



Eileanan Siar
Western Isles

NHS Western Isles
**Director of
Public Health**



Annual Report
2025

Acknowledgements

Thank you to the following Public Health Team members for their contributions to this year's report:

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Introduction

Public Health is about people. It is about helping people to live long and healthy lives. It is about supporting people to thrive in their communities. It is about protecting people from population health hazards. It is about empowering people to make changes that benefit themselves and those around them. It is about working with people to find solutions.

The 2025 Director of Public Health Annual Report for the Western Isles describes the work of the NHS Western Isles Public Health

Team throughout the year. It is presented by topic, across 16 chapters. It highlights the meaningful difference the work has made to people living and working the Western Isles in a variety of ways. It also incorporates feedback, expressing gratitude for the training, campaigns, resources, interactions, advice, and support delivered by the NHS Western Isles Public Health Team. In all that the team has achieved, and will continue to achieve going forward, people are at the centre.

Colum Durkan

Director of Public Health,
NHS Western Isles



Children



Alison MacDonald, Senior Health Promotion Officer

Introduction

The aim is for every child, regardless of their circumstances, to get the best start in life. While overall responsibility for children's services planning rests with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and NHS Western Isles, the Children and Young People's Planning Partnership (CYPPP) works collaboratively and constructively with other members of the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP), as well as with children, young people and their families to inform the development of children's services.

The Public Health Team is committed to aligning its efforts with the aspirations of Scotland's Promise, recognising that a fundamental shift is required in how decisions are made regarding children and families. It acknowledges the necessity of transforming the way support is provided to help families stay together.

The primary objective is to ensure that any action taken to address needs occurs at the earliest appropriate time and, where possible, is implemented as a preventative measure to stop needs from arising.

All children, particularly those who are most vulnerable in the community, and those who require additional support to keep them safe, should have their needs met. NHS Western Isles supports children's health through combining accessible information with practical, community-based learning opportunities.

Child Health

The Child Health Commissioner is a member of the Public Health Team. The Child Health Commissioner is responsible for providing strategic leadership to improve health outcomes for children and young people, ensuring that their needs are reflected in planning, commissioning, and service delivery. This includes working collaboratively across health, education, and social care, as well as championing the rights of children and young people by embedding their voices in decision-making processes.

The Child Health Commissioner took part in a joint inspection of children's services in 2025, where partnership working, accountability, and continuous improvement were key areas of focus. A central priority during the inspection was to ensure that the perspectives of children and young people were meaningfully represented.

The Lewis Youth Council delivered a PowerPoint presentation at the Public Health Team development day to focus the collective thinking of the wider public health team and sharpen priorities in relation to children and young people's health and wellbeing.

Healthy Hebridean Kids

The Healthy Hebridean Kids website was developed to support parents and carers across the Western Isles with trusted, easy-to-access guidance on children's health and wellbeing. The website provides clear, practical information on topics such as nutrition, physical activity, emotional wellbeing, sleep, and family routines, alongside links to relevant local and national support. The website enables families to find reliable information at their own pace and signposted them towards further help when needed.



HENRY

The HENRY (Health, Exercise and Nutrition for the Really Young) family support programme includes evidence-based resources to encourage positive family lifestyles, working alongside parents to build their confidence to identify their own solutions to improve the physical and emotional wellbeing of their family.

The Lewis and Harris Health Improvement Practitioner joined the Uist and Barra Health Improvement Practitioner in delivering HENRY sessions across the islands. The team provided an eight-week online programme “Healthy Families: Right from the Start” and a range of shorter online workshops on a broad range of health and parenting issues including Starting Solids, Healthy Teeth and Drinks, Let’s Get Active, Fussy Eating and Eating Well for Less.

Maternal and Infant Nutrition

Maternal and Infant Nutrition (MIN) is a government-supported programme that focuses on improving nutrition and

health outcomes for pregnant women, new mothers, and young children. Members of the Public Health Team co-chaired the local MIN Steering Group which aims to allocate the Western Isles MIN funding to provide support in early life on; infant feeding, and maternal wellbeing, helping families to establish healthy foundations from pregnancy through the early years.

Vitamin Distribution

The Public Health Team led the local implementation of national guidance on vitamin D supplementation. The Public Health Team ordered, packed and distributed vitamins for children under the age of three. Healthy Start vitamins for expectant mothers are included in the scheme and were made available free of charge to anyone who is pregnant or planning pregnancy in partnership with Midwives and Health Visitors. The Team tracked all ordered vitamins to ensure cost-effectiveness and impact, recognising the importance of vitamins in supporting healthy bone development, immune function, and overall growth. Vitamin D supplementation is particularly important in areas with limited sunlight exposure, such as the Western Isles.

Immunisations



Jake Johnson, Health Intelligence Analyst Specialist

Introduction

Immunisation is the most effective way of preventing disease and protecting the public against infectious diseases. Members of the Public Health Team monitor the proportion of the eligible population immunised as this is a key measure of the immunisation programmes' performance. It is of concern to public health when immunisation rates decrease, as this makes the possibility of disease transmission more likely.

NHS Western Isles offers immunisations following the Scottish routine childhood immunisation programmes. NHS Western Isles also offers adults aged over 65 years, and adults at risk aged less than 65 years, some routine immunisations. There are also specific cohorts considered at risk identified each year for the administration of Covid and Flu immunisations.

School Immunisation Champions

Following the success of the 2024 School Immunisation Champions initiative in Uist and Barra primary schools, the initiative was expanded to include Lewis and Harris schools in 2025. The initiative was created to inspire and empower school communities to support childhood immunisations through fun and educational activities.

Pupils took part in four online training sessions where they learned about how diseases spread, the history of immunisation, and the impact of immunisation-preventable illnesses. The sessions also covered important topics like consent and confidentiality. Pupil Immunisation Champions played an active role, setting up information displays, helping to distribute consent packs, and supporting school nursing teams on immunisation day.


