

Women's Health Plan

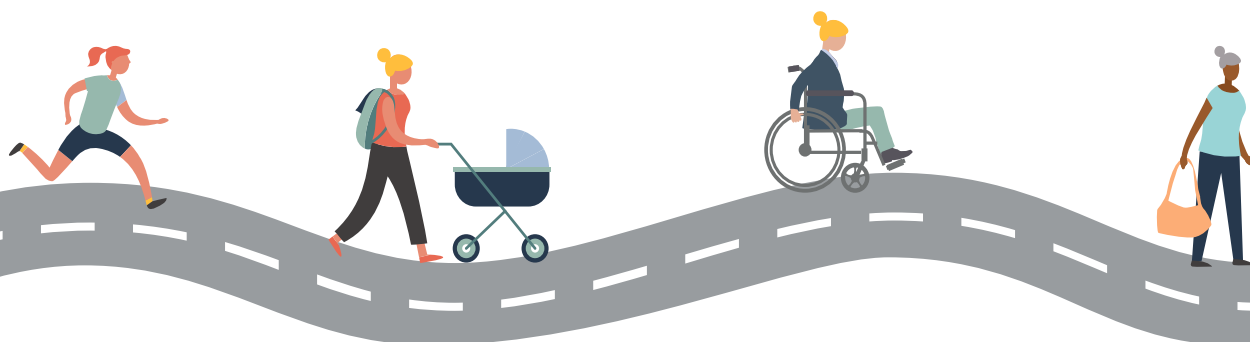
A Report on Progress





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Foreword by the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport



Maree Todd, MSP
Minister for Public
Health, Women's
Health and Sport

The Women's Health Plan was published in August 2021. Its aim is to improve health outcomes and health services for all women and girls in Scotland.

The need for a women's health plan is clear. Women face particular health inequalities, and in some cases actual disadvantage, because they are women. Women and girls experience health needs and risks across their life course, which are not the same as men. This can relate to their reproductive health but also extends far beyond, for example, to conditions such as heart disease.

Many women continue to be treated within the same framework as men, rather than acknowledging that they have their own, sex-specific differences and health needs. Until the time comes when women's health is simply 'health', specific policy and focus on women's health is essential.

The Women's Health Plan is the beginning of this journey.

I am delighted to present the progress that has been made to date. I would like to give my thanks to all those who have worked so hard to make this happen across the NHS, public and third sectors in Scotland. Significant work has included:

- the launch of the Women's Health Platform on NHS Inform, which includes new resources on menopause and menstrual health.
- relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education in the Scottish curriculum includes learning about menstrual health, including menopause and endometriosis.
- that there is now a specialist menopause service in every mainland health board and a 'buddy' support system in place for the Island health boards.
- the launch of a £250,000 research call, jointly funded by the Scottish Government with Wellbeing of Women, which aims to develop improvements in treatment and management options for endometriosis.
- all community pharmacies in Scotland are now able to provide access to a three-month supply of bridging contraception (a short-term supply of contraception which bridges the gap between emergency and longer-term contraception) following a consultation with a pharmacist to determine suitability.



I would like to extend my particular gratitude to the women who continue to inform this vital work, and who bring their voices and views to us. Women's voices included the [First Minister talking to Kirsty Wark about her own experience of menopause](#) at Menopause Café's Flush Fest, illustrating the impact menopause can have on all women.



Women's Health at the Centre
The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland

Scotland's First Women's Health and Wellbeing Plan
Hearing the Voices of Women in Scotland
Report from our online survey
October 2020

Scotland's First Women's Health Plan
How Scotland's women want to plan future services

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Women's voices will continue to be at the heart of all that we do, and through our partnership with the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) we will work to amplify all those who are seldom heard but to whom we must listen if we are to fully achieve the aspirations of the Women's Health Plan.

Whilst good progress is being made to improve women's health, we know we still have much more to do, and we won't shy away from that.

I am delighted to welcome Professor Anna Glasier as our Women's Health Champion and I look forward to working with her in the months ahead.

As we move forward through Year Two, the Plan sets a renewed focus into the medium and long term. I hope that in continuing to work together, we can truly say that in Scotland women and girls enjoy the best possible health, throughout their lives.

Introduction

Ambition: A Scotland where health outcomes are equitable across the population so that all women and girls enjoy the best possible health throughout their lives.



The Women's Health Plan aims to improve health outcomes and health services for all women and girls in Scotland. It sets out how the Scottish Government intends to reduce inequalities in health outcomes affecting women over a three year period from 2021 – 2024, and beyond. Its sixty-six actions focus on **six priority areas** and work toward the Scottish Government's ambition that all women enjoy the best possible health, throughout their lives. The **six priority areas** are **menopause, menstrual health, endometriosis, abortion and contraception, post natal contraception and heart health**.

The Plan, informed by women, focuses on creating the conditions that can change culture, support women's health and tackle the inequalities that have affected women's health for generations.

Different stages in a woman's life present both health opportunities and challenges. Many aspects will be present in more than one life stage. That is why the Women's Health Plan takes a life-course approach so that the health needs of women are responded to holistically, and opportunities to promote and protect health and wellbeing are taken, throughout all stages of life.

We know that multiple social, structural and individual factors lead to health inequalities and that every individual has different needs and experiences.

The Women's Health Plan takes an intersectional approach which recognises that many women and girls in Scotland will face multiple (and often overlapping) barriers to accessing good healthcare.

