programme's Proactive and Preventative Care Programme, including a focus on activities that will help address health inequalities, as part of our new Organisational Strategy's commitment to this agenda.

NHS 24's Winter Campaign included key information to support people to stay warm and well in winter, as well as signposts to support and help with the cost-of-living crisis. Opportunities to include signposting to support with the cost-of-living crisis and other wider determinants of health from relevant NHS inform pages have also been identified.

## NHS 24 Public Protection Team

NHS 24 Public Protection Team has corporate and operational responsibility and provides support to all NHS 24 staff. The core functions of the service are underpinned by national guidance, legislation, policy and roles and competencies for healthcare staff and includes providing advice and support and public protection referrals.

During the financial year 2022-2023 our staff raised 5,513 child concerns and 10,384 adult concerns. This rise in referrals is most likely attributable to the mental health hub being open 24 hours a day and the cost-of-living crisis. Our statistics indicate that these are our highest referrers for children and adults. In the financial year 2023-2024 our staff raised 4,840 child concerns and 9,702 adult concerns. These figures include concerns relating to gender-based violence.

## Children and Young People Health and Wellbeing Steering Group

The purpose of this steering group is to bring together NHS 24 services who have a responsibility for delivering work with a full or partial focus on children and young people. More effective connections between our different pieces of work in this area will help maximise opportunities to positively impact children and young people's health and wellbeing, experiences, and outcomes. The group is underpinned by a human rights-based approach and the refreshed national approach to Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC), which reflects the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, The Promise, and is in line with statutory duties contained within the Children and Young People Scotland Act 2014.

As part of their work, the group completed the Getting Ready for UNCRC Incorporation Framework. This provided a baseline and highlighted any actions and improvements required prior to full implementation of the Act. A Corporate Parenting Action Plan has also been completed.

## Child poverty delivery plan

Children living in poverty are more likely to have health issues (including mental health problems), gain fewer qualifications and experience stigma and bullying at school. They are also at higher risk of being care experienced.

The child poverty delivery plan has informed our organisational strategy on tackling child poverty. The aim of the delivery plan is to build on existing work to remove barriers to employment taking a strategic and intersectional approach to tackling employment inequalities. Workforce colleagues are working on a career pathway as part of their NHS 24 workforce strategy.

As part of the Social Justice and Social Security Committee's Post-legislative scrutiny of the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017, a collective response from NHS 24 was submitted. This demonstrates that as an organisation we are deeply invested in the wellbeing of children and their families and are committed to tackling child poverty.

## NHS 24 procurement

NHS 24's Procurement Strategy contains a commitment to ensure that everyone it deals with, and employs is treated fairly regardless of their age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or trade union activity. NHS 24 will also give due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination against someone because of their marriage or civil partnership status. Procurement must be undertaken to the highest ethical standards and with fairness to all potential suppliers.

Scottish Procurement Policy Note SSPN 8/2012 stipulates that where NHS 24 is a contracting authority and proposes to enter into a relevant agreement on the basis of an offer which is the most economically advantageous, it must have due regard to whether the award criteria should include considerations to enable it to better perform its general equality duty.

Where NHS 24 is a contracting authority and proposes to stipulate conditions relating to the performance of a relevant agreement, it must have due regard to whether the conditions should include considerations to enable it to better perform the equality duty.

## Sustainable procurement

As a public body, NHS 24 is required to address sustainability in its procurement practices. Sustainable procurement is a process whereby organisations meet their needs for goods, services, works and utilities in a way that achieves value for money on a whole life basis, in terms of generating benefits not only to the organisation but also to society and the economy whilst maximising environmental opportunity.

NHS 24 complies with the sustainable procurement duty laid out in the Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 in its procurement activity in so much as:

- (a) carrying out a regulated procurement, to consider how in conducting the procurement process it can—
  - (i) improve the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of the authority's area,
  - (ii) facilitate the involvement of small and medium enterprises, third sector bodies and supported businesses in the process, and
  - (iii) promote innovation, and
- (b) in carrying out the procurement, to act with a view to securing such improvements identified as a result of paragraph (a) (in).

## Employment practices and workforce matters including Living Wage in public contracts

Scottish Procurement Policy Note (SPPN 1/2015) provides information on how and when employment practices and workforce matters including payment of the living wage should be considered, in the course of a public procurement exercise as a key driver of service quality and contract delivery.

In complying with this requirement, NHS 24 note the advice and adopts it wherever it is legally possible to do so, in its own procurement procedures.

## Supported Factories and Businesses

A national collaborative Framework Agreement for Supported Factories and Businesses has been established by the Scottish Government to provide products and services to the Scottish public sector.

The Framework is reserved for Supported Factories and Businesses as defined in regulation 7 of the Public Contracts (Scotland) Regulations 2012 (Article 19 of Directive 2004/18/EC). A supported factory/business is 'an establishment where more than 50% of the workers are disabled persons who by reason of the nature or severity of their disability are unable to take up work in the open labour market.'

The Scottish Government encourages public sector bodies to utilise the services of supported businesses whenever appropriate opportunities arise and to seek the services of those companies on the framework agreement.

NHS 24 will ensure that the framework agreement will be utilised whenever appropriate.

## Staff training

NHS 24 recognises the importance of learning and development and provides all staff with equality and diversity training as part of their induction programme.

Additionally, all staff have access to the following equalities focussed e-learning training modules and resources:

- Deaf awareness
- Dignity at work
- Equality and diversity awareness in NHS 24
- Gender Based Violence (provided by NHS National Education Scotland)
- Raising awareness of Gypsy/Traveller communities (provided by NHS Fife)
- Dementia awareness
- Learning disabilities (provided by NHS National Education Scotland)
- Public protection
- Mental health awareness in NHS 24
- Mental health improvement and suicide prevention (provided by NHS Education Scotland)
- Video resources to raise awareness of LGB and Trans.

We are currently reviewing the training we offer staff to ensure the application of person-centred principles are integral to everything that we do.

## Management Essentials Programme

All new and experienced managers up to pay band 7 undertake the Management Essential Programme which includes a dedicated session on Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion. This session tells participants what is expected of a NHS 24 people manager in relation to treating staff fairly, in line with our values, and helps them understand how this benefits the workforce, our organisation and service users.

## NHS 24 Board Workshop

A Board workshop was held in spring 2024 focussing on engagement and participation in addition to equalities, inclusion, and rights. Furthermore, embedded throughout the discussions were the themes of intersectionality and poverty which underpin some of the key challenges faced by people living in Scotland. This session included representatives and colleagues from organisations working within Corporate Parenting, sensory loss, Third Sector Interfaces and race equality. These are key organisations that help deliver public duties for care experienced young people, disabled people, minority ethnic people and other members of the public.

The session provided an opportunity for the NHS 24 Board to be assured of the progress made in relation to our equality duties. It also enabled a positive discussion and fostered good relations with key partners. Feedback from partners who took part was positive and constructive and offered future opportunities to work together to meet the general equality duty.

## Workforce equality monitoring

Our workforce equality monitoring data is used to measure our performance and progress towards our equality and diversity goals and has been used to inform the development of our equality outcomes for 2025 to 2027

We are committed to improving our equality monitoring disclosure rate.

Our Workforce Equality Monitoring Reports for 2021 to 2025 are published on our website and can be accessed using the link below:

[Equality and diversity reports | NHS 24](#)



## Disability Confident

We successfully obtained consent to use the government's Disability Confident logo in our job adverts. The Disability Confident scheme is designed to help employers recruit and retain disabled people, helping to remove barriers to their participation. As part of this scheme, we are committed to:

- interviewing all disabled applicants who meet the minimum criteria for a job vacancy and to consider them on their abilities
- discussing with disabled employees, at any time but at least once a year, what we can do to make sure they can develop and seek to progress if they wish to
- making every effort when employees become disabled to help them stay in employment
- taking action to ensure that all employees develop the appropriate level of disability awareness needed to make these commitments work
- reviewing these commitments every year, assessing what has been achieved and planning ways to improve on them.

## Carer Positive

Our organisation proudly maintains the Carer Positive Engaged status, successfully gaining accreditation from Carers Scotland in March 2023. Carer Positive is a Scottish Government funded initiative.

A multi disciplinary working group was established to progress the work of the initiative. A workplan was initiated and continues to progress to support and evidence activity with an aspiration of achieving the next level of accreditation of 'Carer Positive – Established' status by the deadline of October 2025. As part of our activities to support carers in balancing their work and caregiving duties, we have launched a dedicated page on staff intranet. This provides easy access to internal policies, procedures, and external resources relevant to our staff who are carers.

Carers represent a significant part of the working age population and it's likely that around one in eight of our staff are carers.

As an employer we acknowledge that the growing number of working carers is a significant factor in workforce management. Supporting these carers is crucial for maintaining a healthy and productive workforce.

Evidence has shown that supportive working practices for carers:

- attract and retain staff
- reduce recruitment and training costs
- improve service delivery
- improve people management and staff morale.
- reduce stress and sickness absence
- increase resilience and productivity
- produce cost savings

Through the working group, NHS 24 regularly reviews and progresses all actions related to being a Carer Positive employer.

## Inclusive employer

NHS 24 is committed to creating a workplace where everyone feels valued, respected, included, and able to achieve their own personal career aspirations.

We understand that people can sometimes experience inequalities when in, or when seeking, employment. As an inclusive employer we take positive steps to advance equality and tackle discrimination.

## Fair Work Principles

NHS 24 is committed to fair work and reducing workplace inequalities and has therefore embedded the Scottish Government's Fair Work First principles into practice. NHS 24 is unwavering in our commitment for fair pay and conditions, a workplace where workers are heard and represented, treated with respect, and have opportunities to progress.

NHS 24 has implemented the fair work principles in both workforce policies and in our practice as well as in awarding any grants or funding. Some examples of the elements of the fair work principles that we consider include:

- the payment of the real Living Wage and other fair working practices
- working to remove barriers to employment and career progression for disabled people, women, workers over 50 years old, and people who may be treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity.
- ensuring appropriate channels for effective voice, such as trade union recognition.
- investment in workforce development.
- action to tackle the gender pay gap and create a more diverse and inclusive workplace.
- offer flexible and family friendly working practices for all workers from day one of employment.