Each group also researched and delivered a one-minute presentation on a chosen disease. These were enthusiastically received and delivered in both English and Gaelic, covering topics like MPOX, measles, HPV, influenza, pertussis, Meningitis, Polio, Typhoid, and Rabies. The champions had the opportunity to share feedback on their experiences, and they rated learning about the diseases and illness and how immunisations work amongst the most interesting topics.

Schedule Change Training


The Public Health Team delivered a series of education sessions to NHS staff in preparation for the 2025 childhood immunisation schedule changes. These changes included earlier protection against meningococcal disease, with immunisation offered at eight and twelve weeks, and the inclusion of the varicella immunisation within the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR), now known as the MMRV immunisation, from January 2026.

A new routine appointment was also introduced for all children aged 18 months who were born on or after 1 July 2024. At this appointment, children are offered a fourth dose of the six-in-one immunisation and a dose of the MMRV immunisation.





PEER Vaccinators Training Pack 2025/2026



compiled by
Isabell Macinnes
& Debbie Crackett

Peer Vaccinators

The Public Health Team developed a Peer Vaccinator programme to maximise flu immunisation uptake among NHS staff. A training pack was created by the Public Health Team, which included resources and links to support new and returning peer vaccinators in their roles. A total of 14 peer vaccinators were recruited alongside all midwives to deliver flu vaccinations across 11 sites in the Western Isles. Staff immunisation uptake increased in 2025.



Mental Health



Charlotte Herlingshaw, Public Health Administration Assistant

Introduction

Poor mental health has a considerable impact on individuals, their families and society (3). Strong evidence indicates that proactive mental health care in Scotland is crucial, with roughly one in four people experiencing problems annually (4), costing the economy £8.8 billion in 2019 (5). Promoting mental health support resources prevents long-term, severe issues and reduces health inequalities.

Mental Health Website

The Public Health Team marked Mental Health Awareness Week in May 2025 by launching a new Mental Health and Wellbeing website. The website was developed for people living and working in the Western Isles. It was designed to include local and national self-help resources and services in one easy-to-navigate space. It provides links to a wide range of supports, including resources for managing stress, low mood, anxiety, and loneliness, as well as guidance on how and where to seek further help. The content has been structured to support people who may be unsure where to start, helping them to explore practical tools for self-care while also making clear what professional and community supports are available locally. Clear language and straightforward navigation aim to reduce barriers to access, particularly for those who may already be feeling overwhelmed. The website aligns local pathways and services, ensuring that information is relevant and up to date. By providing a single, trusted source of mental wellbeing information, the project supports early intervention, self-management, and complements existing community-based and clinical mental health services across the islands.



"Site looks great, very easy to navigate."

"I am looking forward to seeing how the public interacts with this."

"I'll find the directory very useful in practice – so nice to have some up-to-date information and contact details."

Mental Health First Aid Training

The Healthy Working Lives Advisor launched the Mental Health First Aid training course for employers in July 2025. The course equipped participants with the skills and confidence to recognise the signs that someone may be experiencing mental health difficulties, to know when to signpost to initial practical support – whether to a colleague, friend or family member.

By developing a growing network of trained Mental Health First Aiders, workplaces are helping to foster supportive environments where people feel able to talk openly, seek help at an early stage and challenge the stigma often associated with mental health issues. There were 23 people trained in Mental Health First Aid across two courses in 2025.



“Excellent course that was both thought provoking and practical in terms of mental health condition, how they can be supported in work setting and other situations and how to approach and support these in a range of circumstances and exactly what our role should be without crossing any boundaries.”

“The training was excellent throughout, learning the word “parking” for my own thoughts helped me with the visual of what parking means to me. Learning the model of ALGEE and how it can be used for everyone that is in crisis. I must add that having training with a variety of different people with varied experience and learning from each other and making new connections with what other services are doing.”

Suicide Prevention

Suicide is an important public health issue. As deaths from suicide often occur in younger people, the number of years of life lost compared to average life expectancy at the time of death were five times higher for suicide than for road traffic accidents. The Public Health Team is a member of the Western Isles Multi Agency Suicide Advisory Group, which acknowledges that communities can play a critical role in suicide prevention.

NHS Western Isles joined partner organisations in June 2025 to celebrate the launch of the Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) programme. Three Distress and Crisis Training courses were delivered in 2025. The programme is designed to build and strengthen connected, compassionate support within the local community.

The Public Health Team delivered two Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) training sessions in 2025; one in Uist and one in Barra. ASIST is a two-day certified training course aimed at anyone who would like to be better equipped to prevent suicide or to support those who have been affected by suicide.



