

## News release

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### No clear plan to deliver NHS vision

**The Scottish Government needs a delivery plan that clearly explains to the public how it will reform the NHS and address the pressures on services.**

Despite increasing funding and staffing, the NHS in Scotland is still seeing fewer patients than before the Covid-19 pandemic. Auditors found that:

- commitments to reducing waiting lists and times have not been met
- the number of people remaining in hospital because their discharge has been delayed is the highest on record
- and NHS initiatives to improve productivity and patient outcomes have yet to have an impact and lack clear progress reporting.

Health accounts for about 40 per cent of the Scottish budget. Funding grew again in 2023/24 but has mostly been used to cover pay commitments and inflation. Costs are forecast to continue rising and making savings remains challenging. Work to build new healthcare facilities also remains paused.

The Scottish Government's restated vision for health and social care is not clear on how these operational pressures on the NHS will be addressed or how reform will be prioritised. It needs to work with NHS staff, partners and the public to set out a clear delivery plan and make tough decisions about how it may change or potentially even stop some services.

**Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland**, said:

“To safeguard the NHS, a fundamental change in how services are provided remains urgent. The Scottish Government needs to set out clearly to the public and the health service how it will deliver reform, including how progress will be measured and monitored.

“Difficult decisions are needed about making services more efficient or, potentially, withdrawing those services with more limited clinical value to allow funding to be re-directed. Taking those steps will require greater leadership from Scottish Government and NHS leaders than we've seen to date.”

For further information contact Patrick McFall Tel: 0131 625 1663 / 07786660171  
[pmcfall@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:pmcfall@audit-scotland.gov.uk) or [media@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:media@audit-scotland.gov.uk)

## Notes to Editor:

**1.** Health remains the single biggest area of government spending at £19.1 billion in 2023/24 - a 2.5% increase since 2022/23 in real terms.

**2.** The planned increase in health spending in 2024/25, to £19.4 billion, reflects the long-term trend of annual increases in health spending (see Exhibit 1). This puts pressure on other public services.

**3.** Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 are available at [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)

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