## Early Careers

NHS 24 is proud to support young people to access the workplace. Modern Apprenticeships provide an opportunity for 17- to 21-year-olds to enter the workplace on an earn as you learn basis. NHS 24 advertises all available opportunities via our own Careers site as well as via the apprenticeship.scot website. One example of this is that we have employed a Modern Apprentice in our Workforce Directorate on a 24-month contract and during their time with the organisation they will support the Workforce activities while working towards their SCQF Level 5 and 6 in Business and Administration.

NHS 24 has also introduced a Graduate Apprenticeship programme which supports individuals to get the higher-level knowledge and skills needed to succeed and progress in a career. Graduates are able to combine work and study whilst they learn in the workplace and earn a university degree or professional qualification.

## School engagement

The talent acquisition and recruitment teams have engaged local schools in the vicinity of our 6 regional centres. They have supported and attended careers events, as well as student engagement and information sessions to raise awareness of the opportunities for employment at NHS 24 both now and in the future. These sessions have helped students understand the skills required and pathways to consider in order to secure a career with NHS 24.

NHS 24 has also engaged schools, supporting students to develop Curriculum Vitae (CVs), providing guidance on completing job applications and developing interview skills. Over the past 18 months, we offered this support at 5 school sessions.

## University and college engagement

NHS 24 engage students at various stages of their education journey to raise awareness of career opportunities at NHS 24. Over the last 18 months, we have attended Careers Fairs to support students at the end of their education journey and to promote part-time employment opportunities with new students while they are in full time education. In the past 12 months, we have attended four college and university recruitment events. Furthermore, during 2023 and 2024 we promoted NHS 24 recruitment opportunities as one of our key messages at Freshers and wellbeing fairs we attended.

## Employability partnership work

Over the last 18 months, NHS 24 has engaged several employability partners; attended career events; held candidate information and application support sessions with various groups. The purpose of these sessions is to break down the barriers candidates may face and to ensure everyone has a fair opportunity to secure employment with NHS 24. We have attended seven external careers events over the last 12 months.

NHS 24 Employability Lead also works with the National Employability Leads Group to share best practice and to further develop its routes into employment. Engagement is ongoing with organisations whose purpose is to offer opportunities for employment.

## Armed Forces recruitment

NHS 24 is part of the National Armed Forces Talent Programme which supports armed forces leavers, veterans, and their families into NHS employment through career pathways and resources. The work also increases NHS Scotland staff's awareness and understanding of the range and transferability of skills and qualifications this group can offer. This aims to improve this group's experience of the application and recruitment process when seeking employment in the health and care system.

Over the last 12 months we have attended Manager Awareness Sessions hosted by Joint Force Alba. These were designed to raise awareness of the Armed Forces talent pipeline and of the benefits of this potential applicant pool. Topics covered included:

- defining the Armed Forces and the groups within the community
- training and qualifications and alignment to the NHS workforce
- knowledge, skills and experience (and their transferability)
- the re-settlement process
- partner organisations.

To ensure the promotion of NHS 24 careers extends to the Armed Forces community we have attended engagement events and online seminars. We have also created an external guidance document that will help these candidates understand what opportunities are available and where their skills can be transferred. This guidance is shared via the NHS Scotland Careers sites, distributed via the Career Transformation Programme, partner organisations and via the Armed Forces Talent Programme.

In the last 6 months we have engaged the Highland and Lowland reserve Forces and Cadet Association to work closely with the Reservists, Cadets, and Cadet Force Adult Volunteers. This is to understand the skills and qualifications they have and to promote career opportunities with NHS 24. Along with NHS Education for Scotland and Scottish Ambulance Service, we will be working closely with the Reserve Forces' and Cadets' Associations (RFCA) to ensure there is continued engagement in this space.

In 2024, NHS 24 became a signatory of the Armed Forces Covenant. The Covenant is a pledge that those who currently serve or have served, and their families, should be treated fairly and not be disadvantaged in any way.

NHS 24 is committed to supporting and where required, advocating for both serving Armed Forces personnel and veterans as well as supporting NHS 24 to meet its commitments and duties in relation to the Armed Forces Covenant. Furthermore, NHS 24 is committed to engaging across the organisation to seek improvement opportunities for Armed Forces Community members across our workforce as well as those who require our services.

## CEMVO Scotland

CEMVO (Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations) Scotland is a national intermediary organisation and strategic partner of the Scottish Government Equality Unit. CEMVO work to build the capacity and sustainability of the ethnic minority voluntary sector and its communities.

During 2024, NHS 24 engaged with CEMVO on the "Race for Human Rights" work where we have facilitated 3 consultative sessions supporting with:

- Tackling racism
- Embedding anti racism in strategy development
- Allyship and championing diversity and inclusion

Through the engagement with CEMVO, we have developed anti-racism training for all NHS 24 members of staff, ensured our action plan has clear measures of success and we have cemented the approach that all staff in NHS 24 have a responsibility to champion diversity and challenge racism.

Over and above the work detailed above, we have also advertised our vacancies through the Equal Jobs platform. This platform, which is hosted by CEMVO, is designed for supporting and encouraging businesses to reflect the rich diversity and vibrancy of Scotland.

## Equality outcomes 2021–2025 - Final Progress Report

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012 requires us to publish and report progress on equality outcomes we intend to achieve over a four-year period. Our equality outcomes must specify a result that we aim to achieve in order to further one or more of the needs of the general equality duty, which are to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

In 2021, NHS 24 set three equality outcomes intended to help improve the experiences of disabled people, minority ethnic people and younger people. The outcomes were:

- The number of minority ethnic people who work for NHS 24, and who seek employment with NHS 24, will increase, and as a minimum we will work towards our workforce being more representative of the demographics of the Scottish population.
- Disabled people (specifically groups of disabled people that might experience barriers to communication, for example people who have hearing impairments or people with conditions such as autism), experience improved awareness of and access to urgent care services via NHS 24.
- Young people experiencing mental ill health in Scotland are better informed about and have improved access to NHS 24 mental health services available to support them.

In 2023, we published [progress reports](#) on the outputs we had undertaken to achieve under the intended outcomes. Further information is now provided below.

### Equality Outcome One

Equality outcome one - the number of minority ethnic people who work for NHS 24, and who seek employment with NHS 24, will increase, and as a minimum we will work towards our workforce being more representative of the demographics of the Scottish population.

### Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment (EDIA)

In 2022 a review of NHS 24's Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment (EDIA) for the recruitment process was undertaken. The recommendations included raising awareness of job opportunities and working with community groups who are underrepresented within the workforce.

To raise awareness of NHS 24 vacancies we now engage a range of organisations who work with and support minority ethnic people across Scotland. These organisations advertise our vacancies and support awareness raising of recruitment opportunities.

### Community engagement

Our community engagement work has also supported raising awareness of opportunities to work and volunteer at NHS 24, for example at Freshers events and when recruiting volunteers for the Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum.

## Employability partnership work

We have held candidate information sessions and application support sessions with a number of groups. The purpose of these sessions is to break down the barriers candidates may face and to ensure everyone has a fair opportunity to secure employment with NHS 24. We have attended seven external careers events over the last 12 months.

NHS 24's Employability Lead also works with the National Employability Leads Group to share best practice and to further develop routes into employment. Engagement is ongoing with organisations that support people with protected characteristics including disability, race and age.

This has helped us reach applicants who may not usually apply for roles within NHS 24.

In 2021-22, 3.15% staff identified as minority ethnic. In 2023-24, this increased to 7.31% did (acknowledging that the overall number of staff employed increased over the course of this four-year period).

We remain committed to improving our workforce being more representative of the demographics of the Scottish population and this work will continue as part of our mainstreamed equality work alongside progressing a new Equality Outcome - The number of minority ethnic people who are employed by NHS 24 in management roles (from band 5 and above), including a focus on senior roles (band 8 and above), will increase and be more representative of the demographics of the Scottish population.

## Equality Outcome Two

Disabled people (specifically groups of disabled people that might experience barriers to communication, for example people who have hearing impairments or people with conditions such as autism), experience improved awareness of and access to urgent care services via NHS 24.

### Improved access for people with disabilities

In 2021, NHS 24 identified a key priority to raise awareness of our services, care navigation, webchat, and resources to support people living with physical disabilities and people who are neurodivergent.

Having gathered insights via a survey a disabled-led organisation distributed to their members and through our later engagement with neurodiverse organisations, we progressed with engagement activities to raise awareness of NHS 24 services, resources and access channels with a range of third sector organisations, community groups and schools.

As part of this work, we have delivered presentations and provided information stands to staff and to members of the public. These events were an opportunity to raise awareness of the different ways people can access NHS 24 services, including webchat, Relay UK and Contact Scotland BSL.

This has been further supported by our Communications team who developed digital assets and social media content for disability groups we work with to aid further awareness raising.

To help people access the 111 service at a time when they might be anxious or stressed, we have updated and shared our publication 'My important information for NHS 24'. This card can be used to write down key health information callers may be asked if they phone 111 - including their date of birth, details of their GP practice, and of any illnesses and medication. Having this information on hand should help to reduce callers' anxiety. Requests for this resource has increased, with one organisation that supports people with learning disabilities ordering 2,000 copies.

Following up on feedback about awareness raising sessions, we have worked with an autism organisation to develop a neurodiverse friendly presentation – this includes ways to aid discussions during these information sessions.

## Disability History Month

In 2023, we celebrated Disability History Month by publishing a poster on our digital wallboards. This showcased the theme of reducing stigma and stereotypes. We signposted all staff to our resources (including e-learning, videos and weblinks). We also published intranet articles throughout November and December 2023 talking about:

- Disability History Month
- What is disability?
- The social model of disability
- Disability in the workplace: employment, the Equality Act and Reasonable Adjustments.

This internal activity helps to support our Public Sector Equality Duty to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it. Additionally, it helps to promote understanding and increase cultural competence among our NHS 24 colleagues.