MENTAL WELLBEING

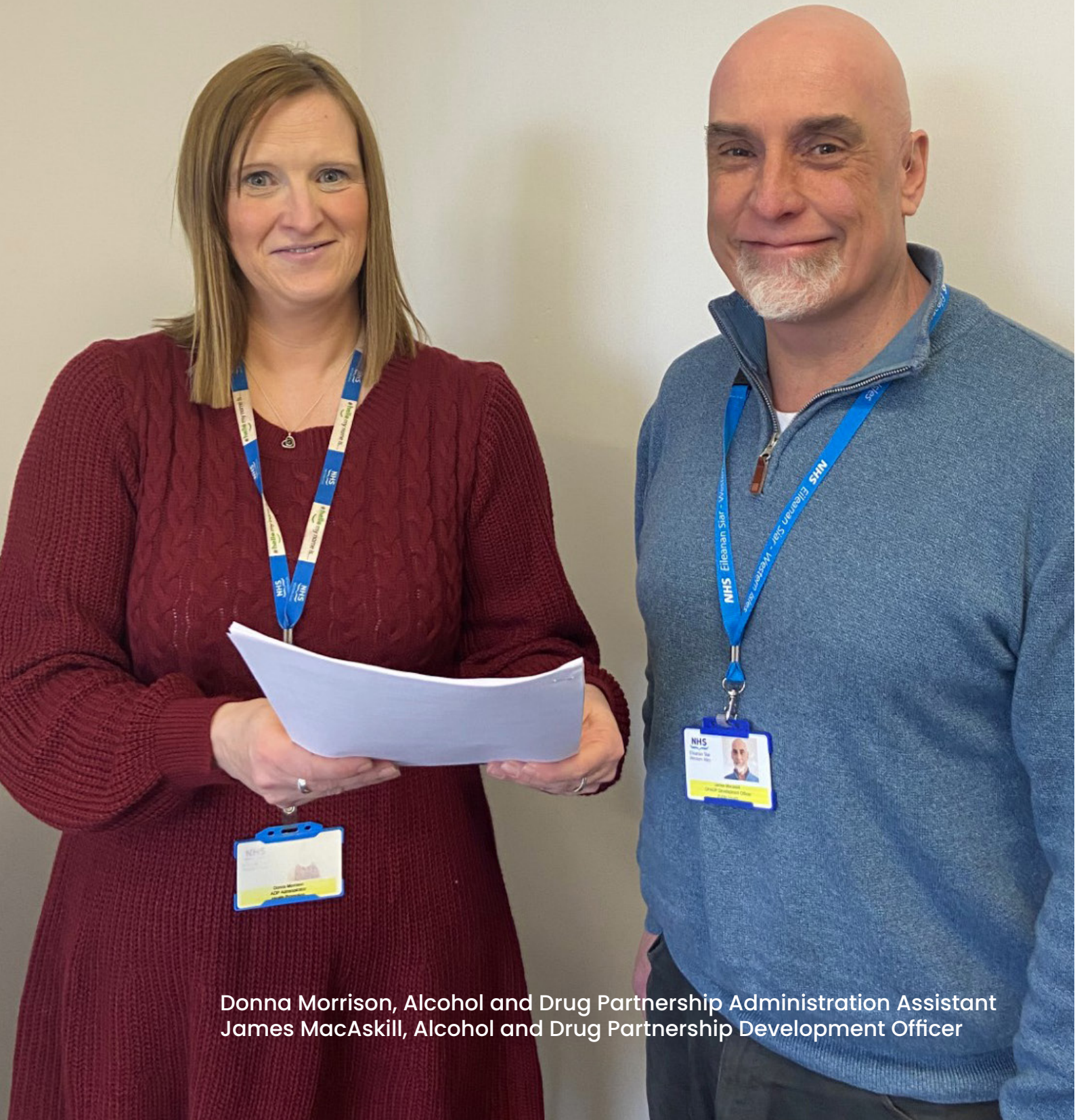
www.mentalwellbeing.wihb.scot.nhs.uk

Information, tools and resources to help you look after your mental health & wellbeing

URGENT HELP	MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS	LIFESTYLE CONDITIONS
SELF-HELP	WELLBEING	RESOURCES
WORKPLACE	USEFUL LOCAL LINKS	TRAINING

Positive Mental Health & Wellbeing

Alcohol



Donna Morrison, Alcohol and Drug Partnership Administration Assistant
James MacAskill, Alcohol and Drug Partnership Development Officer

Introduction

The Scottish Government recommends that men or women should not regularly drink more than 14 units of alcohol per week – the equivalent of six pints of beer, six glasses of wine, or 14 shots of spirits. Alcohol-related hospital admissions in the Western Isles, while sometimes lower than the national average in specific settings, remain a significant health concern. The Public Health Team co-ordinate a range of campaigns to reduce harm from Alcohol.

highlighted. Local support services across the Outer Hebrides were promoted and resources distributed to licensed premises.

Hebridean Celtic Festival Safe Space

The Outer Hebrides Alcohol and Drug Partnership Support Team in partnership with Action for Children provided support to the Safe Space Tent at the Hebridean Celtic Festival in July 2025. The tent, situated in the festival grounds over the three days, staffed by experienced volunteers from various organisations' including third-sector services. Staff covered the tent, the front of the arena area, the periphery and intensive support ensuring anyone who may have taken too much alcohol or substances or just required time out of the crowd and noise, had a place of safety where they received emotional and practical support. The staff worked in partnership with Scottish Ambulance Staff when additional support was required.

Winter Campaign

The Winter Alcohol and Drug Safety Campaign included sixteen days of information on the NHS Western Isles social media platforms aimed to raise awareness of the increased risks associated with alcohol and drug use during the colder months and festive period. The campaign provided practical harm reduction advice on topics including knowing your alcohol limits, the risks associated with alcohol while pregnant, the benefits of having alcohol free days, polydrug use, cocaine and ketamine risks, needle safety, naloxone awareness and overdose recognition. The impact of substance use on families was also

Eilean Dorcha Festival Safe Space

Members of the Public Health Team supported the Safe Space tent at the Eilean Dorcha Festival in Benbecula in July 2025. They were part of a team of the on-site crew, which included volunteers, Action for Children staff, paramedics, an ambulance and police to ensure festival goers were safe. The staff were accompanied by the Police Dog and its Police Constable Handler.



Older People



Walk

Walking Group

Get on Track

Grimsay

Dementia Walk

Easy Walk & Talk

Walk & Talk

Buggy Buddies

Northbay

Northbay Buggy Walk

Lochboisdale Health Walk

Uist Buggy Walk

Laxdale Social Seniors

Why walking
activity, it is
mood and i

For more info
laura.mackay

Laura MacKay, Health Improvement Practitioner

Introduction

The Western Isles has the highest proportion of residents aged over 65 and over of all the local authority areas in Scotland, at 27.4% (11). The NHS' strategic focus for older people is on prevention and early support, ensuring that every older person, whatever their circumstances, feels valued, supported and able to live well in their community.

Public and community organisations work together to make this possible across the Western Isles. There are several supports available to in help people to stay active, independent and included into later life.

Gentle Movement

The Health Improvement Practitioners delivered a range of classes offering gentle exercises to improve strength and balance and reduce the risk of trips, falls, and frailty across the Western Isles. Weekly Gentle Movement classes were available both online and in-person. The classes were free and open to anyone to attend, with between six to eight people attending on regular basis.