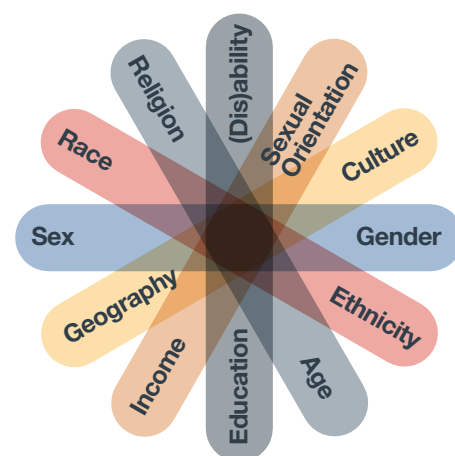
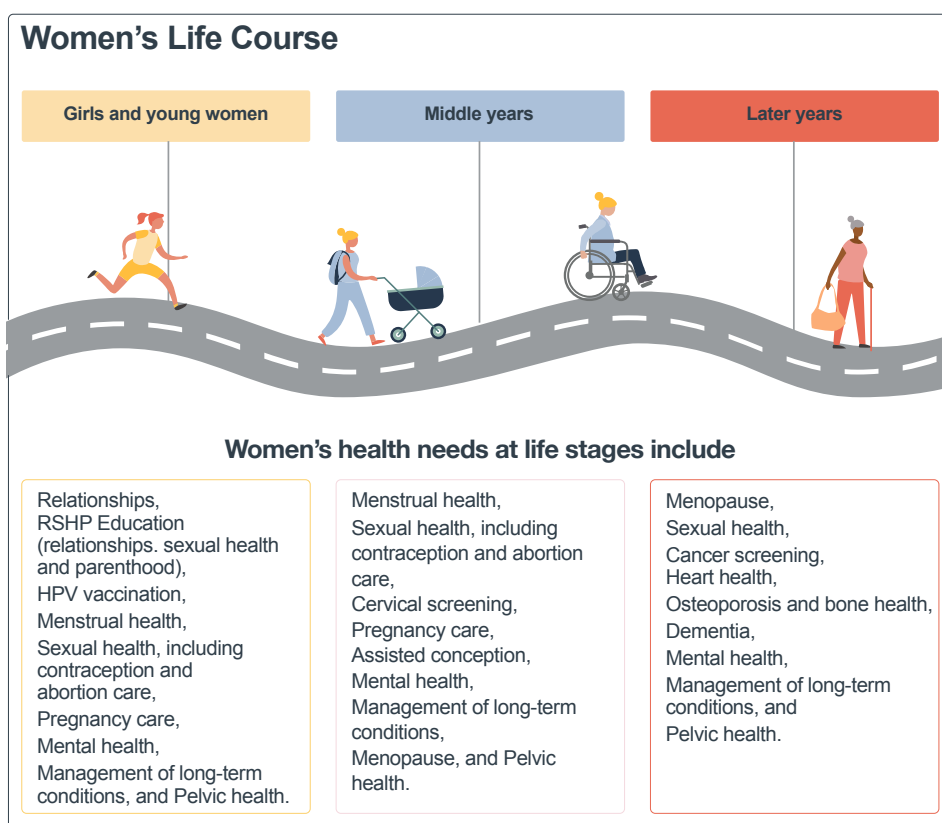
Intersectionality acknowledges that there are many different factors that make up people's identities, for example their sex, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, disability, religion and more.

The Plan references women/woman throughout, but it is important to highlight – as it is in the Plan – that it is not only those that identify as women who require access to women's health and reproductive services. Some transgender men, non-binary people and intersex people or people with variations in sex characteristics may also experience menstrual cycles, pregnancy and the menopause. The actions in the Plan make clear that all healthcare services should be respectful and responsive to the needs of the individual.

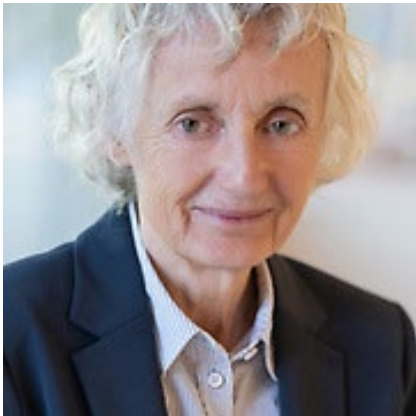
The actions in the Plan are divided into short-term (one year), medium-term (one-to-three years) and long-term (three years or more) timescales. The delivery of the Plan is overseen by the Women's Health Plan Implementation Programme Board, chaired by Professor Marion Bain, Deputy Chief Medical Officer.

This first report sets out progress against the Plan's short-term actions, all of which were commenced in the first year of the Plan. For some areas, it also provides an update on medium-term actions where progress is already being made, ahead of schedule.

The specific aims and actions in the Women's Health Plan are not the only areas where women's health is being progressed in Scotland. Policies across the Scottish Government are making a difference to women's health, including pregnancy and maternity, screening and mental health.



Spotlight on: Women's Health Champion



Professor Anna Glasier, OBE

One of the key medium-term actions for the Women's Health Plan was the appointment of a Women's Health Champion, who will support the implementation of the Plan, driving forward change and improvement in Women's Health across Scotland.

Here, our Women's Health Champion, Professor Anna Glasier OBE, sets out her priorities for the coming year.

"I am honoured to have been invited to champion Women's Health in Scotland and am eagerly looking forward to starting in the role and making progress with the medium and longer term actions".

Scotland has a long tradition of being at the forefront of advances in women's reproductive health. The Scottish Government has a history of being courageous in its approach to some controversial areas of women's health in the past, making emergency contraception available free in pharmacies from 2008 for example and, more recently, enabling women having early medical abortion to take both sets of abortion medicines at home, where clinically appropriate to do so. But the current Plan encompasses much more than reproductive health, recognising as it does the inequalities which affect women in many areas of health.

Having worked in NHS Scotland in reproductive health for many years, I am particularly keen to take a focussed approach to some of the proposals regarding menstrual health and the menopause, since both issues affect over half the population of Scotland at some point in their lives. It is clear from the report on progress that action has already been taken, particularly in terms of improving the amount of high quality and accessible information available to women in Scotland on these topics.

My priorities

Menopause is one of the key priorities of the Women's Health Plan. During my time as Women's Health Champion I should particularly like to explore the provision of our specialist menopause services to try and understand any differences in the delivery of services currently provided by different Health Boards so that we can take a national approach, learning from 'what works' in service provision.

It is so positive to see so much is already going on in the field of endometriosis both in terms of raising awareness of the condition and in its research. I know that this is a condition that can really impact all aspects of women's and their families' lives, and I want to support the continuation of this important work to help improve access for women to appropriate support, quicker diagnosis and treatment.

In addition, I would like us to think more about the impact of polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS), a condition which affects many women from the onset of their first period to beyond the menopause, is a common cause of subfertility and can affect women's health in later life including the risks of diabetes, cancer and heart disease.

This takes me to my third priority - heart health - since heart disease remains a major cause of death and disability for women in Scotland. There is also an important overlap with inequalities relating to race and social deprivation. I have a lot to learn in this area of health care and I look forward to engaging with clinical experts and hearing from those with lived experience in order to do so.

I look forward to working with everyone in the Women's Health Plan Implementation Programme Board, in the Lived Experience Stakeholder Group and beyond in the hope that together we can achieve great things for the health of women in Scotland.

Cross-cutting actions: progress against the short-term actions

The Women's Health Plan contains 11 'cross-cutting' actions which span the Plan's priority areas and underpin many of the other actions in the Plan.

Action 1: Establish a central platform for information on women's health on NHS Inform

Women's Health Platform

✓ The [Women's Health Platform](#) was launched in May 2022.

Bringing together women's health information from across NHS Inform into one place, the Platform responds to women's ask for a *'trustworthy, comprehensive health website for women and girls and healthcare professionals'*.

Resources have been renewed and refreshed, including, [menopause](#), [menstrual health](#) and [heart health](#). More information on these can be found in the menopause, menstrual health and heart health sections of the report.

The development of the Platform continues beyond the short-term timescales of the action and will be an ongoing piece of work throughout the lifetime of the Plan.



Women will be provided with consistent, reliable and accessible information empowering them to make informed decisions about their health and healthcare.

Spotlight on: lived experience

The voices of women played a very significant role in shaping the development of the Women's Health Plan, and it is essential these voices continue to influence and drive its implementation. The ongoing input of lived experience is being taken forward by the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) who have developed a full programme of work to support women's health, including the Lived Experience Stakeholder Group.

