

## News release

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# Scotland making good progress on heart disease and could make savings in cardiology services

Scotland has made good progress in reducing the numbers of people affected by heart disease, including reducing deaths, and the NHS could save at least £4 million a year by making cardiology services more efficient.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *Cardiology services*, looks at how effectively these services are run, how much is spent and whether patients across the country get the same access to services. It also looks at some services in the community such as prescribing and prevention. More than 182,000 people in Scotland – 3.3 per cent of the country's population – have heart disease and it kills more than 8,000 people a year.

The report finds there has been significant progress in tackling heart disease and developing services; death rates have dropped by 40 per cent in 10 years, more patients are getting better treatment and waiting times for treatment have fallen. However Scotland still has the highest rate of heart disease in Western Europe, and the NHS needs to ensure all patients get the services they need, such as those who may benefit from cardiac rehabilitation and heart failure patients.

The NHS spends at least £146 million a year on hospital cardiology services; this is a significant underestimate due to limited cost information and also does not include general practice and community treatment. From what information is available, Audit Scotland estimates at least £4.4 million could be saved a year by cutting prescribing costs, reducing hospital stays, treating more patients as day cases and using less invasive and cheaper tests to diagnose people.

Auditor General for Scotland Robert Black said: "Heart disease is the second highest cause of death in Scotland. The country needs to continue its efforts to prevent heart disease, including addressing issues such as obesity, smoking and physical inactivity."

"The NHS is making good progress in providing better treatment for more patients. People are living longer with heart disease, and patients are waiting a shorter time for cardiology treatment. The NHS needs to ensure services meet patients' needs as efficiently as possible. It should make sure it has consistent and accurate information about cardiology services so local areas can monitor their performance, compare services and identify areas to improve services and save money."

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### Notes to editors

1. Coronary heart disease (CHD) is one of the three leading causes of premature death in Scotland, alongside cancer and stroke. An estimated 3.3 per cent of Scotland's population has CHD. The rate is higher in men (4.2 per cent) than in women (2.5 per cent) and strongly related to age; about 16 per cent of Scotland's over-75s have CHD and in some deprived areas around 25 per cent of men aged 75 and over have CHD. Among risk factors such as age, diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, smoking, being overweight and family history of heart disease, ethnicity is a risk factor, with south Asian men having more hospital admissions for heart attacks (7.7 per 1000 people) than the general population (5/1000).
2. Audit Scotland estimates the NHS could save at least £4.4 million a year in hospital cardiology services. However this is likely to be a significant underestimate due to limitations in information available about costs and activity. The NHS could save up to £0.8 million a year by making more use of cheaper and less invasive diagnostic tests; for example, if boards which carry out high numbers of angiography procedures used more

CT scanning instead. The service could also save around 4,700 'bed days' (days in hospital), or £1.5 million a year, by reducing the number of days patients with heart conditions spend in hospital, and treating more patients as day cases. Outpatient services could be more efficient and patients who do not attend their appointments cost the health service about £1.6 million a year. NHS National Procurement has achieved considerable savings for three drug and equipment contracts related to Cardiology services. Audit Scotland has identified a further £0.5 million of cash savings year for the NHS if local areas made further efficiencies.

3. In the community, drugs for cardiovascular disease account for around 15 per cent of the overall drugs bill, and the number of GP prescriptions has risen by 61 per cent over the past decade to 25 million in 2010/11. The NHS spent about £70.7 million in 2010/11 on statins, a class of drugs used for controlling cholesterol. Some statins are much more expensive than others, and there are significant variations across Scotland in the prescribing of the different versions. This variance seems to have little relation with health outcomes in those areas, and there is scope for the NHS to prescribe more cost-effective drugs.
  4. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)
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