"It is really good for me to gather together and share in the class and meet up. Good for my mental health and also good to keep fit, it's really very enjoyable"

"Its good for me to do proper exercises and be guided by someone who has experience"



Community Development



Janet MacLean, Health Protection and Screening Clinical Specialist

Mary MacLean, Fas Fallan Manager

Introduction

NHS Western Isles supports several community development projects to reduce inequalities across the islands.

encourage social inclusion and community engagement. The inclusive design ensured accessibility and participation across all cultural groups and a high number of attendees.

Local Outcome Improvement and Locality Plans

Members of the Public Health Team represented NHS Western Isles on the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership (OHCPP). The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 (6) places a responsibility on Community Planning Partnerships, to produce two types of plans. The Local Outcomes Improvement Plan (LOIP) is one of those plans, which encompasses outlining local priorities for improvement, required actions and timescales the entire local authority area.

The second type is a Locality Plan and covers smaller areas, usually focusing on the areas requiring most improvement. Members the Public Health Team contributed to the Stornoway North and the North Uist and Benbecula Locality plans focusing on improvements to local priorities including childcare, employment and recreation.

Celebration of Learning and Culture Event

Members of the Public Health Team worked in partnership with The Learning Shop, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar, to deliver a celebration of culture event in Stornoway Town Hall in September. The aims of the event were to celebrate and showcase cultural diversity within the Western Isles, promote intercultural understanding and mutual respect, accredit the achievements of adult learners, strengthen collaboration between health, education and community sectors and

Cearns Resource Centre

The Public Health Fas Fallain Manager was based at the Cearns Resource Centre on Tuesdays and Thursdays in 2025. The centre acts as a hub offering advice and support through a programme of outreach services spearheaded by the Public Health Team and the Cearns Community Association; the Resource Centre hosted a variety of information sessions delivered by partner organisations such as: Tighean Innse Gall, Hebridean Housing Partnership, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Financial Inclusion Services, and the NHS Alcohol and Substance Abuse Support team. Each organisation used the centre's welcoming and private spaces to meet with individuals confidentially, providing guidance, support, and practical help in a comfortable, local setting.



Community I.T. Course

The Public Health Team hosted a six-week computer training course at the Cearns Resource Centre, providing local people with the opportunity to build confidence and develop practical digital skills. Community based digital training supports digital inclusion by equipping participants with the knowledge needed to access online services, communicate effectively and improve their employability, in a familiar and accessible setting.

The course was delivered in partnership with Hebridean Housing Partnership (HHP) and The Learning Shop, Comhairle Nan Eilean Siar. HHP provided laptops and funding for the sessions. Participants were guided through essential computer skills such as using email, browsing safely and accessing online public services. The course strengthened digital confidence, promoted independence and supported wider

public health objectives by enabling greater access to information, services and social connections.

Challenge Poverty Week

Members of the Public Health Team joined a multi-agency event at Stornoway Town Hall to mark Challenge Poverty Week in October. The event adopted an open day format and those who came along highlighted rising food and energy costs as immediate concerns. Partner agencies valued the networking opportunities at the event and will work to promote future events with a stronger social or cultural focus to improve public engagement. Significant interest was expressed in hosting cultural cooking lessons and those in attendance were also able to collect a free healthy recipe bag of ingredients. This reflected the event's approach to deliver practical support with dignity and community connection.



Healthcare Public Health



Any Questions?

- 2023 Guidance
- NHSScotland Wa
- Latest stage of treat... the publications:
- Publication 25 Novem
- PHS 2023 guida... Impact analysis:
- Publication 28 O
- PHS Waitin...
- Artim

Mark MacKinnon, Health Intelligence Analyst Specialist

Introduction

Healthcare public health focuses on the planning, delivery and evaluation of health care services to improve health outcomes, reduce disease burden, promote equity and ensure the best use of resources.

As a population health organisation, NHS Western Isles works alongside partners across public health, social care and community organisations to plan and deliver services that prevent ill health, detect risks early, and support people to live well with existing conditions.

The Health and Social Care Service Renewal Framework (2) sets out a long-term vision for health and social care in Scotland. The framework complements prevention efforts by placing renewed emphasis on early detection, timely intervention and effective management of health conditions to reduce harm and improve quality of life for the communities in the Western Isles.

Oral Health Needs Assessment

The Public Health Team worked in partnership with the Director of Dentistry in NHS Western Isles on the development of an oral health needs assessment. The needs assessment draws on a broad range of local and national data sources, to illustrate the demographic and oral health trends in the Western Isles. It also includes local dental and oral health improvement service profiles, and information on secondary care referrals to dental services elsewhere in Scotland. When complete, the needs assessment will support the planning of future dental and oral health improvement services and provide a baseline against which future oral health data may be compared.



Managed Clinical Networks

The establishment of a cancer managed clinical network in the Western Isles was facilitated by the Public Health Team, in conjunction with clinical staff members and partner organisations. Support and input were also provided to the respiratory, stroke and coronary heart disease, diabetes, and neurology managed clinical networks from a population health perspective. The Public Health Team coordinated the allocation of long-term conditions funding to the managed clinical networks, via an application and evaluation process. The funding resourced three FeNO devices to measure airway inflammation, a high-resolution fundus camera to enhance the quality of diabetic eye screening images, travel expenses for an occupational therapist to undertake a specialist hand therapy course, lymphoedema practitioner training, and functional fitness training.

Improving the Cancer Journey

Working jointly with the Western Isles Cancer Care Initiative and the Macmillan Team, the Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) project was undertaken to improve professionals' awareness of community-based support services for those living with cancer. This involved collating information on services and referral pathways and engaging professionals to promote the services in their area. There was a particular focus on physical activity classes, to complement the established clinical and emotional input available to those with cancer.