Action 2: Seek women's lived experience, through the continuation of a lived experience group, to inform health policy and improve healthcare services and to ensure women are meaningfully involved in decision making and priority setting going forward.

- ✓ Women's Health Plan Lived Experience Stakeholder Group has been established and first met in August 2022.
- ✓ Senior Development Officer recruited in March 2022.
- ✓ Operational Plan finalised in May 2022.

Members of the stakeholder group have been recruited across a variety of geographical locations and experiences, to reflect women's real-life experiences of their health, and the healthcare they need. Group membership continues to be considered with new members to be invited whilst the Group formalises its objectives and way of working.

The voices of women and girls are vital to achieving the Plan's ambitions and this work will continue throughout the lifetime of the Plan.

Irene Oldfather, ALLIANCE Director of Strategic Partnerships and Engagement, reflects on the journey so far;

'Through both the development and implementation phases of the Women's Health Plan, it has been important to have women's voices at the heart. As the Women's Health Plan was being developed, a lived experience sub-group was established to oversee engagement with women across Scotland on their experiences of health care and access to services and information. Now, as we reflect on the achievements of the Plan so far, it is critical that we consider how women's experiences continue to be heard and fed into our work to reduce health inequalities.'

'We have made a good start, and the ALLIANCE is pleased to have convened a Lived Experience Stakeholder Group which will follow the implementation of the Plan, and permeate through the various actions. I am very grateful to all of the women who gave of their time so far to help us inform the Plan, and note the commitment that our Stakeholder Group brings. This commitment is led by their own experiences of accessing health information and services. As we go forward we hope the Group will influence policy and shape good practice.'

'The Lived Experience Stakeholder Group and the ALLIANCE's wider engagement work to support the Plan, reminds us that each of us can contribute to this important piece of work by acknowledging, respecting and promoting women's health in Scotland.'

'Sitting alongside the work of the Implementation Group, is the challenge of bringing women's health issues out of the shadows. Encouraging open conversations and destigmatising the language around women's health is not just the responsibility of government but is everyone's business.'

To stay up to date with the ALLIANCE's work to support the Women's Health Plan, including future events and further resources, you can sign up to the mailing list via whp@alliance-scotland.org.uk

Supporting the Women's Health Plan

Sign up to the Women's Health mailing list
If you are interested in staying up-to-date with ALLIANCE work in this area then subscribe to the ALLIANCE mailing list to receive a monthly e-newsletter and other relevant communication. The newsletter will also feature information on upcoming information events, and engagement opportunities.
Email whp@alliance-scotland.org.uk to subscribe.

Lived Experience Stakeholder Group
This Group supports women across Scotland to share their perspectives to influence change. The Group identifies and influences proposed policy and service developments in relation to the priority areas of the Women's Health Plan.

Information events
The ALLIANCE's programme of information events supports women's access to health information, and tackles misinformation and stigma that are still attached to many women's health concerns.

Sharing good practice

Action 3: Share examples of good practice to encourage primary care to consider different and more flexible options for provision of women's health services to best meet the needs of their communities.

- ✓ A Women's Health Knowledge Hub ('KHub') has been created for stakeholders involved in the delivery and implementation of the Women's Health Plan to share examples of best practice and facilitate discussions on improvements in women's health, across all sectors.

Work is ongoing to facilitate the sharing of good practice across networks, including the National Menopause Specialist Network where examples of innovative practice across primary and secondary care are regularly shared.

Work on delivering this action will continue beyond the short term and sharing good practice will be an ongoing piece of work throughout the lifetime of the Plan.

Video and telephone consultation

In March 2020, a rapid programme of expansion of the Near Me service was established in support of the COVID pandemic. The number of video consultations rose steeply from around 1,000 per month, pre-pandemic, to a peak of 92,000 per month in March 2021. Since COVID restrictions have lifted, call volumes have stabilised and vary between 40 and 50 thousand calls per month.

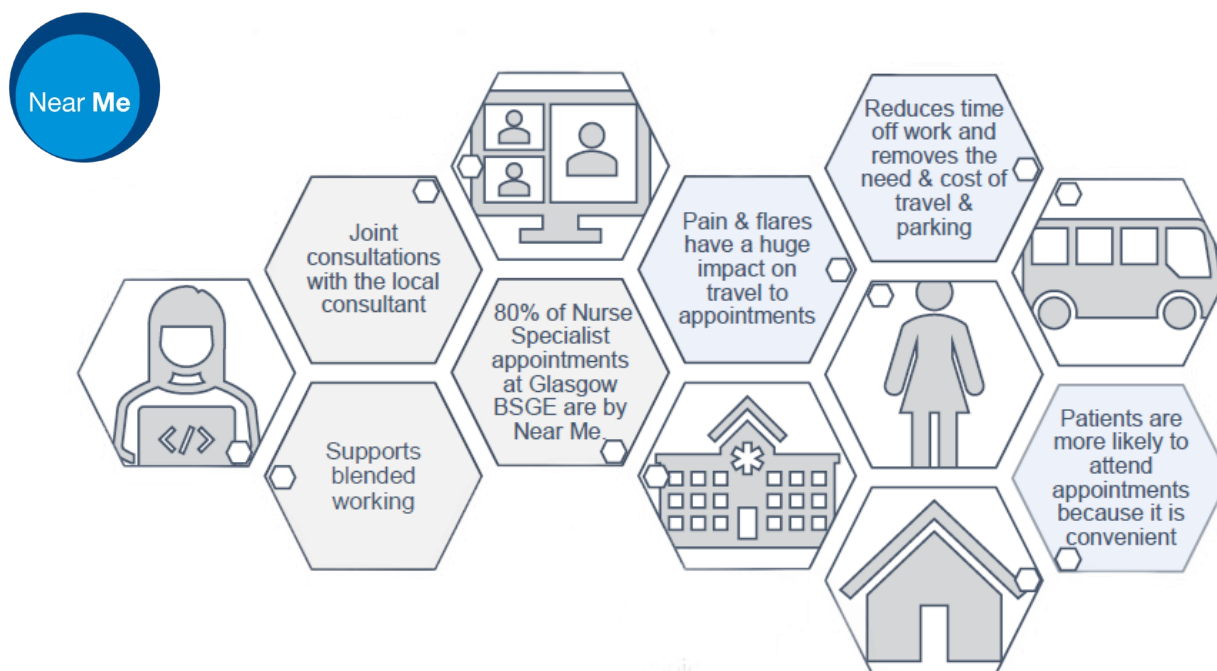
Women and girls need access to services that are flexible to their life circumstances, such as work, education and caring commitments. The greater availability of video and telephone consultations means that women and girls have more choice around the types of consultations that fit flexibly into day to day commitments. Data from the Near Me end of call survey showed that 63% of respondents were women.

Action 4: Promote the use of video or telephone consultation where appropriate to support access to services for women, particularly those who may otherwise be required to travel long distances or who may have difficulty travelling to appointments.