With the theme for 2024, being livelihood and employment, we used this opportunity to spotlight an NHS 24 colleague and share their achievements of being the first frame runner to complete the London Marathon. NHS 24's Communication Team provided digital content to be shared internally and externally via social media, wallboards and staff intranet.

## Relay UK and hard of hearing groups

According to the [Royal National Institute for Deaf People](#) (RNID) 'One in three adults in the UK are deaf, have hearing loss or tinnitus'. We know that this group can experience barriers when accessing services. The Stakeholder Engagement Team is responsible for the day-to-day management of community engagement to help promote a better understanding and awareness of NHS 24 services, equalities and human rights. As part of this, the team engaged hard of hearing support groups to raise awareness of NHS 24 services and how they can be accessed.

In 2023-24 we visited six hard-of-hearing groups (in Renfrewshire, Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Fife), speaking to staff and volunteers who support people in the community. We were invited to a community information day in October 2023 – an opportunity to engage with approximately 20 attendees informally. We have also presented at two lipreading classes in Ayrshire – where one of the learners is 102.

The groups found printed resources useful, particularly the 'My important information for NHS 24' cards and 'Helping you find the right care' leaflet. We will continue to promote these widely, alongside the other new publications (including 'Caring for someone' and 'Accessing the right mental health care from NHS 24'). Awareness of Relay UK is limited within this group, and we have been handing out leaflets to attendees.

We hosted an introductory meeting with a Relay UK Product Owner which was very positive. We will build on initial conversations which focused on the development of bespoke promotional material we could distribute to our contacts in the deaf community. We will also explore options for online awareness sessions with organisations who support hard-of-hearing groups locally, and awareness-raising opportunities with staff.

## Engagement with the British Sign Language (BSL) community

In 2017, the Scottish Government published the first BSL National Plan. In November 2023, the second BSL National Plan (2023-2029) was launched. This sets out ten priority areas (including health and wellbeing) which have been developed to respond to the barriers BSL users have identified as important to them.

The Stakeholder Engagement Team has continued to work towards improving access to services for BSL users as part of our commitment under the first BSL National Plan. This is to gain a better understanding of BSL users' health information needs and of any barriers they experience when accessing NHS 24 services. We share these insights with colleagues involved in service improvement and development.

We have developed a set of pledges to underpin our engagement with the BSL community in 2024-2030. We will consult with people on a regular basis; share information on accessing NHS 24 resources and services; support children and their families; inform staff on how to communicate effectively using BSL; promote employment and volunteering opportunities; work in partnership with a Deaf-led organisation.

Between June 2023 and November 2024, the Stakeholder Engagement Team visited five deaf clubs to promote the different ways BSL users can access NHS 24 services and to find out about attendees' experience of using NHS 24 services. Contact Scotland BSL and local NHS colleagues supported some of the sessions, making them more informative for attendees. At a Deaf Education Department Academy, we engaged pupils and staff who are BSL users. This was an opportunity to speak to young BSL users, improving their knowledge of NHS 24 services and gathering their insights.

Support from a national Deaf-led membership organisation allows us to engage widely with the BSL community: we took part in a livestreaming session, raising awareness of NHS 24 and taking questions from BSL users; we attended two stakeholder events about the new national plan, local plans, and sharing of good practice. As well as arranging our visit to a Deaf Club in Tayside, they have shared BSL users' feedback about NHS 24 with us and promoted our services across their network.

There are over 110 BSL clips on NHS inform. Providing alternative formats (including BSL) is an integral part of discussions with new content owners and new publications about NHS 24 services have been translated in BSL.

We will continue to explore ways to raise awareness of the ways BSL users can access our resources and services. Calls to 111 supported by Contact Scotland BSL remain high, averaging 40 per month. We promote Contact Scotland BSL online, in press releases, in printed materials and in relevant communications. Our weekly bulletin about BSL videos on NHS 24 websites goes to 16 key stakeholders for onward dissemination via newsletters and social media.

By visiting Deaf Clubs, we engaged over 60 BSL users face-to-face. Awareness of NHS 24 in this group was usually limited and support from Deaf Clubs staff helped re-focus conversations so they are relevant to NHS 24 services.

## Deaf Awareness Week – 2023 (1-7 May)

The Stakeholder Engagement Team supported the organisation to raise awareness of our resources that are available to the deaf community. NHS 24 celebrated deaf awareness week in 2023. Using our social media channels and campaign page on NHS inform, we were able to raise awareness of our BSL resources and our partnership with Contact Scotland BSL. We worked in partnership with colleagues from a range of organisations to ensure our key messages reflected the needs of our deaf community.

Between 28 April and 9 May, the campaign page achieved 1893 page views. Furthermore, we worked closely with our communications team who supported the campaign on NHS 24 social media channels with one Facebook post achieving 19 Likes and 28 shares and four tweets achieving a total of 36 retweets, 25 likes and 10,650 impressions.

## Deaf Awareness Week – 2024 (6-12 May)

As we do annually, the Stakeholder Engagement Team support the organisation to raise awareness of our resources that are available to the deaf community by celebrating deaf awareness week in 2024. As in previous years, we promoted the campaign on our social media channels, with a campaign page on NHS inform, raising awareness of our BSL resources and our partnership with Contact Scotland BSL. We worked in partnership with colleagues from a range of organisations to ensure our key messages reflected the needs of the deaf community. In addition, we contacted the UK Council on Deafness who host the national campaign to let them know of our plans.

In 2024, the campaign page achieved 1439 page views. Furthermore, our promotion on our social media channels produced 27 likes and 27 shares with one Facebook post and five posts on X (formerly Twitter) achieving a total of 7 retweets, 8 likes and 2,159 views. The ALLIANCE also promoted the campaign on X, with a post achieving 6 retweets, 11 likes and 550 views.

## Deafblind Awareness Week – 2024 (24-30 June)

We promoted Deafblind awareness week on our social media channels and with a campaign page on NHS inform. In Scotland, Deafblindness and sight loss affect approximately 211,000 people. Working with key stakeholders, we published relevant and accurate information with appropriate signposting for those who required support. Once launched, our stakeholders signposted their users to the NHS inform campaign page to ensure the resource was accessed by those who needed it.

In June 2024, the campaign page achieved 98 views, and the [deafblindness article](#) achieved 201 views. The [Facebook post on 27 June](#) achieved 10 likes, 2 comments and 6 shares and our post on X on [26 June 2024](#) achieved 13 likes, 1500 page views, 16 reposts.

## Parliamentary event – 26 June 2024

NHS 24 staff attended Deafblind Scotland's Parliamentary Reception to celebrate the Scottish Deafblind community and hear about the progress towards a Scottish Definition of Deafblindness.

## Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID) Event – 3 March 2024

World Hearing Day is on 3 March each year. This is to raise awareness on how to prevent deafness and hearing loss and to promote ear and hearing care across the world. On World Hearing Day in 2024, NHS 24 attended an event at Dennistoun Public Library to hear from an author about their book called 'Hear No Evil'. Discussions also highlighted the work that the RNID and Macmillan at Glasgow Libraries are progressing. NHS 24 colleagues spoke to the staff and updated them on work underway at NHS 24 and received details of hard of hearing clubs that had recently been set up and where we could attend to showcase our resources and gather insights.

We remain committed to improving awareness of and access to our services for people who are disabled and will focus on improving access and awareness of NHS 24 services for people with sensory loss or speech impairment.

## Digital Transformation Programme

As part of the Digital Transformation Programme, NHS 24 embedded social value and accessibility functional and non-functional requirements into its procurement process. NHS 24 is committed to taking a 'digital first' approach to the delivery of our services, using technology in a way that makes it easier for people to access the care, advice, and information they need. We will engage with our stakeholders, both internal and external, to ensure our approach is meeting the needs of all our stakeholders, ensuring it is inclusive and meaningful for disadvantaged people.

## Review of NHS inform

NHS inform is Scotland's national health information service. Its aim is to provide the people in Scotland with accurate and relevant information to help them make informed decisions about their own health and the health of the people they care for.

NHS inform is under review. To support the review, we have adopted the Scottish Approach to Service Design enabling people of Scotland to be supported and empowered to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of public services provided by NHS 24.

We commissioned an accessibility audit and have followed this up with workshops to scope out improvements intended to enable people to find the information they need in a format and language of their choice.

## Equality Outcome Three

Young people experiencing mental ill health in Scotland are better informed about and have improved access to NHS 24 mental health services available to support them.

### Breathing Space – youth work

The Breathing Space Team works closely with a range of national and local sports organisations to promote the service to young people and men who might otherwise have a low awareness of the service. The work has included supporting information sessions, workshops, community engagement events, attending Mental Health and Wellbeing Steering Groups, Mental Health Improvement Planning meetings, and supporting student health campaigns.

### Breathing Space in schools

The Breathing Space team have been progressing with engagement with students and staff at schools across Scotland to raise awareness of NHS 24 mental health offering. This work has included a range of support:

- wellbeing presentations with staff
- sessions with senior pupils (S5/S6)
- communication toolkit
- highlighting the opportunity to support 'Take some Breathing Space' benches.

### 'Take some Breathing Space' benches

The Breathing Space Bench initiative, which began in 2018, aims to provide physical reminders for people to pause, reflect, and find comfort. They are welcoming spaces to encourage people to sit and take some breathing space, to share a bit of time for listening and talking, or by reaching out and showing kindness and compassion.

Over 60 benches, funded by various organisations, have been installed across Scotland in parks, train stations, and urban areas. As of October 2024, we have worked with colleges, schools, and universities to install 20 benches to enhance student wellbeing.

### Breathing Space webchat

The Breathing Space service offers webchat. This channel of delivery can support people with communication differences and anyone who is not comfortable communicating by phone. Where service users disclosed their age, October 2024 analytics show that approximately 25% of chats were received from people aged 16 to 24.

## Engagement with students around student health

There is a lack of awareness among students about care navigation, and each academic year sees a large movement of young people and international students. However, due to competing advertising priorities and the vast number of students involved, it can be difficult to spread information directly to students at face-to-face events. Therefore, engaging student support staff allows us to promote NHS 24 services (including mental health support), so they are empowered to signpost to the right care in the right place.

