

Response from the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh to Scottish Labour's Policy Forum Stage 2 Consultation Paper on Preventative Health Care.

1. How do we achieve a shift towards preventative approaches when acute needs remain so high?

The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (“the College”) recognises how challenging it will be for health spending and the policy focus to move towards a preventative approach, alongside a broader cultural change which is equally essential, when acute care needs remain so high and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Indeed, Public Health Scotland has recently predicted that the number of unplanned acute inpatient hospital admissions in Scotland is projected to increase by 11.8% by 2034ⁱ. We understand that both aspects require support and investment and an appropriate balance is essential.

We consider that the Scottish Government, working with partners in local government, health charities, health experts and medical organisations, including the Medical Royal Colleges, should take a lead in speaking out consistently and on a frequent basis on the importance of prevention and the potential health benefits to individuals, the wider population and the health service. The argument must be made that we cannot afford not to invest in prevention, either from a health or financial perspective and that it is vital to stop people from developing conditions which are preventable rather than just managing and treating these conditions.

2. How can a shift to prevention be institutionalised within the NHS and government?

There must be consistent support for the prevention agenda across all parts of the NHS, public sector and government, involving all portfolios including education and transport so that the preventative approach is not just seen as a ‘health’ issue. We would also welcome efforts to establish the broadest possible cross-party consensus within Scotland on this agenda.

Consideration should be given to ring-fenced funding, over multi-year periods, for prevention investment to allow for certainty and longer-term planning.

Careful workforce planning will be required to ensure there are enough staff with the appropriate training to support the delivery of preventative policies and that all staff working in the NHS are confident talking to patients about preventative actions.

The Scottish Government’s recently published Population Health Frameworkⁱⁱ is a useful document and set of aims. We would also wish to highlight the 2024 report NCD Prevention: A Commercial Determinants of Health Approachⁱⁱⁱ from the NCD Alliance Scotland- of which we are a member- as a useful and comprehensive basis for some specific policy actions in most key areas.

3. Given it would take years, perhaps decades, to see the benefits of a shift to prevention, how can the public be taken on that journey when they are faced with long waiting lists, corridor care etc in the here and now?

Clear and consistent public communication from government and politicians, reinforced by clinicians, academics and third sector partners will be essential. Messaging must be realistic in recognising the fact that results will only become visible in the medium to long term and that patience will be required.

Careful monitoring of progress and the regular publication of results in relation to preventative outcomes may help encourage public support for this agenda – particularly as progress is (hopefully) made.

4. How do we meaningfully involve people with lived experience in identifying solutions to some of these problems?

We consider that involving people with lived experience is important and would encourage close cooperation with charities and other third sector partners, including smaller organisations working at grassroots level. There are many examples of people with lived experience achieving success in relation to preventative approaches and delivering meaningful projects in their communities and we hope that these positive cases can be promoted widely.

ⁱ [Projecting future demand for health and care services in Scotland \(2024-2034\) - Long term service demand projections in Scotland - Publications - Public Health Scotland](https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-population-health-framework/)

ⁱⁱ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-population-health-framework/>

ⁱⁱⁱ NCD Prevention: A Commercial Determinants of Health Approach: <https://www.bhf.org.uk/-/media/files/what-we-do/in-your-area-scotland-pages/ncd/ncd-prevention-a-commercial-determinants-of-health-approach-2024-report.pdf>