- ✓ Social media campaigns to promote Near Me have taken place since February 2022, including around International Women's Day and Endometriosis Awareness Month.
- ✓ To promote the use of video consultation, the views of four women's health specialities (abortion service, sexual trauma counselling, gynaecology and sexual health) have been sought, to explore how they are using Near Me.

Case studies are being developed and will be shared across Scotland on the Women's Health Plan Knowledge Hub to illustrate how Near Me can positively support women and girls who use these services. Early engagement with Endometriosis UK highlighted that women with endometriosis see value in using Near Me for appointments.

Near Me and Endometriosis: An Engagement Exercise



* Key points from women with lived experience of stage IV Endometriosis and Clinicians from Specialist Endometriosis Centres (BSGE*)

An engagement exercise was completed by NHS Near Me to understand the value of video consultations in the diagnosis, treatment and management of endometriosis.

The engagement involved:

- Endometriosis UK survey to members;
- detailed interviews with women diagnosed with endometriosis; and
- detailed interviews with clinicians involved in treating women with endometriosis.

Findings from the engagement highlighted a range of benefits of video consultations for endometriosis, including for:

- patients experiencing pain given that they do not need to leave their home;
- patients living in rural and remote areas;
- patients who work, reducing the time they need to take off work;
- post-op and follow-up appointments, where physical examinations are not required;
- pre-op appointments, where physical examinations are not required;
- helping to make a holistic assessment of the patient, which cannot be done as easily over telephone;
- seeing a patient with their local clinician; and
- enabling women to avoid triggers which could exacerbate their symptoms, for example, sharing waiting areas with those accessing ante-natal care when they may be experiencing fertility challenges.

Findings from the engagement activities have informed the direction of the Near Me programme, including how services are supported to implement Near Me for their patients.

Contraception, abortion, sexual health and pre-pregnancy: progress against the short-term actions

Improving women's access to abortion

Action 12: Make telephone or video consultation universally available as an option for abortion services.

- ✓ A Chief Medical Officer letter was issued to NHS Boards in December 2021 which required Boards to make telephone or video consultation universally available [Abortion – Women's health plan actions on telemedicine and contraception \(scot.nhs.uk\)](#)

NHS Boards have confirmed that telephone consultations are now routinely offered.

Action 13: For post-abortion contraception, provide all women with 6 or 12 months, progestogen-only pills with their abortion medications. Fast track to long-active reversible contraception if desired.

- ✓ A Chief Medical Officer letter was issued to NHS Boards in December 2021 requiring them to offer the progestogen-only pill to patients during their abortion consultation [Abortion – Women's health plan actions on telemedicine and contraception \(scot.nhs.uk\)](#)

Clinicians have provided feedback that this is now routinely offered.

Action 14: Review data collected on abortions to ensure it is relevant, whilst protecting anonymity.

- ✓ Public Health Scotland (PHS) has amended the existing abortion database to provide an updated digital platform, which enables NHS Boards to directly input data about abortions.
- ✓ Directions were issued by the Scottish Government on 27 April 2022, signed by the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport. These directions contained information on the updated data that NHS Boards are required to provide to Public Health Scotland and the timescales for its provision.

Beyond the short term

Action 15: NHS, Local Authorities, Justice agencies and the Scottish Government to work together to find ways of preventing women feeling harassed when accessing abortion care due to protests or vigils.

The Scottish Government is committed to safeguarding women's rights to access abortion care, free from stigma or harassment.

- ✓ To achieve this the Scottish Government is committed to supporting legislative change to protect safe access to health care facilities that provide abortion services through national legislation by supporting Gillian Mackay MSP with the development and drafting of her proposed Safe Access Zones Member's Bill.

Action 16: Increase options for women around where they can take abortion medication (mifepristone).

- ✓ The approval for early medical abortion at home (EMAH), which allows for the abortion medication (mifepristone) to be taken at home, has been extended, and a clinical evaluation of early medical abortion at home is due to be completed shortly.

Arrangements will be reviewed once the evaluation is complete.

Action 17: Provide mid-trimester abortion care locally or regionally for all indications.

Work is being prioritised with NHS Boards to ensure that abortion services for all women up to 24 weeks' gestation can be provided as locally as possible.

- ✓ In June 2022, the Scottish Government wrote to NHS Board Chief Executives to clarify the expectation for NHS Boards to meet the Health Improvement Scotland standard of delivering abortions up to at least 20 weeks gestation.
- ✓ All mainland NHS Boards have confirmed they now offer this service up to at least 20 weeks' gestation.

Improving access to contraception services

Action 19: Promote use of video or telephone, in addition to face-to-face consultation for women, including those in prisons, to provide greater privacy, dignity, choice and flexibility.

Awareness raising of Near Me for women in prisons will take place through a two-pronged approach.

1. Engaging with prison health centre staff to raise awareness of Near Me.
 2. The development of an engagement approach to raise awareness with prisons of the potential for Near Me consultations with NHS Board clinicians.
- ✓ Engagement with Prison Health Centres on how Near Me is used has taken place, including a presentation to the Prison Healthcare Network in September 2022.

Engagement communications targeted at secondary care services, informing them that Near Me is available in prisons, are under development.

Action 20: Provide accessible information and advice on pre-pregnancy care.

- ✓ Short-life working group on pre-pregnancy care has been established.
- ✓ Scoping exercise undertaken by the short-life working group to identify priority areas for the provision of information.

Beyond the short term

Action 25: Ensure that discussions on contraception take place during pregnancy. Women should be given adequate and appropriate information on their options, as well as rapid access to their preferred method where applicable.

- ✓ Scottish Government funding of £44,337 was provided to the NHS Lothian Post-Partum Contraception Project in February 2022 to improve the availability of post-partum contraception.

NHS Lothian Post-Partum Contraception Service.

The NHS Lothian Post-Partum Contraception Service was designed to improve access to contraception after childbirth. It is working to allow women the opportunity to discuss contraception options antenatally and be empowered to make an informed choice as part of their birth plan, with a full range of contraceptive methods made available to women to access immediately following childbirth.

This service can remove the difficulties women can experience in trying to access contraception after they leave the maternity hospital and can reduce their chance of experiencing an unintended pregnancy.

In October 2022, the project launched a new [animation](#) aimed at providing women with information about postnatal contraception.