Between August 2023 and October 2024, we progressed a programme of work focussing on student health. This work was split into two parts: face-to-face engagement with students at freshers' events; running information sessions with college and university staff. The aim was to raise awareness of NHS 24 services and promote care navigation among staff who support students, so that they could signpost students to the most appropriate help. There was an additional focus on mental health services and access to information for people with communication differences.

We delivered information in the format desired by the college or university, which included face-to-face or online, and meetings, training sessions, attendance at events and a lecture to students. This has increased the amount of resource requests received from further and higher education establishments.

During the period 2022 to 2024, the Stakeholder Engagement team attended 51 freshers' events, speaking to over 3000 students and members of staff.

## Accessing the right mental health care from NHS 24 resource

To support an improved understanding of NHS 24's mental health offerings, a new leaflet called '[Accessing the right mental health care from NHS 24](#)' was developed and translated into eleven community languages and accessible formats. This resource has been distributed at 2024 freshers' events, during student services engagement, and to third sector organisations and community groups. Over 25,000 printed copies of this leaflet had been distributed by December 2024.

Promotional communication about this resource has been sent to a range of services and organisations that supports young people, including Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) children's health care services, school counselling services, and third sector organisations.

## Equality Outcomes 2025 to 2029

The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012, as amended, requires NHS 24 to publish equality outcomes. Our equality outcomes specify a result that we aim to achieve to further one or more of the needs of the general equality duty, which are to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

To help inform our equality outcomes, NHS 24 gathered and considered relevant evidence obtained through:

- engagement with third sector organisations that represent the interests of people with the relevant protected characteristics
- engagement with the groups of people for whom the outcomes are intended to support an improved experience
- a review of evidence gained from engagement activities undertaken by NHS 24 over the past couple of years, such as our Corporate Strategy engagement and NHS inform refresh engagement
- an analysis of reports published by the Scottish Government, third sector organisations that represent the interests of people with the relevant protected characteristics, public bodies and other organisations
- an analysis of our workforce data
- an analysis of our public involvement data
- staff engagement
- engagement with the NHS 24 Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum members.

The equality outcomes NHS 24 has set relate to the relevant protected characteristics of age, disability, and race. Whilst setting outcomes in relation to the other six protected characteristics were explored, it was noted that the issues identified within the chosen outcomes affect a significant amount of people, and there is a strong potential for NHS 24's actions to make an improvement to the outcomes experienced by these groups of people. Work to advance equality for the other protected characteristic groups will continue as part of NHS 24's mainstreaming work. Additionally, NHS 24 is aware of how intersectional characteristics can further exacerbate inequalities will consider this when taking steps to deliver these outcomes.

## Equality Outcome One

The number of minority ethnic people who are employed by NHS 24 in management roles (from band 5 and above), including a focus on senior roles (band 8 and above), will increase and be more representative of the demographics of the Scottish population.

### General Duty:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

## Protected characteristic: Race

### Evidence

The Scottish Parliament's Equalities and Human Rights Committee's report, Race Equality, Employment and Skills: Making Progress? stated 'The ethnicity employment gap remains unacceptable and much more needs to be done to reduce the ethnicity pay gap and occupational segregation.'

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) published a report in November 2023, 'Is Scotland Fairer?'; it highlighted that despite increasing employment levels, ethnic minority workers in Scotland on average experience both a lower quantity and poorer quality of work, with consistently lower average hourly earnings and higher levels of insecure work.

The Scottish Government's Race Equality Framework for Scotland 2016 to 2030 highlights that Scottish public bodies have very low proportions of minority ethnic staff in comparison to national and local demographic profiles. The framework notes that to develop a representative workforce, most of Scotland's public bodies will need to invest additional effort – including tackling discrimination and looking at opportunities to take positive action.

### Demographic data

As a national Health Board, with office locations across the country, NHS 24's potential and current staff and service users will be the entire Scottish population.

Scotland's Census 2022 shows that 12.9% of people in Scotland had a minority ethnic background, which is an increase from 8.2% in 2011.

Within the Census, 'Minority ethnic group' is used to refer to all ethnic groups other than White Scottish or White British. This includes some ethnic groups that were in the White category on the census form such as Irish, Polish, Gypsy/Traveller, Roma and Showman/Showwoman.

The 'Other white' category sits at 2.92% of the population and is the largest minority ethnic group. Around three out of four people in this group had European heritage – they either wrote in 'European' or wrote in a European country to define their ethnic background.

Census Data - Minority Ethnic Group	%
Other White	92%
Polish	1.67%
Pakistani, Scottish Pakistani or British Pakistani	1.12%
African, Scottish African or British African	1.08%
Irish	1.05%
Indian, Scottish Indian or British Indian	0.97%
Chinese, Scottish Chinese or British Chinese	0.87%
Other Asian	0.59%
Other ethnic group	0.5%
Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British	0.41%
Bangladeshi, Scottish Bangladeshi or British Bangladeshi	0.13%
Caribbean or Black	0.12%
Roma	0.06%
Gypsy/Traveller	0.06%
Showman/Showwoman	0.03%

## NHS 24 Workforce Data

5.92% of staff identify as being from a minority ethnic group.  
68.33% of minority ethnic staff are employed at pay bands 2 or 3.  
9.17% of minority ethnic staff are employed at pay bands 4 or 5.  
21.67% of minority ethnic staff are employed at pay band 6 or 7.  
0.83% of minority ethnic staff are employed at pay band 8 or above.

It is significant to note that just over 44% of all NHS 24's staff are employed at pay band 3 and only 1.51% of staff are employed at pay band 8a.

The annual pay gap comparison by race was 9.59% in favour of any White – British ethnic group, in comparison to those who identify as being from a minority ethnic group.

A key factor contributing to the 9.59% pay gap is the high concentration of minority ethnic staff employed at pay bands 2 or 3 and the underrepresentation of minority ethnic staff at pay band 8 and above.

In the 2023 NHS 24 Workforce Equality Monitoring Report, additional data and analysis of our recruitment, as reported by the protected characteristic of race, was included to provide additional evidence relating to the equality outcome set in 2021 that was intended to help improve the experience of minority ethnic people applying for and working with NHS 24. The additional data highlighted the success rate of applicants for each ethnic group. Overall, the success rate for applicants in non-white minority ethnic categories was reported to be disproportionately low. The combined average success rate for all white categories was 13.84%. The combined average success rate for all non-white minority ethnic categories was 6.40%.

However, it was established that NHS 24 commonly receives applications from international candidates, who at the time of application have no right to work in the UK. It was also noted that NHS 24 also regularly receives applications from international candidates who are seeking an NHS Scotland sponsor. NHS 24 is not currently a sponsor and many of the roles that NHS 24 recruits to are not eligible for sponsorship e.g. Call Handlers. It was felt that these two factors could have had an impact on the overall success rate of minority ethnic candidates, particularly as the overall percentage of staff in post who identify as minority ethnic has increased.

## Anti-Racism Action Plan

On 6 September 2024, the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care published a statement that identified racism as a significant public health challenge, and a key cause of health inequalities.

To support an improved staff and patient experience, Health Boards have been asked to develop and deliver against their own Anti-Racism Action Plans. Plans should set out each Board's ambition, the action they will take to address racism, and a commitment to achieve improved outcomes for minority ethnic people.

## Equality Outcome One - activities

Our aim is to ensure that minority ethnic people have equal and fair access to employment opportunities within NHS 24 across all job roles.

This outcome will support NHS 24 to take positive steps to ensure that our organisation is equipped to tackle any racism that may exist. It will also support NHS 24 to identify and promote practice that works in reducing employment inequalities, discrimination, and barriers for minority ethnic people, including in career paths, recruitment, progression, and retention.

Effective engagement with minority ethnic communities to promote equality of opportunity should help attract interest in posts at every level within NHS 24, and we will have a particular focus on encouraging applications from minority ethnic candidates for senior roles.

### **Activity 1:**

Establish leadership and governance arrangements that provide visibility and accountability for anti-racism at Senior Management, Executive Management Team, and Board level.

### **Activity 2:**

Take positive action to encourage applications from minority ethnic people for job roles at band 8 and above. Positive action may include:

- including a statement within job adverts making it clear that NHS 24 is an equal opportunities employer that is committed to advancing equality and particularly welcomes applications from groups of people currently underrepresented within the workforce
- working with organisations that promote the interests of minority ethnic people to share information about job opportunities
- delivering recruitment best practice training sessions to minority ethnic community groups
- inviting minority ethnic groups to visit NHS 24 to learn more about the organisation and the job roles available
- using social media to encourage applications from minority ethnic candidates.

### **Activity 3:**

Ensure images used to promote NHS 24 consistently reflect diversity and a commitment to inclusion.

### **Activity 4:**

Develop an apprenticeship or management scheme inclusive of minority ethnic people.

### **Activity 5:**

Take steps to ensure that NHS 24's workforce is fully aware of and understands racism and the impact this can have on people, both in work and in the delivery of services.

### **Activity 6:**

Proactively promote an anti-racism stance within communications and corporate documents.

### **Measure:**

Progress towards this outcome will be measured through an annual analysis of our workforce data, including:

- the percentage of minority ethnic candidates applying for job roles
- the percentage of minority ethnic candidates successfully appointed
- the percentage of minority ethnic candidates employed at pay band 8 and above
- the NHS 24 pay gap as reported by the protected characteristic of race.

## Equality Outcome Two

Young people experiencing mental ill health in Scotland have an improved awareness of and have improved access to NHS 24 mental health services.

### General duty:

- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

### Protected characteristic: Age

#### Evidence:

In 2021, NHS 24 set an equality outcome intended to support an improved awareness of and access to mental health services. Though some progress has been made, it is clear from the evidence gathered that additional work is required to fully achieve this outcome.

It has been reported that the mental wellbeing of children and young people has declined over the past few years, with the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic being a significant contributing factor.

A Lockdown Lowdown survey conducted by the Scottish Youth Parliament, Young Scot and YouthLink reported that almost two fifths (39%) of respondents stated that they felt moderately or extremely concerned about their own mental wellbeing. Additionally, 46% of respondents stated that they felt moderately or extremely concerned about the mental wellbeing of others.