Smoking and Vaping



Joyce Beverstock, Smoking Cessation Advisor
Mags Ralston, Smoking Cessation Coordinator

Introduction

Smoking accounts for over 8,000 deaths and nearly 90,000 hospital admissions annually in Scotland and is a major contributor to health inequalities. ASH Scotland reports that 63,081 households could be lifted out of poverty if smoking costs were eliminated. The Public Health Team aims to reduce tobacco use, the leading cause of preventable illness and death. The service has evolved to address cultural shifts in nicotine use, including vaping. Local efforts focus on face-to-face support, education and media campaigns to adapt to community needs. Aligned with Scotland’s goal of a tobacco free generation by 2034, the service promotes prevention through training, workforce health events, and raising awareness at community events.

TIPS TO HELP YOU QUIT VAPING

Short-term vape use can be a really useful tool to quit smoking tobacco. But we don't know the long-term risks. If you have never smoked, don't start vaping.

Here are some tips for when you are ready to quit vaping:

Reduce nicotine gradually

- After 12 weeks of no tobacco at all (exclusive use of vape) reduce your usual nicotine liquid strength every 2-4 weeks, or longer as needed
- for example: 20mg-18mg-12mg-6mg-3mg-0mg

Reduce when you vape

- If you normally vape every 20 mins, try waiting 40 mins
- Only vape at certain times of the day
- Don't constantly have your vape in your hand

Reduce where you vape

- Don't vape inside buildings, in the car or in front of kids
- Only vape at work on breaks, outside

Choose a flavour you really don't like

- Making vaping less pleasant and enjoyable

If you ever get the feeling that you want to smoke tobacco again, reach for your vape or NRT
You CAN do this!

QUIT YOUR WAY with our support | Contact Smoking Cessation Quit Your Way 01851 708040

Reference: www.ncsct.co.uk/publication_Support_stop_vaping.php (April 2024)

Quit Your Way

The Public Health Team Smoking Cessation service, "Quit your Way", is benchmarked against national reporting from Public Health Scotland (PHS). NHS Western Isles has historically performed strongly within this national context, particularly in relation to sustained quit outcomes. The Smoking Cessation service received 225 referrals in 2025, and 87 clients successfully quit Smoking. The service supported clients through their quitting journey, including liaising with pharmacies and GPs where nicotine replacement therapy was appropriate.



Pilot for Hospital Care Packages

A pilot project was launched to develop staff training in referral to the smoking cessation service, and provide inpatient care packages including helpful resources and free NRT products to help manage withdrawal. Staff were trained to implement the “Ask-Advise-Refer” model at patient contact and referral processes were expanded to allow telephone or direct e-mail referrals to maximise access to the service. Referrals for hospital inpatients to the service increased during the pilot from 11% to 30% of total referrals.

Training

A recent quality improvement project aligned with the Smoking Intervention Framework (SIFs) focused on strengthening referral pathways to specialist smoking cessation support. The smoking cessation service benefitted from strong collaboration across GP practices, Community Pharmacies, Acute Hospital service and the Public Health Team. The “Quit Your Way” team delivered targeted staff training which improved referral pathways and increased staff confidence in delivering Very Brief Advice (VBA). This encouraged a more systematic, opt out referral approach.

“The referral process was clearly explained”

“Very informative and Interactive”

Vaping

The use of electronic cigarettes (vapes) has increased significantly in recent years, particularly among young people and individuals attempting to stop smoking. While vaping is often considered less harmful than traditional tobacco smoking, it is not risk free and can lead to nicotine dependence. The “Quit Your Way” team worked with national partners to develop educational resources on the potential harms of vaping in 2025. There were 13 referrals received for support with quitting vaping in 2025, and 12 so far in 2026 which was over double the number of referrals received in 2024.



Workplace Health



Craig McKeachie, Head of IT and Digital Health
Alasdair MacLean, IT Technical Officer

Introduction

Workplace Health is promoting and managing the health and wellbeing of staff. It includes managing sickness absence and presenteeism, where a person is physically at work but unproductive. Workplace health interventions include activities undertaken within the workplace by an employer or others to address these issues, and action to address health and safety risks.

Mentally Healthy Workplaces

The Public Health Team hosts the NHS Healthy Working Lives Advisor (1). NHS Western Isles actively promoted employee wellbeing through a comprehensive range of initiatives. Mentally Healthy Workplace awareness sessions were delivered to over 100 staff from a range of local employers in the Western Isles. Local workplaces also benefited from two funded Mental Health First Aid courses in 2025.



Mental Health Accreditation Scheme

The Public Health Healthy Working Lives Advisor developed a Mental Health Accreditation Scheme for employers across the Western Isles. The scheme was designed to strengthen workplace mental wellbeing through a tiered approach. Following consultation with local employers, the scheme was structured into three progressive levels:

Level 1 - focuses on building basic mental health awareness

Level 2 - requires employers to adopt a formal mental health plan, embed mental health within organisational policies and statements, and train staff as Mental Health First Aiders

Level 3 - employers are expected to implement a comprehensive mental health strategy, action plan, and demonstrate measurable improvements in workplace practices and staff wellbeing.

As a result of the consultation process, six employers have committed to taking part in the scheme.

Drugs



Angela Grant, Alcohol and Drug Partnership Coordinator
Mags Mackin, Health and Social Care Analyst

Introduction

The Western Isles have among the lowest rates of drug-related hospital admissions in Scotland. Similarly, drug-related crime rates have been lower than the national average. While the number of drug supply crimes remains

low, drug possession offenses have increased over the past 10 years, therefore the Public Health team continue to work with the Outer Hebrides Alcohol and Drug Partnership services to reduce the prevalence of drug use and its associated health harms.



Drug Detection Dog

The Outer Hebrides Alcohol and Drug Partnership supported Police Scotland to provide additional policing resources to employ a Drugs Detection Dog and Police Constable handler. The benefit of this additional resource has been evident through substantial drugs recovered across the islands thus keeping communities safe and protecting the public from harm. The dog and handler engaged in warrant searches, preventative work at local events including the Hebridean Celtic Festival and Eilean Dorcha Festival. They were also involved in public educational inputs and visits to local community groups.