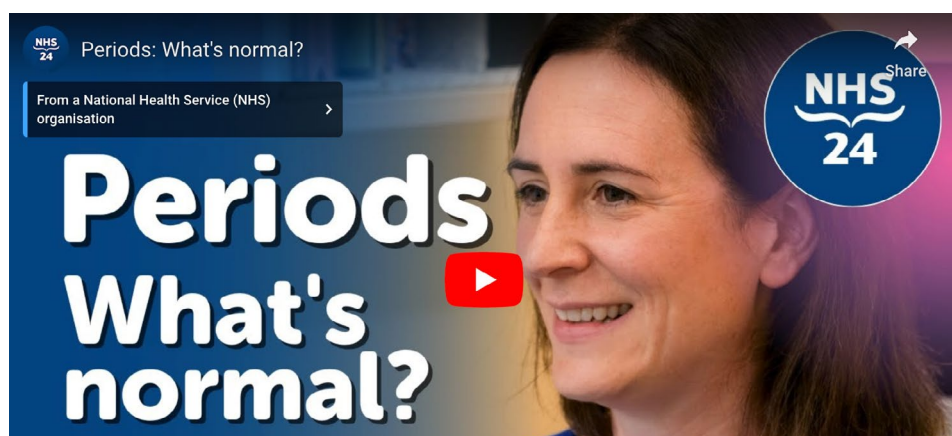


Menopause and menstrual health, including endometriosis: progress against the short-term actions

Menstrual health

Most women and girls experience periods and menstrual cycles – but many are unprepared for the impact they can have. From pain, to heavy bleeding and Pre-Menstrual Syndrome (PMS), many are not aware of what's normal and what's not normal when it comes to this aspect of their lives. Improving information, education and awareness is vital to help women and girls know when and how to seek help.

NHS Inform Menstrual Health Resource



In May 2022, a new [menstrual health resource](#) was launched on the NHS Inform [Women's Health Platform](#). The resource includes information from choosing period products, to period pain and menstrual health conditions including fibroids, Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS) and endometriosis. There are three brand new short films which provide information and support

from experts on; [What's Normal?](#) ; [Irregular Periods](#) and [Premenstrual Syndrome](#) (PMS). The resource includes a film focussed on [living with endometriosis](#), as well as an animation on endometriosis created by Endo Warriors West Lothian with the Excellence in Pelvic Pain and Endometriosis Care and Treatment centre in Edinburgh (EXPPECT).

The content is available in Arabic, Chinese (Simplified), Polish, Punjabi and Urdu, BSL and Easy Read versions.

Action 27: Promote the use of positive language around menstrual health.

- ✓ A new [menstrual health resource](#) on the NHS Inform Women's Health Platform has been launched. Menstrual health content, including endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome, has been reviewed, refreshed and published.
- ✓ Short films on menstrual health provide affirmative information for women and people who menstruate on i) what's normal ii) PMS and iii) irregular periods.
- ✓ Parent Club information on [girls' and women's health](#) now includes up-to-date information on menstrual health, including endometriosis, and menopause.
- ✓ The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 commenced in August 2022.

This action continues beyond the short term and promoting positive language will be an ongoing piece of work throughout the lifetime of the Plan.

Free period products

The Period Products (Free Provision) (Scotland) Act 2021 commenced on 15 August 2022 and places duties on local authorities and education providers to ensure that everyone in Scotland who menstruates can have reasonably convenient access to period products, free of charge, as and when they are required.

We are proud to have taken world-leading (and award-winning) action by investing over £33 million since 2017 to fund access to free period products across a range of settings including schools, colleges and universities, wider public spaces, and targeted access through community groups for those on low incomes.

Being able to access period products is fundamental to equality and dignity. In a society as rich as Scotland, no-one should have to suffer the indignity of not having the means to meet their basic needs.

Period dignity goes beyond the provision of free period products which is why we have also provided funding for a Period Dignity website for employers, run a successful anti-stigma campaign, and enhanced the menstrual health resources available for teachers, on [RSHP.scot](https://rsHP.scot)

- We awarded funding to Hey Girls to update content on their website, www.myperiod.org.uk and to support the development of the PickupMyPeriod [mobile app](#)
- This has resulted in workplace resources being created and made available on the website, including in-house training and online courses which cover period stigma, menstrual health, reusable period products, and ways that employers can support staff that have periods. The development of the app is supporting people to identify locations where period products can be accessed for free in Scotland.

**LET'S CALL
PERIODS, PERIODS.**



Action 28: Where appropriate, offer women who are eligible for combined hormonal contraception, the option of a continuous or extended regimen and raise awareness of the option of no bleeding, even if contraception is not required.

- ✓ Information on the option of no bleeding included on the NHS Inform [menstrual health resource](#) and [contraception](#) content.

This action continues beyond the short term and will be an ongoing piece of work throughout the lifetime of the Plan.

Endometriosis

Endometriosis is a long-term condition where tissue, similar to the lining of the womb, is found elsewhere in the body. It affects around 1 in 10 of those who menstruate. Improving access to appropriate support, speedy diagnosis and best treatment is one of the key priorities of the Women's Health Plan. Progress this year has included the following.

- ✓ NHS Inform pages on endometriosis have been updated to ensure that people across Scotland are able to find accurate and accessible information on [Endometriosis](#) and the support available. This includes a lived experience video as well as an animation on endometriosis created by Endo Warriors West Lothian and the Excellence in Pelvic Pain and Endometriosis Care and Treatment centre in Edinburgh (EXPPECT).
- ✓ The Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) curriculum resource for [senior year pupils](#) has been updated with an endometriosis animation created by Endo Warriors West Lothian, and the EXPPECT centre in Edinburgh. The animation provides young people with appropriate and accurate information about endometriosis, the symptoms and treatment options.
- ✓ We awarded £15,000 to Endometriosis UK to develop a project to better understand the support needs of those who are newly diagnosed and those awaiting diagnosis. Responding to the need for more information, a set of informative webinars for those 'newly diagnosed in Scotland' have been delivered and are available online.

[Newly Diagnosed in Scotland: What is Endometriosis](#), The Diagnosis Journey & Pain Management with Professor Andrew Horne, Dr Lucy Whitaker and Priscilla Fernandez – EXPPECT Edinburgh.

[Newly Diagnosed in Scotland series: Endometriosis & Fertility](#) with Dr Lucky Saraswat – Consultant Gynaecologist and Minimal Access Surgeon at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Action 31: Implement and raise awareness of current national guidelines on endometriosis and develop and implement further pathways for care where these don't currently exist – for example endometriosis outside the pelvis.

- ✓ The Modernising Patient Pathways Programme (MPPP) Integrated Endometriosis Referral Care Pathway for NHS Scotland has now been approved and will be distributed to all NHS Boards for implementation.
- ✓ An endometriosis advisory group of endometriosis specialists, secondary care health professionals and service managers has been established to increase collaborative working, inform policy actions and drive improvement. The first meeting of the group was held in April 2022.
- ✓ An endometriosis lived experience forum has been established, supporting the sharing of knowledge and expertise, and current processes and pressures in the support, diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis.

Action 32: Commission endometriosis research to find the cause of the condition, leading to the development of better treatment and management options, and a cure.

- ✓ Scottish Government have jointly funded a £250,000 research call with Wellbeing of Women, which was awarded in December 2022. The research aims to develop improvements into treatment and management options for endometriosis.

Menopause

Menopause is a key life transition yet is something that many women know little about. The 10 actions set out in the WHP aim to ensure that women have timely access to menopause support and services; healthcare professionals are aware of the impact of medical or surgical treatments to induce menopause and all women have access to a healthcare professional with an interest in menopause through primary care.