#### SAMH (Scottish Action for Mental Health) report that:

- Every day in Scotland, 20 young people don't get the help they need for mental health problems.
- Only a quarter of young people know where to go to find help for their mental health.
- In Scotland, 1 in 6 young adults aged 18-34 have self-harmed. Girls are three times more likely than boys to report self-harm.
- Three in four (76%) parents said that their child's mental health had deteriorated while waiting for specialist mental health support.
- On average, children and young people with mental health difficulties go ten years between first becoming unwell and getting any help.

Public Health Scotland report that between 2011 and 2020, suicide was the leading cause of death among children and young people aged 5 to 24 and suicides in this age group made up a larger percentage share of total suicides in 2020 compared with 2011.

The suicide rate for boys and young men aged 5 to 24 was noted as over two times higher than that for girls and young women in the same age group. Age was also noted as a significant factor in the likelihood of self-harm. In 2021, it was reported that younger people aged 16 to 24 (25%) and 25 to 34 (20%) were much more likely than those aged 65 and over (1%) to report having self-harmed.

Scotland's Census 2022 data shows that 11.3% of the population reported a condition that affected their mental wellbeing. This is an increase from 232,900 people in 2011 to 617,100 in 2022. The data shows that is now more common for younger people to report a mental health condition than people in older age groups, which is the opposite of the 2011 data.

Census data noted that 15.4% of people aged 16 to 24 reported having a mental health condition, which is a significant increase from 2.5% in 2011. It was reported that females in this age group were twice as likely as males in this age group to report having a mental health condition.

## Engagement

Upon joining NHS 24's Youth Forum, new members have commonly reported a low awareness of NHS 24's mental health services. They have suggested that this lack of awareness is likely to be reflected across other young people. They recognised the benefits of promoting awareness but highlighted the need for this to be an ongoing commitment as young people age.

Youth Forum members supported continuing to commit to an equality outcome intended to improve awareness of and access to NHS 24's mental health services and shared suggestions as to how this could be achieved.

## Equality Outcome Two - activities

Our aim is to ensure that we play our part to help improve the experience of young people who are now more likely to report experiencing a mental health concern.

We understand the need to continue to prioritise engagement with young people, evolving our approach to meet the needs of a new generation. We will work with our Youth Forum and other young people to help ensure that the actions that we take are tailored to what works best for sharing key messages and delivering services that are accessible to young people.

### Activity 1:

Develop a survey to engage with young people to establish a baseline awareness of NHS 24's mental health services.

### Activity 2:

Develop a Communications and Engagement Plan targeted at secondary school age pupils. This will include working with NHS 24 Youth Forum members to engage young people within their schools.

### Activity 3:

As part of the Digital and Transformation work being undertaken by NHS 24, explore opportunities to offer access to services for young people in ways that meet their preferences. For example, young people reported a preference for webchat, online videos and video chat.

### Activity 4:

Engage with Health and Social Care Partnership mental health leads to promote NHS 24's mental health services across Scotland.

### Activity 5:

Engage with third sector organisations that work with young people to promote NHS 24's mental health services across Scotland.

## Measure

Progress made to achieve this outcome will be measured against the baseline data gathered and through the ongoing engagement of young people.

## Equality Outcome Three

Disabled people, with a sensory or speech impairment, have improved access to accessible information, communication, and awareness of NHS 24 services.

### General Duty:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

### Protected characteristic: Disability

### Evidence

The number of people with sensory impairments in the UK is large and growing, affecting over 26% of the population.

It has been reported that:

- In the UK over 2 million people are affected by sight loss.
- Approximately 320,000 people are officially registered as blind or partially sighted.
- A substantial majority of those affected by sight loss are older adults, with nearly 80% being 65 years or older, and around 60% over 75.
- Well over half of people with sight loss are women.
- Around 170,000 people in Scotland have significant sight loss.
- Blind and partially sighted people feel that health information is often not provided in an accessible format, making it more difficult for them to manage their healthcare independently.

The RNIB published a report, *Communication Failure*, that sets out the experience of blind and partially sighted people accessing health services in Scotland. A key point within the report is that blind and partially sighted patients often have to rely on the support of others to access health information and services, which can lead to the patient feeling disempowered and put them in a position where their confidentiality is breached due to their reliance on carers, relatives or friends. Those interviewed for the report noted that health service websites can be difficult to navigate and that there could be a better use of online information to provide easily accessible vision support. It was also noted that there is an opportunity to improve the experience of people with sight loss when they are seeking to give feedback.

The ALLIANCE Scottish Sensory Hub undertook a consultation with minority ethnic people on behalf of the Scottish Government to inform the See Hear Strategy. Participants highlighted a lack of inclusive communication practices and shared examples of barriers experienced in accessing care and support. The impact of stigma and discrimination, particularly across the intersections of age, disability and ethnicity was highlighted within [their report](#).

It is reported that around 14 million people in the UK have some form of speech impairment. Chest, Heart and Stroke Scotland report that approximately one in three stroke survivors develop aphasia, a communication disorder that severely impacts their ability to speak and understand language. There are over 128,000 stroke survivors living in Scotland.

A survey by STAMMA, a third sector organisation that promote the interests of people who stammer, noted that:

- using the telephone can be a source of anxiety for many who stammer
- 41% of respondents found it 'very difficult' using the phone to book a GP appointment
- 54% of people who stammer experienced mental distress around using the phone to make appointments
- people answering the survey reported that they had been hung up on, misunderstood, rushed, laughed at, or simply not given enough time to explain their needs. This led some to delay making appointments or even avoid them altogether, which has impacted their health.

There are now an estimated 945,000 people in Scotland who are deaf or have hearing loss and, with an ageing population, this number is expected to increase. It is reported that:

- 80% of people over the age of 70 will have hearing loss
- 117,300 people are able to use British Sign Language in Scotland
- inaccessible communication methods such as phone calls and the lack of alternatives such as email, text, or video relay can be challenging for people with hearing loss
- there is a lack of health information and resources available in British Sign Language and other accessible formats.

Deafblind Scotland estimates that 34,000 people in Scotland are deafblind. This means that an individual's vision and hearing are so impaired that one cannot compensate for the other. This dual sensory loss can lead to significant inequalities in relation to accessing public services, including health services. This can have a negative impact on a person's physical and mental wellbeing.

The Patient Rights (Scotland) Act 2011 sets out the responsibility of the NHS to provide accessible information, including the requirement that communication about a patient's health and wellbeing is clear, accessible and understood. It notes that patients have the right to be given information about their care and treatment in a format or language that meets their needs.

## NHS 24 data

- Relay UK offers a relay service for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and speech-impaired people. It is provided nationally by BT. Relay UK were unable to provide data specific to NHS 24 but did note that they deal with around 350 to 400 contacts per month to 111 (this includes contacts to the NHS 111 online service provided in England).
- The analytics below show the number of contacts NHS 24 has received via Contact Scotland BSL each year since 2020

Year	Number of contacts
2024 (up to 30.09.24)	393
2023	368
2022	580
2021	573
2020	442

## Equality Outcome Three - activities

NHS 24 is committed to supporting people more likely to experience barriers and inequalities when seeking to access public services to have an improved experience. Though we have achieved improvements to access for disabled people over the last four-year period, we feel there is more to be done. A commitment to working with people experiencing a sensory loss or speech impairment, will support us to better understand the opportunities that may exist to enhance their experience of accessing our services.

### Activity 1:

Engage with organisations that work with people with a sensory loss or speech impairment to establish a set of measures to help track progress towards delivering improvements.

### Activity 2:

Develop and share awareness raising information for staff to help them better understand the experiences of people with a sensory loss or speech impairment.

### Activity 3:

Develop a Communications and Engagement Plan to help promote awareness of NHS 24's services.

### Activity 4:

Create opportunities for people with a sensory loss or speech impairment to share their views on the design, development, and improvement of NHS 24's services.

### Activity 5:

Promote the existing accessible routes into NHS 24's services for people with a sensory or speech impairment, such as Contact Scotland BSL, Relay UK, and webchat.

### Activity 6:

Take steps to consider how all NHS 24 communications can be produced in an accessible and inclusive manner.

### Activity 7:

Engage with organisations that represent the interests of people with dementia, learning disabilities, neurodivergence and people who have English as a second language to consider the intersectional impact that sensory or speech impairment may have on these groups, and establish what additional action might be required to support them.

## Measure

The success of this outcome will be measured through an improvement in the baseline data gathered in relation to awareness of, and access to NHS 24 services.

The following examples illustrate how we mainstream equality in our work in practice. While this is not an exhaustive list of examples of what we do, it provides information on a range of different areas of our activity.

## Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments (EDIAs)

The consideration of Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments (EDIAs) is one of the main ways in which we seek to ensure equality is mainstreamed across the organisation. The Stakeholder Engagement team support staff to carry out EDIAs. The EDIA screening form, full EDIA tool, and comprehensive guidance help staff assess the impact of their work against the needs of the general equality duty. As part of a recent review, we have formally included consideration of the experiences of the Armed Forces community in the process. Furthermore, following the incorporation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scots Law, all staff must now give due consideration to identifying whether children or young people (up to the age of 18) will be impacted by our work and considering the relevance of the rights set out within the UNCRC.

In addition, as a Corporate Parent we now consider the needs of young people who have experienced care arrangements, and young people up to the age of 26 who are transitioning out of these arrangements.

You can [see completed EDIAs on our website](#).

## Community engagement

### NHS 24 Annual Review

In November 2024, our Annual Review was held at the Golden Jubilee Conference Hotel and was chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care. Twenty-three members of the public and our stakeholders who attended the public session in person had the opportunity to ask questions on the day. A further 12 stakeholders viewed the public session remotely. Electronic note-takers and BSL interpreters provided communication support throughout the session.

### Equality and diversity calendar

Each year a range of awareness days, weeks and months celebrate equality and diversity themes. Content created by NHS 24 staff, volunteers and partners promotes these events internally and externally.

In 2023 and in the first half of 2024 we promoted 39 awareness events using a range of methods. Topics were selected to raise awareness of health inequalities experienced by different groups with protected characteristics.

