



Priorities Post

Issue 1

In conversation with you

One of the most important ways NHS Grampian can improve services is by listening to the people who use them. This is why our Community Conversations are becoming such a valuable part of how we plan and develop services across the region.

These events bring together patients, carers, community groups, partner organisations and NHS staff to discuss what matters most to local people. They provide an opportunity for honest conversations about both the challenges facing health and care services and the improvements people want to see in the future.

People have told us they want clear and honest information about NHS services, they agree on the importance of preventing illness, tackling health inequalities and supporting people to stay well within their communities. They want to be active partners in improving health and wellbeing – helping to address issues such as loneliness and isolation.

We'll keep you posted on future events, but in the meantime, we welcome any feedback to gram.involve@nhs.scot



Welcome

From our Chief Executive, Laura Skaife-Knight

Welcome to our first quarterly newsletter which has been introduced to keep our patients, communities, partners and staff updated on how we're doing against the priorities we have set for 2026/27.

As we continue to navigate sustained pressure on services, I want to start by thanking staff, volunteers and partners working across the health and care system in Grampian for their hard work, dedication and compassion in caring for patients.

We can signal progress in some areas, including staff engagement, some of our waiting times, financial performance and improving our organisational culture, and we equally know we need to strengthen our focus on the areas where our patients and staff are not currently getting the experience we would wish them to.

In another important step forward, in recent months we have agreed with the Scottish Government a clear path to make improvements and evidence this progress against the priorities we update on in this newsletter. We look forward to sharing more of this with you in future editions.



Living well in Kincardine & Mearns: bringing prevention into the heart of the community

In June, we hosted the first Living Well in Kincardine & Mearns Community Appointment Day at Stonehaven Town Hall. The event brought together four local GP practices (Inverbervie, Laurencekirk, Stonehaven and Portlethen), NHS services, local authority teams, charities, voluntary organisations and community groups under one roof to support people to live well and take positive steps for their health.

The day combined targeted cardiovascular health checks for invited patients with an open-access community wellbeing event. Visitors had the opportunity to speak with a knowledgeable healthcare professional, attend talks and taster sessions, meet local organisations and learn more about the support available in their area. In total, 181 Cardiovascular health checks were delivered and 23 fitness assessments.



Above: Making sure everyone has a seat at the table; beautiful Stonehaven shoreline.

The aim was simple: to make prevention, early intervention and health improvement more accessible. By bringing together health, social care and community organisations, we were able to offer a more holistic experience and people valued being able to have informal conversations. The input of staff, volunteers and partner organisations was key to the event’s success.

The positive response from the community has reinforced our belief that prevention is most effective when it happens alongside communities rather than solely within healthcare settings. We are now reviewing the learning from this event and exploring how Community Appointment Days can continue to develop, helping more people access support earlier and strengthening links between primary care and the communities we serve.

By Dr Michelle Harper, Portlethen GP Partner and K&M Cluster Quality Lead





People First

Creating a positive, supportive and transparent culture is an important priority for NHS Grampian over the coming year. This includes prioritising the importance of staff appraisals, building on our annual iMatter staff survey and using real-time feedback from wards to make improvements. Placing a strong focus on people, leadership and governance simply means making sure our organisation is well led, that decisions are made openly and responsibly, and that people feel listened to, valued and involved.

Luan Grugeon, strategic development manager for colleagues and citizens engagement, said: “We are committed to improving the way we engage with people and ensuring feedback helps shape the services we deliver. We want patients and communities to feel informed and involved, and we want staff to feel safe to share ideas, raise concerns and contribute to improvements.”

Over recent months, NHS Grampian has been working to strengthen leadership, improve accountability and build a culture based on openness, trust and collaboration. Listening to feedback is a key part of this.

Strong governance may sound technical, but it is about doing the right thing, being accountable for our actions and making sure we learn and improve.

Work is underway to improve both Board governance and operational governance in the organisation. An improvement plan will be discussed at the meeting of the Board of NHS Grampian in October, setting out how we will strengthen Board governance. Operationally, we are focusing on strengthening decision-making by the Executive Team, the Baird and ANCHOR, acute sector governance and clinical governance as priority areas. By strengthening our leadership, supporting our workforce and continuing to put people first, we can build trust and create a stronger NHS Grampian for the future.