Nitazenes Awareness

Nitazenes are a group of new synthetic opioids that have been detected in all parts of Scotland, some of which are up to a hundred times stronger than heroin. Nitazenes can be mixed with other drugs, so the person taking drugs is unaware they could contain Nitazenes. To mitigate any risk of exposure and manage risks of any locally emerging incidents the Public Health Team developed a local Standard Operating Procedure for Management of Urgent Out-of-Hours Drug Cluster incidents.

Naloxone Kits

Members of the Public Health Team promoted and provided Naloxone Kits from the Outer Hebrides Alcohol and Drug Partnership in 2025. Naloxone is a drug that can temporarily reverse the effects of opioid drugs such as heroin, methadone, codeine and morphine. Naloxone can be provided as a pre-filled syringe (Prenoxad) or as a nasal spray (Nyxoid). It is only effective for opioid overdoses but can also be effective at reversing a Nitazene overdose. Given the current strength of Nitazenes, sometimes repeat doses are required. The team also promoted free training on how to administer Naloxone.

Sexual Health



Manisha Sharma, Health Information and Resources Officer

Introduction

The Scottish Government has a vision for everyone in Scotland to have good sexual health and wellbeing. Their ambition is for high quality, innovative, Blood Borne Virus (BBV) prevention, care and support to be available to those who need it, in a timely manner and irrespective of age, sex, gender, sexual identity, background or location (13).

Scottish Government Sexual Health Team Visit

The Public Health Team hosted representatives from the Scottish Government Sexual Health Team at the Health Board Office in September 2025. The purpose of the visit was to share the great work happening locally with national colleagues, and to learn from their experience of supporting other Health Boards. The agenda included presentations and discussions on sexual health pathways, sexual health testing, data, and public health awareness. The visit was attended by a wide range of staff from across the Health Board, who are involved in the planning and delivery of sexual health services and campaigns.

Condom Distribution Scheme

The Public Health Team co-ordinated the free condom distribution scheme for young people and students throughout the Western Isles. The team maintained a stock of condoms, ensuring they were available for surgeries, community centres and other distribution points as required. A new online request form developed in 2025 streamlined the ordering process. This enabled the team to track the status of requests and resources and reduce turnaround times.

Sexual Health Education

Members of the Public Health Team have been working with secondary schools throughout the islands to develop a school training package to improve awareness on a range of topics, including sexual health. This education package was designed in partnership with the headteachers to ensure that the local needs were met.



Screening



Seyi Gansallo, Public Health Intelligence Analyst

Introduction

Screening is a process of identifying people who may be at increased risk of a disease or condition. Screening tests are not compulsory, but they are offered to help people make informed choices about their health. Screening can find serious conditions early, before any symptoms appear. There are six national screening programmes in Scotland:

- Abdominal aortic aneurysm (AAA) screening
- Bowel screening
- Breast screening
- Cervical screening
- Diabetic eye screening
- Pregnancy and newborn screening

Diabetic Eye Screening

The external provider's contract for Diabetic Eye Screening came to an end in April 2025. The Public Health Team reviewed the service and worked with the NHS Western Isles Diabetes Centre to develop a new Diabetic Eye Screening service within NHS Western Isles.

The service launched in June 2025 at three locations in Lewis, Uist and Barra, and is co-located with other diabetes services. The new model includes an agreement with NHS Highland to provide a slit lamp service three times per year. Diabetic Eye Screening is now available at all three NHS Western Isles hospitals.



Breast Screening Bus Consultation

A breast screening bus visits the Western Isles every three years; the bus is usually located on four different sites across the Western Isles.

A 2023 population survey conducted by the NHS Western Isles Breast Screening coordinating group sought responses around people's experience of attending their breast screening appointment. Analysis of the responses highlighted a number of negative comments around the difficulty of parking at the Western Isles Hospital site, resulting in missed screening appointments.

In response to this the Breast Screening coordinating group collaborated with partner organisations to identify alternative sites for the bus in 2026. A further online survey was devised and circulated for six weeks in Summer 2025.

The engagement results determined the location of the screening bus for its return in 2026.

Cervical Screening Audit

In 2022 a national issue was identified within the Scottish Cervical Call Recall System (SCCRS), where several women were excluded from the cervical screening call and recall due to an error in the recording of their Hysterectomy.

Members of the Public Health Team conducted a local audit in 2025 to check on

those women that had "no further recall" code on their SCCRS record. There were a smaller number of women, 36, identified as needing a review. An audit of those women's records found that 27 records were correct and required no action whereas nine cases required a prompt to the GP practice to explain the reason for exclusion.

The Call Recall Officers and the Cervical Screening Coordinator developed a process for reviewing the evidence when a women is now excluded from screening, which should ensure all future exclusions are appropriate.



Health Protection



Rhona McGuire, Senior Administrator
Isabell MacInnes, Health Protection and Screening Nurse Specialist

Introduction

The health protection service provides advice, support and information to health professionals, the public and other bodies that play a part in protecting the public's health. The work encompasses a range of issues from communicable disease control to environmental hazards.

Ticks and Lyme Disease

In May 2025 the Public Health Team hosted a session at Stoneybridge Hall in South Uist to update the public on the ongoing research into ticks and Lyme disease in the Outer Hebrides. The Health Protection and Screening Nurse Specialist shared data showing a decrease in cases of Lyme disease, specifically the "bullseye" rash (Erythema Migrans), with reports dropping from 52 cases in 2019 to 31 cases in 2024. A bullseye rash is a red, circular rash that appears around a tick bite, with a lighter centre, looking like a bullseye. This raised awareness that this type of rash following a tick bite could be an early sign of Lyme disease requiring GP treatment. Members of the Public Health Team also raised awareness of ticks and Lyme disease by hosting an awareness stand at the Lochs Agricultural Show in Lewis in July.