We worked with key stakeholders including an organisation that promotes equality for people who are deafblind, NHS 24 volunteers and staff from the Public Protection team to create quality assured content to use internally (on digital notice boards, in staff newsletters, at information stands and on the intranet) and externally on [NHSinform.scot](https://www.nhs.uk/inform) and our social media channels.

Some examples of work undertaken:

- Care Day
- Carers Week
- Deaf Awareness Week
- Disability History Month
- LGBT History Month
- Neurodiversity Celebration Week
- Refugee Week
- Ramadan
- Volunteers' Week

# Volunteering at NHS 24 – Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum

## Overview

### NHS 24 Public Partnership Forum

Established in 2008, our Public Partnership Forum comprises of members of the public from across Scotland who volunteer their time to provide public input on the work delivered by NHS 24. People from across the different protected characteristic groups are represented on the Public Partnership Forum, aged from 26 to over 80.

### NHS 24 Youth Forum

The Youth Forum was established in 2018 in response to NHS 24's commitment to ensure that young people were given greater opportunities to get involved in the design, development, and improvement of its services. The Youth Forum seeks to engage with, and listen to, a diverse range of young people aged 16 to 26 from across Scotland.

Both the Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum meet formally four to five 5 times per year. Members are also offered involvement in projects throughout the year, which for 2023/24 included:

- involvement in various user research programmes of work for feedback
- sharing relevant NHS 24 news including Team Talk (NHS 24 staff bulletin)
- sharing NHS 24 recruitment opportunities including modern apprenticeship, call handler and call operator vacancies
- attending and contributing to NHS 24 Annual Review
- supporting NHS 24 Communications team, sharing experiences of observing Ramadan
- inviting guest speakers to meetings including NHS 24 colleagues from User Research, Organisation development, leadership and learning; and the Trauma Informed Lead Nurse
- members attending as guest speakers and contributing to agenda
- undertaking QI fundamentals learning programme
- providing feedback on draft EDIA for NHS 24's Digital Transformation Programme
- visiting contact centres and having the opportunity to meet key frontline staff
- contributing to the Equality Outcome development process.

We have successfully supported two members of our Youth Forum to be recruited into NHS 24 posts.

Youth Forum and Public Partnership Forum members offer NHS 24 the opportunity to gather public views on our work; support wider community engagement; and help NHS 24 to develop our services to meet public needs.

#### The aims of both forums are to:

- improve diversity and accessibility
- break down barriers and reduce health inequalities
- ensure we have a good representation of people when developing and improving NHS 24 services, policies, and functions.

We are committed to involving people from different backgrounds and with different experiences in the design, development, and improvement of our services. We know that giving people the opportunity to get involved will help us to deliver better services that meet the needs of the diverse Scottish population.

We endeavour to take on board our forum members' feedback, ensuring their voice is heard and asking what matters to them.

### Volunteers with both forums:

- have regular opportunities to share their views on our work
- are able to influence our strategic thinking
- help us to focus on what matters most to people
- help share information about NHS 24 services within local communities
- are part of a team dedicated to improvement.

### Engagement

Engagement to recruit new members took place with over 150 key stakeholders who engage with people with protected characteristics in Autumn 2023.

The aim of the stakeholder engagement was to recruit new members to both forums, with a particular focus on disabled people and minority ethnic people. Both forums were promoted in various ways including social media, face to face student engagement, Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) newsletters, volunteering websites (which helped to support awareness raising and networking).

A large percentage of members recently recruited identify as minority ethnic, people with a disability, define themselves as belonging to a protective characteristic group, require additional support, identify as care experienced.

### Investing in Volunteers (IiV) – reaccreditation

Investing in Volunteers (IiV) is the UK quality standard for all organisations that involve volunteers in their work. In Scotland, IiV is delivered by Volunteer Scotland. IiV aims to improve the quality of the volunteering experience and aims to help organisations acknowledge the contribution made by volunteers.

In 2023 we commenced work around our Investing in Volunteers reaccreditation. IiV is a development tool, with a quality framework that supports organisations to achieve best practice in volunteer involvement and management. The process of accreditation supports organisations to review and improve volunteer programmes. It is also an opportunity to highlight the effectiveness of an organisation's work with volunteers.

The accreditation is a six-step process which includes: workshops for staff; a session for volunteers; establishing a working group; carrying out a self-assessment and interviews; and submitting a report for quality assurance and verification. Volunteer Scotland's lead assessor reviewed our report to ensure we met all the quality assurance requirements. The final stage of the process was completed in January 2024. We have been awarded reaccreditation which will run for three years and require renewal in 2027.

## Glasgow Volunteering Fair

In September 2023, Stakeholder Engagement Team staff attended an event hosted by Volunteer Glasgow.

The event was aimed at people who are traditionally under-represented in volunteering, and/or who may experience barriers to accessing volunteering. This gave us the opportunity to promote NHS 24's volunteering opportunities with a diverse audience and supported the recruitment drive for our Public Partnership and Youth forums.

The event was well attended, and we engaged with approximately 50 students taking the ESOL course at the local Glasgow colleges as well as refugees and asylum seekers.

This was also an opportunity to: improve attendees' knowledge of how to access NHS services; raise awareness of our translated resources; talk about Language Line; promote webchat.

## Volunteers' Week – 3 to 9 June 2024

Volunteers' Week was a great opportunity to reflect on the amazing work of our Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum. We really value the contribution of our Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum members. Their involvement helps us keep a focus on what matters most to the people who use our services. The 2024 [Volunteers' Week celebrated its 40th anniversary](#).

We worked with our Communications Team colleagues to celebrate and showcase our volunteers, internally and externally, on our social media platforms. Both the Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum meetings took place during Volunteers' Week. This gave us an opportunity to thank our volunteers, recognise their efforts and highlight how important their contributions are to NHS 24.

### Activities undertaken

#### Thanking our volunteers

- Engagement with our volunteers to thank them for their ongoing commitment and dedication.
- In person thanks at the Youth Forum and Public Partnership Forum meetings in June 2024.
- Various posts to thank our volunteers on social media including Instagram, generating 51 likes.
- Our Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum provided quotes highlighting what volunteering with NHS 24 means to them and the impact they can have at NHS 24. This was shared on Facebook and generated 25 likes and 7 shares.
- Internally, we celebrated the great work that our staff undertake, volunteering in the local community with an article on the intranet.
- Raising awareness of our volunteering opportunities on social media, with an X (Twitter) post promoting the Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum.

### Promoting NHS 24 volunteer opportunities

The X post on how to become a volunteer with our Youth Forum included a [link to the BSL video about the NHS 24 Youth Forum](#) and achieved 611 views.

Volunteers' Week was an opportunity to thank all our dedicated volunteers, demonstrating how our volunteers can have their voice heard and make a difference in the design, development and improvement of our services whilst also celebrating the achievement of the Investing in Volunteers reaccreditation. We were able to showcase our NHS 24 volunteers both internally and externally and raise awareness of how NHS 24 values our volunteers and help us to focus on what matters most to people.

## Communities of place

NHS 24 recognises the value and importance that co-ordinated communications and engagement activity offers, not only to support the successful delivery of our services and our strategic ambitions as part of the wider NHS in Scotland, but also in supporting vulnerable communities at risk of health inequalities. For these communities there is a risk of exacerbating health inequalities through a lack of knowledge and understanding of the full range of NHS 24 services, and how and when to access them.

We have been progressing work across the organisation to communicate and engage with identified key partners and targeted communities which will:

- support better patient pathways through the development and dissemination of comprehensive information, in a range of accessible formats, on the full range of NHS 24 services
- build an understanding across communities of the valuable role NHS 24 services provide in supporting health, care, and wellbeing create strong partner relationships by empowering key organisations to raise awareness of the full range of services we deliver, and how and when to access them.

Through our ongoing engagement and the insights gathered there in, a need to develop alternative formats of the [‘Helping you find the right care’](#) leaflet was identified. Additional funding was requested and received, and all NHS 24 service leaflets ([‘Helping you find the right care’](#); [‘Accessing the right mental health care from NHS 24’](#); and [‘Caring for someone’](#)) are available in:

- British Sign Language
- Easy read
- Large print
- Arabic
- Hindi
- Kurdish Sorani
- Polish
- Punjabi
- Romanian
- Simplified Chinese (Mandarin)
- Slovak
- Spanish
- Ukrainian
- Urdu

We have focused our community engagement in the five geographic areas in Scotland that are known to experience socio We focused our community engagement in five geographic areas in Scotland that experience socio economic deprivation (Glasgow City, Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire, North Ayrshire, and Dundee City) and also have a significant number of calls to our 111 service that result in a self-care outcome.

## Christmas card competition

In 2024, we were delighted to give all Primary 5 to 7 pupils at schools near our Cardonald office the opportunity to take part in our Christmas card competition. This year’s theme was ‘I’m dreaming of a Scottish Christmas’ and pupils were asked to draw an NHS worker outside their favourite place in Scotland at Christmas time. We received excellent entries, and the winning design was submitted by a pupil from Cardonald Primary. NHS 24 staff visited the school and gave the competition winner and runner up their prize and certificate.

Information about NHS 24 services was provided to all the primary schools who took part in the competition. This helped raise awareness of our Cardonald Contact Centre and of the services we provide.

## Winter campaign engagement 2023

Winter is a very busy period for all NHS services, including NHS 24.

To support services and enable people to get the help they need quickly and easily, NHS 24's 'Healthy Know How' campaign encourages everyone to be prepared for common winter ailments ahead of the festive season. The campaign reminds people who rely on repeat prescriptions to check they have enough to last over the holidays and to reorder in plenty of time. People are also reminded that GP opening times will be affected by the festive holidays and to make sure they have cold and flu remedies in, just in case.

The messages are important for everyone in Scotland but especially for people who may be particularly vulnerable to winter illnesses, including those with existing medical conditions, the elderly, and parents with young children.

The Stakeholder Engagement team is responsible for the day-to-day management of community engagement to help promote a better understanding and awareness of NHS 24's services, equalities, and human rights. This is why they support this yearly campaign with face-to-face information events. The team work closely with partners across Scotland reaching out to diverse communities and targeting groups who do not currently access NHS 24 services, or groups who engage with services inappropriately.