People

Key actions

- Increase the percentage of staff reporting through the iMatter staff survey they 'feel involved in decision-making
- Roll-out a Real-Time Feedback process, gathering feedback from patients and staff, to 10 wards across Aberdeen Royal Infirmary and Woodend Hospital
- Increase the completion rate of staff appraisals



Improving healthcare in Grampian through better prevention and earlier intervention



Spotlight: New report highlights need to tackle inequalities and improve women's health across Grampian

Prevention is one of our key priorities, and our new Director of Public Health Annual Report highlights why taking action early can make such a difference to people's lives. The report calls for a prevention-focused approach to improving health, supported by employers, public services, third sector partners, volunteers and the wider community.

With a different area of population health focus each time, this edition shows that while progress has been made in some areas of women's health, significant inequalities remain - with women in more deprived communities and those

who experience isolation having poorer health. Professor Shantini Paranjothy, Director of Public Health said: "During the development of this report, we listened to women and their stories and experiences are highlighted throughout. We will continue to listen to and work with women to tackle the inequities we see, including, but not limited to, living longer but in poorer health.

"This report reinforces the fact that improving women's health requires more than healthcare services alone. Health is shaped by wider factors including income, education, work and community support."

Prevention Updates... (continued)

Consultant gynaecologist Lucky Saraswat has led the introduction of 'My Endo, My Way' events to help broaden access to support for those concerned about endometriosis, as well as launching a helpline to provide ongoing support to those in her care living with the condition. She explained: "Everybody's experience of endometriosis is different and there are lots of myths out there about the condition so it's important services help to dispel those myths and offer a personalised approach. Events have been really popular so far and clinicians who have attended have also given us feedback about how helpful these are."

The full Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025: Women's Health is available to view by following this link: [Director of Public Health Annual Report 2025](#)

Supporting prevention in Grampian – one assessment at a time



Advanced public health practitioner Melanie Dolan has shared a little bit about how her work links to organisational priorities.

Melanie said: "In my day-to-day role, I support the priority to increase uptake of cardiovascular disease assessments by 30% – a key action under our Prevention agenda. This means helping identify people who may be at risk of developing heart disease, particularly in our most deprived communities, and making sure they get the right follow-up support."

Melanie works closely GP practices and other health providers to:

- use data and local insight to identify populations at higher risk of CVD
- reduce inequalities by helping reach people missing from checks
- create simple tools like the Heart Health animation to help people understand their risk and take up CVD assessments

Anyone who is eligible for this scheme will be contacted by healthcare providers.



Prevention

Key actions

- Support 5% of the adult population (aged 16+) in Grampian who smoke to set a quit date
- Increase access to weight management services by 10%
- Increase uptake of prevention scheme to help identify people who may be at risk of developing heart disease by 30%
- Increase the number of people who are breastfeeding when their babies are aged 6-8 weeks
- Increase the uptake of six national screening programmes
- Achieve vaccination uptake levels in line with national targets

Urgent & Unscheduled Care Updates...



Working together to improve urgent and unscheduled care

Like health and social care services across the country, our most significant challenges remain in Unscheduled Care.

There are early indications that our improvement plan is beginning to have an effect, however the scale and complexity of the challenges mean this has not yet translated into the improvements we need to see against the national four-hour target and ambulance handover times.



Revised delayed discharges targets have been met, but too many of our patients continue to experience prolonged waits for care and treatment, so this remains a top priority in 2026/27.

Recent data shows encouraging improvements in acute bed occupancy at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (ARI), increasing Hospital@Home patient support, and effective re-routing of Emergency Department patients to more appropriate care pathways.

Performance across the wider system of health and social care remains mixed, with ongoing pressures in patient flow through our hospitals, capacity and demand.

Executive lead for this area of work, Leigh Jolly, who is also Chief Officer of Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership, explained: “Overall, while progress has been made in targeted areas, this has not been sufficient to deliver sustained system-wide improvement, reinforcing the need for continued focus into 2026/27.

“Teams across health, social care and partner organisations have been working closely together to help people return home sooner when they are well enough, providing more care at home, and supporting alternatives to hospital admission wherever it is safe and appropriate.