24 Hour Service

The Public Health Team investigates outbreaks, conducts contact tracing and provide specialist advice on a wide variety of topics to a range of professionals and the public to ensure community safety, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

In 2025, there were 62 cases of communicable disease which required follow up. campylobacter was the most common of these, others included salmonella, clostridium difficile, giardiasis, influenza, hepatitis, mumps and scabies. There were 23 situations investigated by the team. Of these, 13 were associated with water; including algal bloom on lochs, failures in private water supplies and toxin risks associated with shellfish. Support was offered to outbreaks in hospitals, schools, care homes and on cruise ships. An additional 34 general enquiries were recorded where a range of professionals sought advice on topics such as avian influenza, scabies, rabies, immunisations, respiratory illness, gastrointestinal and travel associated infections.



Outbreak Resilience Standard Operating Procedure

The Public Health Team worked in partnership with the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar’s (CNES) Environmental Health section and other agencies to develop a Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) document which set out a single working plan in the event of an outbreak on a large ship. The SOP document provided guidance on roles and responsibilities, routes for escalation, sets out how information may be shared and for what purposes and actions to be taken by an agency in the event of an outbreak situation. It should be read in conjunction with the joint health protection plan required by the Public Health (Scotland) Act 2008 and other specific plans relating to any incident under consideration.



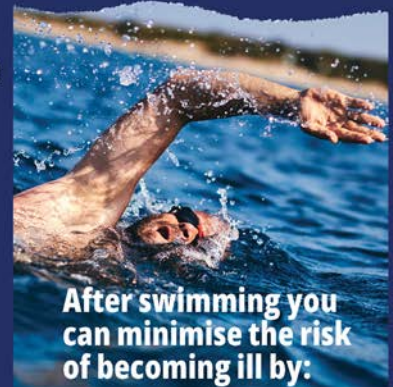
Open Water Swimming Campaign

Open water swimming, also known as “outdoor” or “wild” swimming, has several positive benefits to health, however the Public Health Team launched a summer 2025 campaign to raise public awareness on the potential risks of developing illness or Infections from open water swimming. This included posters and social media posts to raise awareness across the Western Isles.

How to reduce the health risks of



Open water swimming is a fantastic way to connect with nature, get great exercise and enjoy the freedom of lochs, rivers and the sea. But unlike swimming in a pool, natural water bodies can expose people to bacteria, pollution, cold temperatures, and strong currents.



After swimming you can minimise the risk of becoming ill by:

Choose where and when to swim

- look for signs of water contamination – avoid swimming in water with blue-green algal (cyanobacteria) blooms or scums in fresh water
- be mindful of shallow warmer bodies of water as they often breed blue-green algae.
- be mindful of where Scottish Water storm drains are located - more information available at: <https://www.scottishwater.co.uk/Your-Home/Your-Waste-Water/Overflows/Live-Overflow-Map>
- be aware of location of septic tank outfalls
- wait at least 48 hours after heavy rain in case of sewage overflow.

Before you swim

- cover cuts, scratches or sores with a waterproof plaster
- wear appropriate protective clothing such as a wetsuit, gloves or protective footwear.

While you are swimming

- try to avoid swallowing or splashing water into your mouth
- observe local safety advice
- wear bright colours that can easily be spotted in open water.

- cleaning your hands thoroughly with soap and water, removing all sand from hands before eating or handling food
- thoroughly cleaning cuts or abrasions using soap and water, before applying a waterproof plaster
- handling your wetsuit with care after use. Clean your wetsuit and swimsuit with detergent and rinse as advised by manufacturer
- do not do multiple swims in one day without rinsing your swimsuit or wetsuit in between.

Physical Activity



Kedar Paul, Senior Health Intelligence Analyst

Introduction

Physical activity is a broad term, including everyday activities like walking, gardening and DIY, as well as active recreation and sport (6). It is effective in the prevention, early intervention, and management of many long-term conditions and noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and breast and colon cancer (7).

The UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that adults undertake at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity (MPA); or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity (VPA) per week (8). The guidelines also recommend the inclusion of muscle strengthening and balance training activities at least two times a week and the minimising of sedentary time. The physical activity recommendation is slightly higher for children; it is recommended that children should engage in an average of at least 60 minutes per day.

The Scottish Health Survey 2024 found that 67% of adults in the Western Isles met the recommendations, compared to 65% nationally. However, a significantly lower percentage met the moderate to vigorous physical activity and muscle strengthening recommendations; 19% in the Western Isles, compared with 30% nationally (9). This has significant public health implications. The Public Health Scotland "Estimating

the burden of disease attributable to Physical Inactivity in Scotland" study noted that more than 80% of the 3,000 deaths attributable to inactivity, occur amongst those undertaking very low levels of activity.

Increasing physical activity supports Scotland's Population Health Framework 2025 – 2035 vision "We live longer, healthier and more fulfilling lives" and aligns with priority 2 "Improving Healthy Weight". Public Health Scotland outlined a framework for action at a national and local level in "A systems-based approach to physical activity in Scotland" which recognises an increase in population physical activity cannot be achieved by any one agency alone. NHS Western Isles worked with partners to develop the "Active Hebrides Strategy 2019-2030" and delivers several community and staff interventions to make the Outer Hebrides a more active place.



Walk on Hebrides

Walk on Hebrides started as a Walking Scotland affiliated programme which included the establishment of twelve guided Health Walks across the Western Isles, from Laxdale Hall in Lewis to Garadh A Bagh A Tuath in Barra. Health walks are intended to support those who may struggle to walk for 30 minutes on their own. Health walks are taken at participants' own pace, and leaders ensure no-one is left behind. As a member of the Scottish Health Walk Network, the Project Coordinator is a registered Walk Leader trainer. The project upskilled 14 walk leaders in 2025.



Active Travel

A free four-day Adult Cycle Skills Train the Trainer course was offered to those with an interest in improving community cycling skills, in partnership with Cycling Scotland. This training was delivered to five cycle trainers in April, who are now skilled in improving adult cycle skills across the Western Isles. A successful bid was made to the HTRANS People and Places Programme for the provision of a new female e-bike and a new bicycle storage shelter which was installed outside the NHS Western Isles Staff accommodation in Stornoway. This new shelter extends the Staff Pool Bike scheme offered by NHS Western Isles, allowing permanent and visiting staff to benefit from active travel whilst working in the Western Isles.