A review of our call data by the Planning and Performance team shows that NHS 24 receives almost double the number of calls to the 111 service from people living in areas identified by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) as the most deprived in Scotland. A significant number of these calls end in a self-care outcome.

Digital exclusion is inextricably linked to wider inequalities in society and is more likely to be faced by those on low incomes, people over 65 and disabled people.

We determined that an improved awareness of the NHS 24 winter campaign messages amongst these communities might help to appropriately direct people to self-care options and subsequently help to alleviate pressure on the 111 service.

The national digital campaign resources are a useful promotional tool, but they are not accessible by all. For many people, a leaflet or wallet card will act as a useful reminder of the information that has been shared with them as part of a conversation at any event, or information stand.

In-person information events allow people to ask questions about services and take away physical resources. This is to help people who are not digitally enabled, and may already face inequalities, access health information and services. Ultimately this engagement helps support people to access the help most suited to their needs rather than contacting NHS 24's 111 service or other NHS services.

To enhance the impact of face-to-face engagement, we worked with NHS Education for Scotland Principal Lead (Pharmacy Foundation Training Year) to invite trainee pharmacists to support our information stands. Fourteen trainee pharmacists volunteered for this, and seven were available to attend information stands alongside staff from the Stakeholder Engagement team.

## Digi Dundee event – March 2024

In the 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, Dundee City had one of the highest levels of deprivation in Scotland. NHS 24 staff attended an event in March 2024 which was held to support people who felt daunted by the digital world. The aim of the event was to raise awareness of our digital tools including the NHS 24 app and self-help guides which have been developed to empower people to self-care and to support their wellbeing.

We showcased our resources with members of the public, support workers and other exhibitors. We also gathered insights relevant to the work undertaken as part of the NHS inform review.

## Fife Health Literacy event

In 2023, we were invited to participate in an event focussing on health literacy with Fife Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). Part of the event looked at signposting people to quality-assured information and we delivered a presentation on NHS 24 services, including NHS inform, the steps we take to support health literacy in our services, and share campaign information such as [‘It’s OK to Ask’](#) and [‘Right care right place’](#).

The session was attended by professionals from across Fife HSCP, Welfare Support, Community Learning and Development, and voluntary organisations. The aim of this engagement was to improve awareness of NHS 24 services, of our accessibility options, to increase signposting by professionals, and ultimately to help people who already experience inequalities access our health and information services.

The information session was very successful and led to further invitations to present to Community Link Workers and Information services in Fife; share resources; and provide opportunities for feedback. The contacts made have subsequently engaged in further awareness session, supporting NHS 24 in our 24 Strategic Ambition of preventative healthcare.

## Community Link Worker engagement

The Community Link Worker programme aims to bridge the gap between General Practices and communities. As well as working directly with patients, link workers keep practice staff up to date with what’s going on in the community. This helps practice staff signpost patients to relevant resources and support. Link workers also work with organisations in the local community to develop and promote available services and support and help identify gaps in provision.

Engagement took place with Community Link Workers nationally to build effective relationships for information exchange and collaborative working where appropriate. The aim of this engagement activity was to help tackle health inequalities and improve awareness of care navigation resources and services. This helps to support people and organisations that work with people in the lower SIMD areas who face many inequalities.

### The engagement included:

- delivering presentations to Community Link Workers team meetings both in-person and via Teams
- sharing NHS 24 resources both digital and hard copies for Community Link Workers to promote our services
- exhibiting at Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) Scottish Community Link Worker Network Annual Conference 2024
- providing VHS with a blog to share with their networks.
- delivering a presentation to VHS Community Link Workers’ Knowledge Exchange network
- attending the Links Worker Programme: 10 Year Celebration - Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland event
- sharing the 2024 winter campaign messages.

## What Matters to You Day (WMTY) – 2023 and 2024

In 2023, WMTY Day took place on 6 June. The aim of WMTY day is to support meaningful conversations with people about what matters to them within the larger context of their life. It helps to ensure that care is person-centred and is in line with NHS 24 values. In 2023, we focussed on our equality outcome of understanding disabled people's awareness of, and access to, NHS 24 services and what barriers they might experience.

We engaged disability-led community groups and asked the question 'What matters to you?' We spoke to about 190 people.

Feedback from WMTY discussions at events has helped us gain a better understanding of what is important to people when accessing NHS 24 services. There were strong themes around the importance of being treated with care, compassion and respect, and a desire for staff to have more knowledge and experience of individual circumstances.

In 2024, we ran a WMTY Day social media campaign, inviting people to share their views on NHS inform, as part of our review of the service.

## Furthering equality with a focus on mental health

### Mental health community of interest

#### Overview

The Mental Health Community of Interest was established in 2022 and was originally intended to provide a forum for re-establishing and strengthening engagement between Breathing Space partners and mental health helplines stakeholders. Forums for both had existed prior to COVID-19.

An initial scoping exercise demonstrated a need and continued desire to meet as a group, extending membership to a broader range of stakeholders, and developing the format into a community of interest.

The group currently meet on a biannual basis with an NHS 24 update and at least two spotlight sessions from members or external speakers invited to the group. A self-evaluation mechanism built into the group meetings occurs at least once every 18 months.

#### Purpose

NHS 24 Mental Health Community of Interest Group exists to provide a forum to encourage knowledge sharing amongst its members. It supports social learning and collaboration. It enables respective organisational development and research and best practice, along with personal and professional development.

NHS 24 provides an administrative role in facilitating meetings on behalf of the group, enabling an opportunity for partners to engage with NHS 24 and broader mental health interest stakeholders.

#### Membership

Membership of the Mental Health Community of Interest includes staff from NHS 24, Third sector organisations, statutory bodies, public services, and private business, as well as those with lived and living experience.

The group provides input into communications and engagement frameworks in the following ways:

- ensure effective advice and support to all members
- advise on national policy and practice, based on current data from NHS 24 and Scottish Government
- explore pathways to NHS and third sector resources in the community
- present to the group on current awareness raising activities to promote positive mental health and wellbeing
- share innovative approaches to providing support to people in distress.

Engagement commenced with stakeholders and NHS 24 staff in July 2022. The first meeting took place in February 2023 and the group have met twice a year since then. To date there have been various spotlight sessions from members including Macmillan Cancer Support, Scottish Government (Time, Space, and Compassion), Bipolar Scotland, Cruse Scotland, Hourglass, and Penumbra Self Harm Network.

NHS 24 staff have provided an update on various topics including Breathing Space 20th Anniversary, Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Plan 2023/25 – 10 Priorities and NHS inform strategic review.

## Mind to Mind and Surviving Suicidal Thoughts

Phase 2 of [Mind to Mind](#) and [Surviving Suicidal Thoughts](#) digital programmes of work focused on engagement with a range of stakeholders across Scotland. This was to raise awareness of resources and to recruit volunteers for additional video or audio content.

To improve diversity within the digital resources, engagement focussed on organisations that support people with specific protected characteristics, for example men, minority ethnic, LGBT+, and disabled people.

The Mind to Mind digital resource offering has been expanded and now includes content on social isolation and loneliness as well as money worries. We have worked with diverse communities to create audio and video clips.

## Breathing Space

Breathing Space is a free, confidential, phone and webchat service for anyone in Scotland aged 16 or over experiencing low mood, depression, or experiencing distress in their lives. Breathing Space was launched in 2002 to address serious concerns about the mental wellbeing of people in Scotland. The service became a national helpline with NHS 24 in November 2004. The service is operationally managed by NHS 24 and delivered from NHS 24 contact centres in Hillington and South Queensferry.

The service currently receives around 14,000 calls a month as well as providing a webchat service. At present the strapline of the service is 'You Matter, We Care'. This was chosen based on feedback from callers struggling with loneliness and feelings of isolation, who often believe their life has little value. Loneliness and social isolation are major public health issues that can significantly impact physical and mental wellbeing. In Scotland, kindness is recognised as a key element in tackling these issues and ensuring communities are more connected and cohesive. The ability of the Breathing Space staff to offer time, grant space and provide compassion reflects key elements which the service demonstrates daily to all who contact and need support during a difficult time.

## Pregnant mothers and those on maternity leave

Breathing Space, in partnership with a voluntary organisation committed to promoting the welfare of families and Peri-natal Mental Health team co-hosted a webinar event for Maternal Mental Health Awareness Week called, 'Together in a Changing World.' This event aimed to highlight the mental health support available to new parents during the perinatal period.

To mark Baby Loss Awareness Week, the partnership also hosted a webinar that highlighted the support available for women and families experiencing the bereavement of a child. This webinar was in collaboration with the organisation Held in Our Hearts. This organisation provides support to families following the death of a baby through specialised bereavement services.

Both webinar events were well attended with a wide range of professionals from across the Highland region, all of whom received links for follow up resources detailing the range of services available.

## Quote from participant,



**Overall, the webinar was very informative. All guest speakers shared relevant information. Helpful to know all the support that Breathing Space can offer, was not fully aware prior to the webinar.**



## Working with our minority ethnic communities

Breathing Space has been supporting the work of an organisation that works in partnership with carers, voluntary organisations, and statutory bodies to challenge and dismantle barriers that deny minority ethnic groups access to health, social work, and other care services in Scotland.

This organisation has also hosted community-based health information events for the Gypsy/Traveller community. These events have included creative art projects and the development and production of a musical theatre performance to help disseminate important health information and wellbeing messages to this community. Breathing Space have provided promotional material for each event and have attended events, actively engaging in conversation about mental health, exploring ways in which this community can protect and preserve their wellbeing whilst signposting to the Breathing Space phone line and webchat service.

Breathing Space have also delivered 'Take some Breathing Space' information sessions to sub-groups within their minority ethnic community for example, women, as well as to staff working across a diverse range of communities across the country.

## Working with men

Breathing Space have developed partnerships with Scottish Fire and Rescue and Scotland's Railways, mainly Scotrail, targeting a predominately male staff group. Workplace roadshows across the country have provided an opportunity for men to talk about mental health whilst finding out about what supports are available to them if/when they need support for their wellbeing. Key messages about the Breathing Space phone line and webchat service have been shared widely, with additional detail being included within newsletters and bulletins.