“There have been some encouraging signs of progress. The focus now is on building on the progress already made. By continuing to work together across services, we aim to reduce delays, improve patient experience and ensure people can access timely, safe and effective care when they need it most.”



Urgent Care

Key actions

- Reduce median ambulance turnaround times and improve 4-hour emergency department performance
- Reduce the number of delayed discharges in acute hospitals to 5 per Health and Social Care Partnership
- Achieve average hospital occupancy of 98% and reduce acute hospital length of stay by 0.5 days



Building on improvement

Overall, our Planned Care position is mixed - with sustained improvement in diagnostics but continued challenges in cancer pathways.

Towards the end of 25/26 we started to see improvements in planned care, including against the 52-week Treatment Time Guarantee and we have met the progress markers agreed with the Scottish Government in the first quarter of this financial year.

Clear progress has been made in reducing 52-week waits and improving diagnostics. We have also seen improvement through increased capacity, pathway redesign and backlog reduction – and further improvement projects continue.

In cancer pathways and elements of endoscopy, capacity and constraints continue to affect performance. Cancer performance has remained difficult, with both the 31-day and 62-day standards below target, reflecting the difficulty in sustaining earlier improvements. The 31-day standard remains in progress and declined at year 25/26 end, while the 62-day standard has not been achieved.

Overall, results have been partially achieved, with progress in key areas but insufficiently consistent improvement across the programme, reinforcing the need for continued focus into 2026/27.

Geraldine Fraser, who is executive lead for this priority area as well as chief officer for acute services, explained: “Whether someone is waiting for an outpatient



appointment, a diagnostic test or treatment, we know that long waits can be worrying, and we are committed to helping patients get the care they need as quickly as possible.

“Teams have worked hard to increase capacity, recover services and reduce the number of people facing the longest waits. As a result, there have been improvements, particularly in radiology, and the dedication of staff across a wide range of specialties to make improvements is recognised and appreciated. We will continue to work with colleagues on areas of concern, explore opportunities to do things differently and deliver the best possible services for patients and families.”



Planned Care

Key actions

- Reduce the number of people waiting over 52 and 104 weeks for new outpatient appointments
- Increase the percentage of patients referred urgently with a suspicion of cancer who begin treatment within 62 days
- Reduce the percentage of endoscopy and radiology patients waiting over six weeks for diagnostic tests



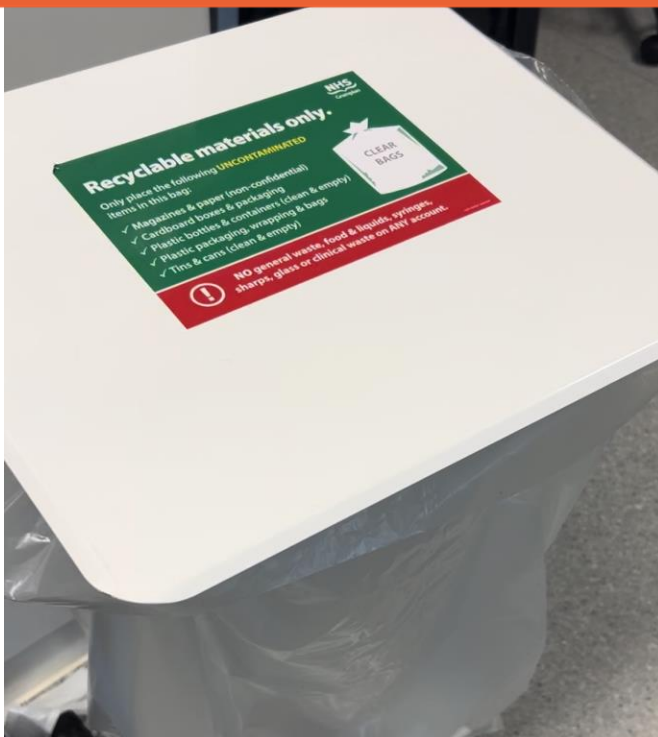
Building a sustainable NHS for the future

The NHS Grampian Financial Plan sets out a requirement to deliver £40 million of savings in 2026/27 to achieve a planned deficit position of £36 million by the end of the financial year. A detailed Value and Sustainability Plan was approved in March 2026 to support delivery of these savings with oversight provided via the Value and Sustainability Programme. The Plan includes a commitment to deliver 3% recurring savings on baseline budgets, in line with national planning guidance.