Action 34: Develop, maintain and promote a support network for menopause specialists throughout Scotland. Each HCP with special interest in menopause should have access to at least one menopause specialist for advice, support, onward referral and leadership of multidisciplinary education.

“**The Menopause Specialists’ Network has been formalised, developed and expanded from an existing informal group and now has over 50 members. Meetings are held through Teams approximately every three months to update on current issues and share ideas and practice. In addition, clinical experience and support is provided through regular email communications between meetings. This network provides excellent peer support and encourages consistency of menopause advice provided across Scotland by Menopause Specialists which is then shared with primary care teams.**”

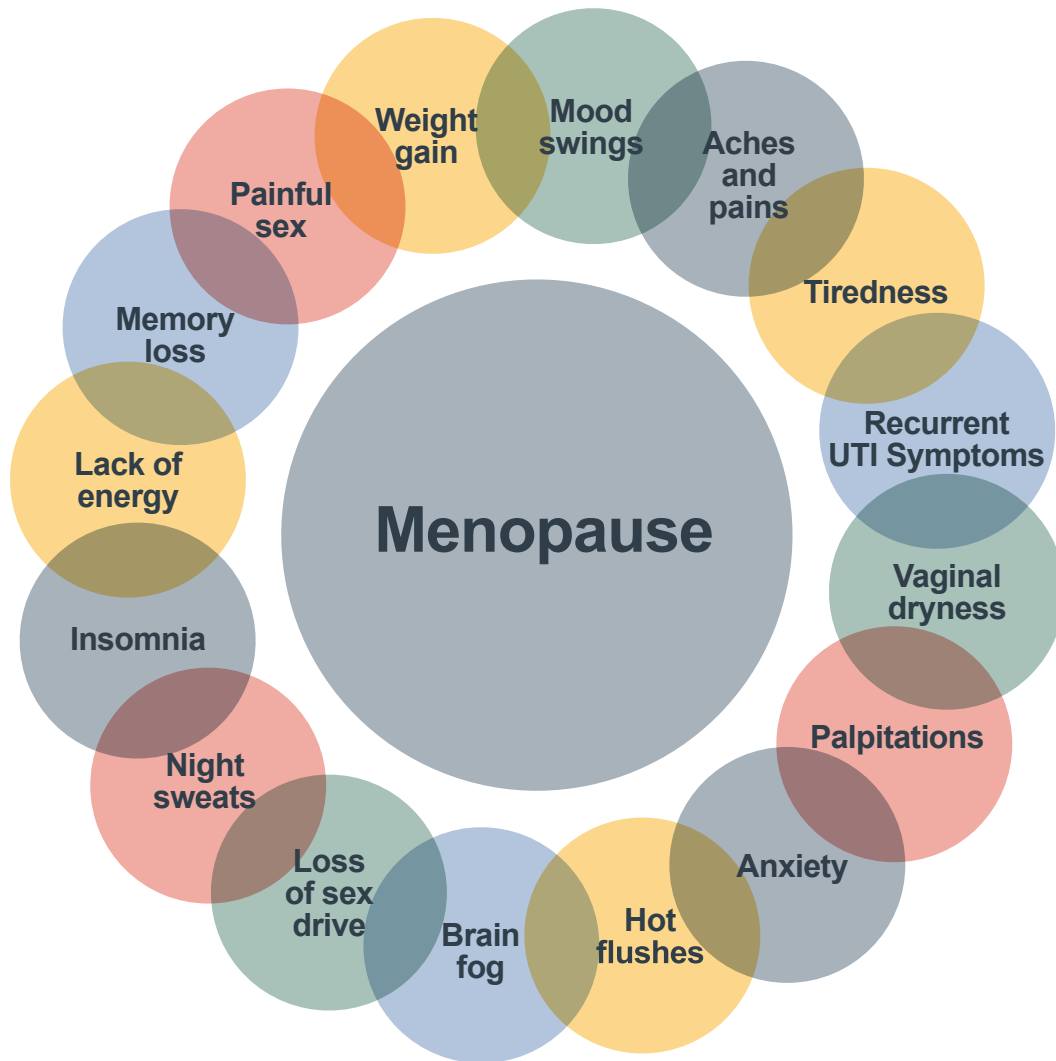
Dr Heather Currie, Consultant Gynaecologist and Network Chair.

✓ The National Menopause Specialists Network, chaired by Dr Heather Currie, meets on a quarterly basis and includes representatives from all mainland NHS Boards.

Action 35: Provide a holistic approach to care by promoting greater joint working between healthcare professionals on menopause diagnosis and treatment across primary and secondary care and specialist clinical, including through joint education sessions starting with pre- and post-qualification training on gynaecology.

✓ Three education sessions have been held, to date, with Scottish obstetrics and gynaecology trainees on menopause, with the latest session supporting 63 attendees. This session, held in September 2022, has been recorded so that the resource can be accessed by other trainees so they too can ‘think menopause’.

This action continues beyond the timescales of the action and increasing holistic care in menopause will be an ongoing piece of work throughout the lifetime of the Plan.



Beyond the short term:

Action 38: Provide a specialist menopause service in every NHS Board, and where sub specialisation is impractical (e.g. Island Health Boards) develop a buddy system.

✓ There is a specialist menopause service in every mainland NHS Board, with a buddy system in place for the Island Boards.

Action 39: Develop a menopause and menstrual health workplace policy, as an example of best practice, starting with NHS Scotland, and promote across the public, private and third sector.

An expert advisory group is leading the development of a menopause and menstrual health workplace policy for NHS Scotland. Membership includes expertise from NHS Scotland Human Resources, union representatives, specialist clinical services and academia.

✓ A survey of NHS Scotland staff launched on World Menopause Day.

The survey seeks the lived experience of those working in NHS Scotland in relation to their personal experiences of menopause and menstrual health in the workplace. This large survey will be a ground-breaking world first to consider menstrual health at work. The results of the survey will provide a firm evidence base for the policy as well as vital intelligence on experience of menopause, menstrual health and the workplace.

Spotlight on: menopause education across the life-course

Around 400,000 women in Scotland are of menopausal age. Improving the information available to them, at all stages of their lives, can help them feel more confident about what to expect, what's 'normal', the options available to them and, importantly, to know that they are not alone.

Menopause education in schools

- ✓ We have strengthened inclusion of menopause in an activity at the senior phase of relationships, sexual health and parenthood education in the Scottish curriculum to ensure meaningful learning is delivered about this important topic. [Human Fertility and Reproduction \(Senior Phase Activity Plan\) Feb 2022 \(rshp.scot\)](#)

NHS Inform Menopause Resource

We want all women and people who experience symptoms of menopause, to have access to high quality and comprehensive information and support.

In October 2021 we launched the NHS Inform [menopause information resource](#) through which we are busting menopause myths, and highlighting menopause symptoms, options for care, treatment and support, mental health and much more.