"I was working in WIH, Stornoway Pharmacy Department and a means of getting around town was hugely beneficial"



Strength and Balance

An eight-week community strength and balance pilot was launched through the Walk on Hebrides programme. This pilot supported six community groups, from Lewis to Barra, to provide a space and refreshments for their participants to perform strength and balance exercises in their community centre. The sessions have supported over 80 participants to practise exercises to improve their strength and balance.

"Participants have been enjoying the sessions so much we have joked about getting dumbbells in soon too"



Step Challenges

Two virtual step-challenges were delivered in partnership with HITRANS. A total of 314 participants followed a virtual route through Portugal for 12 weeks from March to June, followed by a further 309 participants on the September to December challenge on a virtual route through the Caribbean. Prizes were awarded in three categories, to ensure that incentives were there for all abilities.

“Brilliant challenge, it really pushed me to exercise and get the steps in even though I thought the target was unachievable at the beginning. A really motivating tool, and it being 12 weeks long I am hopeful it has permanently changed my exercise habits and that I will now continue walking”

“Thoroughly enjoyed the challenge and the camaraderie with the Harris girls in the WhatsApp group. Enjoyed seeing where they were walking and sharing my own walks. I ended my challenge doing an 8 hr walk to ice caves in a glacier in Svalbard, in -25 degrees celcius and polar night darkness, which was a great finale!”

“I have been recovering from surgery the last 11 weeks and it has been hugely beneficial for my mental and physical health in recovery”



Sustainability



Claire MacLennan, IT Infrastructure Specialist
Gordon Campbell, IT Technical Officer

Introduction

The climate and ecological emergency is also a health emergency. Population health is closely connected to the health of the planet, and the natural systems human life depends on. The NHS is responsible for around 4.5 % of the UK's carbon emissions. In response to this, NHS Scotland released the Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy: 2022-26 (10), setting out aims and targets to reduce the healthcare sector's environmental impact by focusing on five key areas:

1. Reducing building greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Implementing adaptation measures to meet future climate related challenges.
3. Embedding stewardship of our services, buildings and infrastructure assets.
4. Reducing and managing waste better, working towards a circular economy.
5. Valuing, predicting and managing green space.



"We are privileged to live and work in such a unique and special place. Spending time in nature is fundamental to health and happiness. I want to help conserve and give back something and help build a sustainable future."

"I became a green champion, because the environment is very precious to me, because I have already tried to make changes at work to protect the environment, and I would like to encourage others to do the same."



Green Champions

The Public Health Team established and led a network of Green Champions. The network consists of ten staff members, with representatives across the Western Isles. The membership includes GPs, clinicians, administrative staff and support services. The Green Champions met every six weeks throughout 2025 and brought a wide array of experience to collaborate and share ideas. Recent work included campaigns to reduce emissions from inhalers and waste from the incorrect disposal of medications.



Electric Vehicle (EV) Charge Point Expansion

The Public Health Team made a successful bid to the Scottish Government to expand the EV charge point network across the NHS Western Isles properties. The NHS Western Isles vehicles fleet includes 27% EV vehicles. The funding will enable the installation of up to nine more charge points throughout the Western Isles. Improving EV charge point accessibility will provide greater confidence in EV use. NHS staff have reported concerns regarding the current range between

charge points. Increased charge points will encourage both staff and the public to use EVs. Increasing public-access charging capacity in remote island communities will deliver environmental, strategic and community benefits and contribute to a just transition to low carbon transport.

Anchor Institution

Workplace Frame of Reference

Childhood Experience

Family + Friends

Neighbourhood

Employment

Relationships

Norma MacLeod, Healthy Working Lives Advisor

Introduction

Anchor institutions is a term used to describe large and locally rooted organisations such as NHS health boards, colleges, universities, police and local authorities. They employ many people, spend substantial amounts of money, own and manage land and assets and often deliver crucial services. As a result, they have a huge influence on local communities and economies.

The Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland work in partnership deliver the NHS Scotland Health and Social Care Anchors Institution workstream. This work was established in 2021 and members of the Public Health team focused on three key areas:

1. Workforce
2. Procurement
3. Land and assets

NHS Western Isles acts as an anchor institution, redirecting wealth back into the local community. This helps to address health inequalities and contributes to improved health outcomes locally.



Workforce

The Public Health Team worked in partnership with the NHS Western Isles Human Resources Team to actively promote employee wellbeing through a comprehensive range of initiatives. Staff benefited from strong work-life policies, NHS Western Isles' Living Wage Employer accreditation, leadership and management development, and interview skills training. The organisation supported pupils and apprentices through membership of the local Employability Partnership; a multi-agency group to maximise employment opportunities for the population. Engagement extended into schools, workplaces and the wider community through mentoring, careers and science fairs. These sessions included health promotion on topics such as exercise and walking programmes, smoking cessation, alcohol and drugs and mental health.



Procurement

The Public Health Team worked in partnership with the NHS Western Isles Procurement Team to ensure commissioning processes prioritised transparency, fairness, and sustainability through consistent use of the Public Contracts Scotland (PCS) portal. The portal facility allows procurement to include local suppliers, alongside clear and consistent tender documentation. The organisation contributed to community wealth building by purchasing non-clinical goods and services from local suppliers where possible. All contracts above £50,000 were publicly advertised and consideration was given to dividing contracts to avoid geographical disadvantages. Sustainability, environmental impact, and equal opportunities were embedded in the standard tender processes.

Land and Assets

The Public Health lead for anchors reported on the organisations' activity in this area. Through the introduction of a new Estates Asset Management and Helpdesk which strengthened asset management, improved sustainability, improved oversight and responsiveness and service resilience. Environmental sustainability and community partnership were supported by assessing Uist and Barra Hospital grounds for potential use by a local growing project to install polytunnels. Service capacity was further enhanced with the successful reopening of the new Emergency Department at Western Isles Hospital delivering a significant improvement to the healthcare estate and patient services.



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