

News release

Embargoed until 00:01 hours, 27 March 2025

GP plan failing to deliver

A Scottish Government agreement with GPs to improve general practice has failed to deliver on several of its commitments.

The 2018 General Medical Service (GMS) contract aimed to address the financial pressures and growing workloads facing GPs, and to improve patients' access to care. However, seven years on:

- the estimated number of whole-time equivalent GPs has fallen
- pressure on general practice has increased
- proposals to support GP teams with more nurses, physiotherapists and other specialists have moved more slowly than planned
- and people report finding it more difficult to access care.

The Scottish Government has not set out how it intends to invest in general practice over the medium-term. And it is unlikely to hit its target of 800 more GPs by 2027. Spending on general practice as a proportion of overall NHS spending has fallen slightly in recent years. And between 2021/22 and 2023/24 spending decreased by 6 per cent in real terms, putting more pressure on GP practices.

National data for primary care remains inadequate. There is a lack of robust information about general practice demand, workload, workforce, and quality of care. This limits the Scottish Government's ability to say whether the GMS contract changes represent value for money or have improved patient care.

Stephen Boyle, Auditor General for Scotland, said:

"The pandemic pushed back plans for general practice. But the new delivery deadlines that were put in place were missed, and there's not been enough transparency about progress since then.

"The Scottish Government needs to clarify its plan for general practice and set out the actions, timescales and costs to deliver it."

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

Notes to Editor:

1. The 2018 GMS Contract is a joint agreement between the Scottish Government and the Scottish General Practitioners Committee (SGPC) of the British Medical Association.
2. Several commitments from the 2018 contract remain outstanding. These include expanding multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs) in six priority services (see Exhibit 1). There are significant gaps in implementing MDT teams across the country, and there is a lack of clarity about how much additional investment will be needed.
3. The Scottish Government has committed to increase investment in primary care by 25 per cent by the end of the parliamentary term, but it has not set out how much of this increase will be for general practice.
4. In January 2025, the First Minister committed to increase the proportion of new NHS funding that goes to primary and community care, but there is a lack of detail on the proportion for general practice.
5. Spending on general practice as a proportion of overall NHS spend was 7 per cent in 2017/18 and 6.5 per cent in 2023/24.
6. Patients reported feeling less satisfied about the care provided by their general practice in response to the 2023/24 Health and Care Experience Survey (see Exhibit 5).
7. 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
 - The Auditor General appoints auditors to Scotland's central government and NHS bodies; examines how public bodies spend public money; helps them to manage their finances to the highest standards; and checks whether they achieve value for money. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament
 - Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission for Scotland.