- Eight short films are [busting menopause myths](#)
- Dr Sigi Joseph is [‘talking menopause with your GP’](#)
- Women talk about their [personal experiences of menopause](#)

The content is available in [Arabic](#), [Chinese](#) (Simplified), [Polish](#), [Punjabi](#) and [Urdu](#), [BSL](#) and [Easy Read](#) versions.

- ✓ In the year since the launch of the resource in October 2021, there was a fivefold increase in access to menopause information on NHS Inform.

The ALLIANCE Menopause Webinars

To further increase the information available to women on menopause the ALLIANCE have, in partnership with the Scottish Government, hosted a series of webinars with each one focusing on a different aspect of menopause.

1. Menopause mythbusting

✓ In December 2021 The ALLIANCE held a **menopause mythbusting** session for all those who wanted to know more about how we can bust the myths that persistently and negatively affect women's experience of menopause.

Chaired by the ALLIANCE's Irene Oldfather, a panel of experts busted myths and answered questions from the audience.

2. Menopause and the workplace

Attendees of the mythbusting webinar particularly highlighted menopause and the workplace as a topic they'd like to hear more about.

✓ A second webinar on menopause and the workplace was held in August 2022.

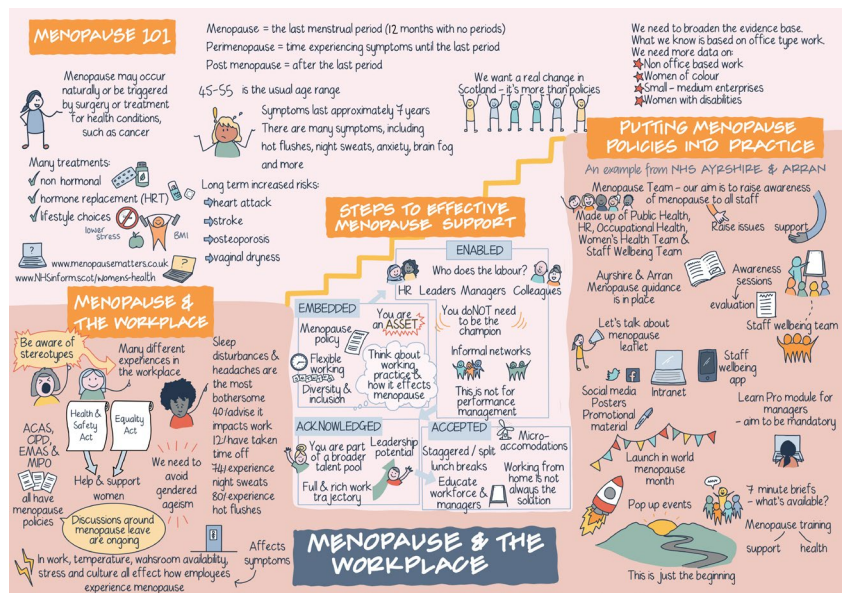
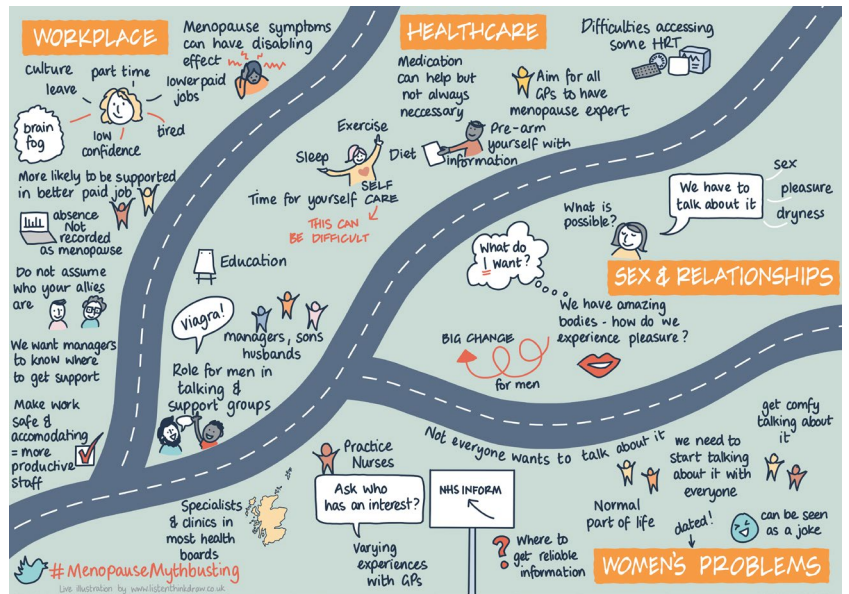
Providing information on 'what is menopause', the evidence around menopause and the workplace, effective support and putting policy into practice, this event provided practical information on how we can all positively improve support for menopause in the workplace

“ I have been reflecting on the message that as a (peri) menopausal woman in the workplace, I am an asset to be supported, rather than a problem to be dealt with. At a time when confidence can be low but anxiety high, this was a positive message to hear and I plan on sharing it and passing it on.”

“ Sometimes you feel alone, but I can see from the webinar this is across the board, thank you for giving me this insight. I used to feel really guilty at having taken some time off as if it wasn't that important what was happening to me; now I have seen the stats I understand better how this is affecting all women.”

✓ A resource pack, including a recording of the webinar, has been produced to support delegates, interested individuals and organisations to learn more and action learning on effective menopause workplace support.

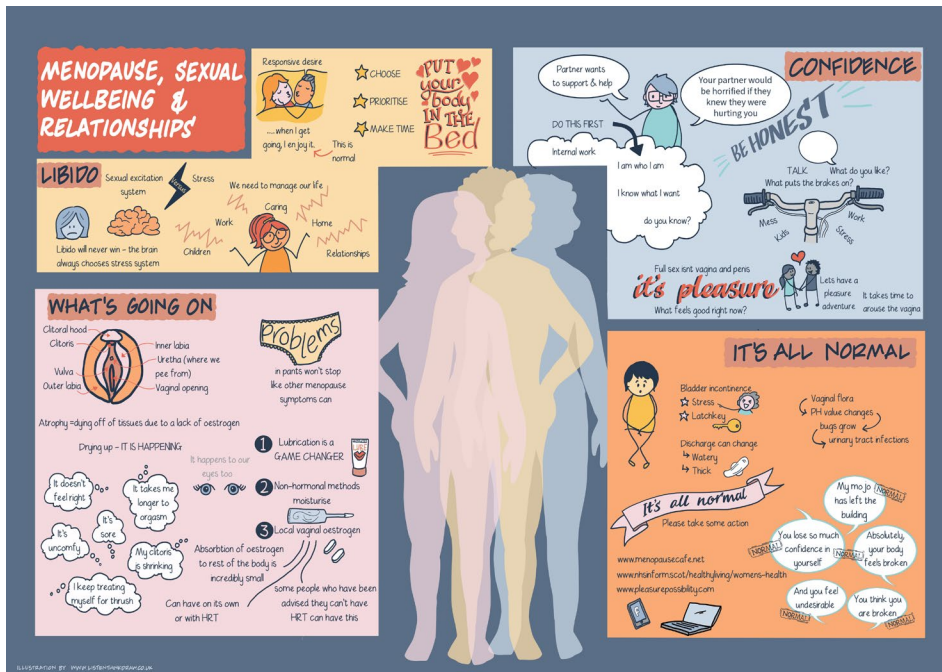
More information can be found at: [ALLIANCE Menopause and Workplace Resource Pack](#)



3. Menopause, sexual wellbeing and relationships

“It was a transformative event”

✓ A third webinar on menopause, sex and relationships with Dr Claire Macaulay was held in October 2022. This built on Claire’s menopause [mythbusting](#) video on NHS Inform and provided information and support on the impact of menopause on your body and your sex life, emphasising the right to pleasure.