The 'Take some Breathing Space' information session has been delivered to a range of staff who are in signposting roles, including, Mental Health First Aiders and Wellbeing Champions. The sessions aim to increase the knowledge and understanding of the Breathing Space service, to help reduce the barriers to seeking help. These sessions build capacity to signpost appropriately and confidently to mental health support available at NHS 24.

## Furthering equality with a focus on race

### Race equality content on our staff intranet

We recently completed a refresh of the race equality pages on our staff intranet. With support from our partners, we have updated the pages to include information on our duties under the Equality Act 2010, our commitment as an organisation to inclusion and anti-racism, details of our Equality Outcome on recruiting ethnic minority staff and information on support available to staff who experienced or witnessed racism. We have also included links to relevant pieces of work undertaken by NHS 24, for example how we raised awareness of Ramadan, Gypsy Roma Traveller History Month and Black History Month.

### Anti-racism action plan

Scottish Government has asked all health boards, including NHS 24, to develop an anti-racism action plan, highlighting racism as a significant public health challenge and a key cause of health inequalities. This follows a statement from the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care emphasising the need to address these issues.

Our anti-racism action plan will be published in April 2025.

## Gypsy/Travellers engagement

NHS 24 works closely with Gypsy/Traveller communities as part of our ongoing engagement programme. We also attend the Scottish NHS & HSCP Gypsy/Traveller Forum and have re-established community engagement activities with Gypsy/Traveller community groups. Our work with the Gypsy/Traveller community demonstrates our support in line with the [Scottish Government's Gypsy / Traveller Action Plan](#) and [Race Equality Framework for Scotland](#).

The Scottish Government's Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan includes an action to 'Tackle racism and discrimination' by promoting Gypsy/Traveller history and culture. As part of this, we have attended the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) History Month 2023 celebration at Dynamic Earth to meet community members.

We have promoted Gypsy/Traveller culture internally by highlighting e-learning resources and reports created by our partners to share best practice.

In 2024, we re-established contact with four organisations involved in supporting Gypsy/Travellers and the Roma community to offer meetings, attendance at events, sharing information around NHS 24 services and care navigation. To date, this engagement has included:

- attendance at Women's Day events
- attended stakeholder staff team meetings, listening to experiences of using NHS services and discussing how we can best raise awareness of NHS 24 resources and general care navigation
- attendance at the Scottish Government's celebrations of Gypsy Roma Traveller history month in 2023 and 2024
- visits to community groups for Gypsy/Traveller carers, to hear about experiences of accessing healthcare
- attendance at health rallies
- involvement in two working groups in Perth & Kinross, and NHS Tayside.

## Furthering equality with a focus on disability

### Accessible information and translated resources

NHS 24 strives to ensure that all our information is accessible to everyone. All the documents and information published on our websites comply with the [Accessible Regulations 2018](#).

Lower socio-economic circumstances are known to impact people's health and can be responsible for creating health inequalities. In September and October 2022, we engaged professionals and organisations who support community groups and individuals in deprived areas (particularly Glasgow City and Dundee). This was to gather insights and suggestions on how to provide inclusive accessible information to help people navigate NHS services.

As a result of this work, new resources about NHS 24 services launched in 2023: a leaflet and a wallet card. These resources were only available printed and in English. In 2024 these resources were reviewed, another two service leaflets were developed (about mental health services, and about services for carers). To improve accessibility to this information, the leaflets are available online in alternative formats (English, audio, easy read, large print and translated in British Sign Language and 11 languages). Organisations can request hard copies of the resources (free of charge) using an online order form.

Hard copies of the new and revised service information leaflets and wallet cards became available on 1 April 2024. The leaflets were published on NHS 24 website in May 2024. In the first 4 months of 2024, we distributed around 60% of all resources. As we plan further promotional activities, we will ensure that we engage key stakeholders not previously contacted.

We will continue to consider requests for additional alternative formats, including translations.

## Furthering equality with a focus on gender reassignment, sex, sexual orientation

### Breathing Space

Our Breathing Space service carried out an Equality and Diversity Impact Assessment. In response to this and to support the progression of their recommendations, staff from Healthcare Improvement Scotland created and delivered a ninety-minute session which covered scene setting (historical overview) and language. There was also an opportunity for attendees to share knowledge and appropriate signposting.

This was primarily to support knowledge building around LGBTQI+ communities and mental health so Breathing Space advisors had a better understanding of key issues and concerns this community may have.

Sexual orientation can have a significant impact on people's mental health which is further exacerbated by people's concerns that staff have limited understanding of issues they can face.

## Pride Badge Pledge

The NHS Scotland Pride Badge Pledge promotes inclusion for LGBTQI+ people and makes a statement that there is no place for discrimination in NHS Scotland.

NHS Scotland strives for everyone to receive respect and good access to healthcare but members of the LGBTQI+ community still face challenges in relation to accessing healthcare and negative attitudes they may face. That's why the 'Pride Pledge' was created - staff can sign the pledge to show they will promote a message of inclusion, speak up, and challenge intolerance.

The badges are for everyone, to signify that staff have signed up to the Pledge and are aware of the issues facing LGBTQI+. [The short NHS Scotland Pride Badge video](#) explains what staff are signing up to.

Promotion of the pledge and badge commenced in 2021 and is ongoing. Additional work commenced in August 2023 with our volunteers within our Public Partnership Forum and Youth Forum members where presentations and discussions took place on the aim of the badge where they were offered the opportunity to sign up to the pledge.

To date 224 members of staff and volunteers have requested a badge.

## LGBTQ+ Pride events

In 2024, colleagues from our Cardonald contact centre promoted LGBTQ+ Pride and attended the Pride celebrations in Glasgow on the 20 and 21 July. Cardonald staff held various events to celebrate Pride including hosting a raffle with all proceeds going to [LGBT Youth Scotland](#) who work to help educate and improve the lives of young LGBTQ+ people in Scotland. Furthermore, our wellbeing wall was dedicated to Pride throughout July 2024, with information on how staff can access resources and support (links and QR codes where provided). In addition, a Pride display in our Dundee contact centre was setup to share key messages from the campaign. Finally, a range of articles were published in our staff newsletter (Team Talk) and on our staff intranet.

## Transgender Care Knowledge and Skills Framework

NHS 24 worked in partnership with NHS Education for Scotland. Trans people continue to face widespread discrimination in healthcare settings. It is noted in research that one in seven LGBT people (14 per cent) will avoid seeking healthcare for fear of discrimination from staff. Almost one in four LGBT people (23%) have witnessed discriminatory or negative remarks against LGBT people by healthcare staff.

The Transgender Care Knowledge and Skills Framework was developed to support the delivery of healthcare to adult trans and non-binary people across all settings in NHS Scotland and is applicable to all staff. It sets out what NHS staff need to know about how to care for trans and non-binary people; from receptionists, nurses and GPs in community settings to staff working in specialist gender identity clinics.

The Framework was developed with the support of the broad development group, representing staff across all settings and disciplines within NHS Scotland, including experts by experience, and we engaged widely with appropriate organisations including medical colleges.

NHS Education for Scotland continues to support the implementation of the Framework by scoping educational needs and opportunities and identifying and developing related resources.

## International Women's Day 2024

International Women's Day is an opportunity to celebrate the NHS 24 workforce, which is made up of 77% women. The theme for 2024 was inspiring inclusion, highlighting the importance of our commitment to tackling inequality and supporting women's rights, equality, and health and wellbeing.

Internally, we celebrated International Women's Day through inviting women within the organisation to share some thoughts about their role, their views on equity for women, and what helps them succeed at work. We published the quotes received on our intranet, [International Women's Day 2024](#).

We also attended a Gypsy/Traveller community event with people of all ages joining in. The organisation hosting this event took this opportunity to share work their Women's Group have undertaken, asking members about women that inspire them. They also launched a series of postcards raising awareness of gender-based violence. These activities support NHS 24 to work towards the Scottish Government Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan commitment to supporting Gypsy/Traveller communities by continuing to work closely with partner organisations and community members directly.

We celebrated on social media, highlighting both International Women's Day and our relationship with this organisation.

## Equal Pay

To calculate the pay gap, we first determined the basic hourly rate of pay for each employee. We then used the following formula, recommended by Close the Gap, to calculate the percentage difference.

$$\frac{A-B}{A} \times 100$$

A = mean hourly rate of pay of male employees  
B = mean hourly rate of pay of female employees

### Annual equal pay gap comparison by sex

	Pay gap in favour of men
2023/24	2.49%
2022/23	2.52%
2021/22	3.55%
2020/21	5.14%

There has been a slight decrease in the pay gap between men and women.

### Annual equal pay gap comparison by disability

	Pay gap in favour of disabled staff
2023/24	2.45%
2022/23	6.88%
2021/22	7.27%
2020/21	6.37%

The pay gap between disabled and non-disabled people continues to be in favour of those staff who identify as disabled.

### Annual equal pay gap comparison by race

	Race pay gap in favour of any White – British ethnic group
2023/24	12.82%
2022/23	9.59%
2021/22	1.45%
2020/21	7.01%

As the number of minority ethnic staff employed by NHS 24 has significantly increased, so too has our pay gap in favour of staff who identify as being White – British. This is primarily due to the high concentration of minority ethnic staff employed at pay bands 5 and below, with a lower representation of minority ethnic staff at senior pay bands. NHS 24 has committed to addressing this gap as part of an Equality Outcome and as part of our Anti-Racism Action Plan.

Additional equal pay information and insights, including NHS 24's Equal Pay Statement, is published in our Workforce Equality Monitoring Report 2025.



## Contact NHS 24

If you would like us to consider producing this report in a different format please contact us with details of your request. You can phone us on **0800 22 44 88**, or call us via Relay UK or Contact Scotland BSL. If you prefer, you can also email us your request at [NHS24.engagementteam@nhs24.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:NHS24.engagementteam@nhs24.scot.nhs.uk)

If you wish further information on the contents of this report, please email us using the email address above.