Savings are expected to be delivered across both Board-controlled services and within the three Integration Joint Boards (IJBs), with system-wide savings used to demonstrate achievement of the 3% target.

Director of Finance, Alex Stephen commented: “Like many other organisations, we are facing rising costs at the same time as rising demand. Teams continue to work hard to ensure resources are used as effectively as possible while continuing to provide safe, high-quality care. Through careful financial planning, stronger financial management and a focus on improving efficiency, significant progress has been made.

“Improvements have been achieved thanks to the efforts of staff across a range of services who have supported changes that help make the best use of public resources. We exceeded savings targets in the last financial year and will continue to do everything we can to strengthen our financial position. Collaboration with partners, suppliers and service providers is key to this area of work.”



One of the simplest ways we can all contribute is to reduce, reuse and recycle health and social care resources whenever and wherever we can.

This includes only ordering what you need when it comes to prescriptions and taking regular medications with you during hospital stays.



Value and
Sustainability

Key actions

- Achieve a minimum of £40 million in-year savings by March 2027
- Achieve 3% of continuing recurrent savings against our annual budget, in line with Scottish Governments requirements for all Boards
- Make sure we don't overspend by more than £36million by March 2027



In changing how we do things and driving efficiency wherever possible, protecting the quality and safety of care remains our first priority



Across NHS Grampian, we all share a clear and simple goal: to provide care that is safe, effective and centred on the people we serve. Every day, colleagues across our services deliver compassionate, high-quality care – often in challenging circumstances – and that commitment remains our strongest foundation.

Looking ahead, we are strengthening how we support that care. Clinical Quality and Safety is now one of our six organisational priorities for 2026/27, reflecting how central this work is to everything we do.

This is about improvement, not criticism. It recognises that while care is strong, our

systems and processes must be consistently robust, visible and responsive – so we can identify risks early, act quickly and sustain progress.

A wide programme of work is already underway. This includes strengthening how we learn from events and feedback, improving consistency across services, and introducing new groups to enhance oversight and shared learning.

By working together, listening, learning and supporting one another, we can continue to build a system that is open, confident and focused on what matters most: safe, high-quality care for every person, every time.

Final thoughts...

Through Community Conversations we have heard your keenness to make sure clear information and updates about NHS Grampian's progress reaches those who are not online. Word-of-mouth is still the most powerful form of communication, and if you are receiving this newsletter we would appreciate everything you can do to stimulate conversation within your own community and share your feedback with us.

Throughout this newsletter, we've highlighted some of the progress being made across our Priorities for Delivery. While there is still much to do, these achievements demonstrate what can be accomplished when we work together with a shared purpose.

The NHS is only one part of the wider health and care system. The support of local communities, volunteers, carers, community groups, charities, partner organisations and people with lived experience is vital in helping us improve health and wellbeing across Grampian. Whether it's helping to prevent illness, supporting people to stay independent, shaping services through feedback, or working alongside us to deliver care closer to home, our communities play an essential role in achieving our goals.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed to progress so far and we look forward to continuing this journey together.

We want your feedback

Contact us

- Please keep in touch by emailing gram.involve@nhs.scot
- We'd love to hear your feedback on this newsletter and social media posts we've shared to keep the story going.



Priorities for Delivery 2026-27 at-a-glance



People, Leadership and Governance

- Improve staff experience and wellbeing so colleagues feel valued, supported and able to deliver high-quality care.



Prevention

- Reduce health inequities, prevent or mitigate the health conditions which cause the greatest burden of disease, and reduce the future burden of demand for hospital care.



Planned Care

- Further improve waiting times for planned care (operations, outpatient appointments, tests and scans), and cancer care.



Urgent and Unscheduled Care

- Improve the timeliness of, and access to, urgent and emergency care for our patients.



Value and Sustainability

- Reduce the in-year financial gap by £40m, to a deficit of no more than £36m, through the delivery of sustainable, cash-releasing, recurring savings across the organisation.



Clinical Quality & Safety