“It was mind-blowing as it included things that I had never considered to be part of the menopause, everyday things that would never have come up elsewhere.”

Support for Employers

Women need employers who understand how their employees can be affected by the menopause, what they need to be successfully supported in the work place and to be equipped with the knowledge and tools to deliver this for their workforce.

In August 2022 Close the Gap – in partnership with the Scottish Government – held a webinar for employers on menopause and the workplace.

Close the Gap has developed a guidance document for employers on how to provide workplace support for those experiencing symptoms of menopause.

More information can be found at:



Menopause and the workplace – what can you do as an employer? Webinar and blog
[Close the Gap | Blog | New employer resource on creating a menopause-aware workplace.](#)
[Menopause and the Workplace – What can you do as an employer? – YouTube](#)

Creating a menopause aware workplace
[Creating a menopause aware workplace](#)

Heart health: progress against the short-term actions

Whilst the following actions on Heart Health are set out in the short term, they are also longer-term ambitions that must necessarily continue throughout the life of the Plan, and beyond. This will ensure women's continued access to high-quality information and services that take into account their particular needs in relation to heart health.

Action 44: In all heart health consultations, opportunities should be taken to provide individualised advice and care to women, and in all pregnancy and pre-pregnancy discussions and interactions, opportunities should be taken to optimise women's heart health to optimise women's holistic health as part of the life-course approach.

- ✓ The Scottish Obstetrics Cardiology Network are developing resources for the delivery of pre-pregnancy care, for both professionals and for patients.
- ✓ Resources for women on pregnancy with a heart condition can be accessed at [Pregnancy with a heart condition \(scot.nhs.uk\)](https://www.scot.nhs.uk/pregnancy-with-a-heart-condition/)
- ✓ Resources for professionals will be available in early 2023.

Scottish Obstetric Cardiology Network resources to support the delivery of preconception care.

Heart disease is the leading cause of maternal death in the UK. Some women who have a heart condition before pregnancy do not receive appropriate preconception care or counselling to inform them of, and give opportunities to reduce, their risk.



The Scottish Obstetric Cardiology Network (SOCN) have worked with healthcare professionals, including cardiologists, cardiac nurses, pharmacists, sexual health consultants, psychologists and primary care professionals, and women with lived experience of heart disease, to develop resources to support the delivery of pre-conception care.

For healthcare professionals the resources provide information on their role in pre-conception care and counselling, including how to make an assessment of a person's cardiac risk in pregnancy and access additional advice if required.

For patients SOCN have developed information leaflets and a video. This includes a list of questions for people to ask their healthcare professionals about the impact of their heart disease in pregnancy. The aim is to support patients to make an informed choice about contraception, pursuing pregnancy or assisted reproductive therapies and ensure they have access to healthcare professionals with expertise in heart disease in pregnancy when they need it.

[Pregnancy with a heart condition \(scot.nhs.uk\)](https://scot.nhs.uk)

Action 45: Where research shows there are sex-related differences in prevention, diagnosis, investigation or treatment of CVD these should be detailed in guidelines and pathways.

The Heart Disease Action Plan makes a commitment to establish nationally agreed pathways of care for heart disease. This will support a 'Once For Scotland' vision of what good quality care would look like across a whole pathway.

- ✓ Work is underway on the development of a number of pathways through the delivery of Heart Disease Action Plan.

Action 46: Improve information and public awareness of heart disease symptoms and risks for women.

- ✓ Women's [Heart Health](#) pages created on NHS Inform.
- ✓ Social media and awareness raising carried out for 'Wear it Red' Day 2021.

Gender and health: progress against the short-term actions

Action 55: Establish a Health Equality team within the Scottish Government, to pursue intersectional healthcare policy with a particular focus on sex, race, disability and sexual orientation.

✓ A Health Equality Team has been established in the Scottish Government.

Action 56: Encourage NHS boards to engage with the Equally Safe at Work employer accreditation programme.

✓ Close the Gap are developing and delivering a tailored version of Equally Safe at Work to pilot in NHS Boards in Scotland (Jun 2022 – July 2023).

✓ Four NHS Boards are participating in the pilot which commenced in July 2022.

✓ A further five NHS Boards have signed up as 'shadow boards'.

Action 57: Ensure National Performance Indicators are disaggregated where appropriate.

✓ National Performance Indicators have been reviewed and disaggregated where appropriate.

✓ All of the 11 National Outcomes have at least one indicator disaggregated by Gender.

These disaggregations are regularly updated and published in the NPF database, which is available for download from the [NPF website](#).

Beyond the short term

Action 58: Build an intersectional evidence base around women's health inequalities ensuring women's healthy life expectancy and quality of life are used as measures in addition to total life expectancy.

Action 59: Build an evidence base on women's health inequalities, with specific focus on the impact of sexism, racism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination, including homophobia, and transphobia on women's health.

✓ Four focus groups have taken place with women across Scotland from different backgrounds: 16-25 group; over 25 group; women from ethnic minority background group; and women with a disability group (14 participants total).

✓ In-depth interviews with young people aged 16-25 started in Autumn 2022.

✓ Scoping work has begun on quantitative work to develop a women's health data dashboard that includes life expectancy, healthy life expectancy and quality of life.

Our Next Steps Together



Since the publication of the Women's Health Plan, I have been so struck - and delighted - to experience the passion and drive that there is in Scotland to improve women's health and to address the inequalities in health that women experience on an everyday basis.

To fundamentally improve the health of women in Scotland, we must work together. The ambitions of the Women's Health Plan can only be achieved through working in partnership. In looking forward to the second and third years of the Plan, working together, involving the many partners who can contribute to improving women's health - and of course women themselves - will continue to be crucial.

As the Chair of the Women's Health Plan Implementation Programme Board, I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to all those who have helped to achieve so much in such a short space of time. Since the publication of the Plan, we have made progress against all of the short-term actions – and with a number of the medium-term actions already showing significant progression.

This is of course just the beginning of a journey, but the direction is set, the journey has begun and we are travelling with women alongside us at every step of the way.

Professor Marion Bain: Deputy Chief Medical Officer and Chair of the Women's Health Plan Implementation Programme Board



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