



# SHA Scotland Scottish Parliament Election Manifesto 2026

## Discussion Paper

### Introduction

The Scottish Parliament elections in May 2026 may seem some way off, but now the general election is out of the way, political parties (including Scottish Labour) are beginning to consider their manifestos. This paper starts a discussion on our main health priorities, following an initial discussion at our last meeting.

### Overarching focus on health inequalities

Life expectancy has begun to decline in Scotland for the first time since the creation of the NHS. The problems are well understood and have recently been highlighted again by the SHERU in their [report](#), *2024 Inequality Landscape: Health and Socioeconomic Divides in Scotland*.

Politicians, and in fairness, the public, often equate health with the NHS. However, tangible improvements in the health of the nation require preventative spending at an earlier stage and move away from the silos that dominate government. Both issues were covered by the [Christie Commission](#) more than a decade ago. This requires a cross-cutting response across almost all policy areas.

SHA Scotland supports the [manifesto](#) of the People's Health Assembly, which argues that we must prioritise health in all policies – housing, transport, active travel and:

- Tackle poverty and socioeconomic priorities
- Tackle the climate emergency
- Protect equality and diversity
- Reduce health risks at work and in the home.
- Put local communities more in charge of the decisions that shape their lives

This includes tackling Britain's growing ill-health crisis, critical to increasing growth. The IPPR has [reported](#) that the UK government needs to invest £15bn a year on a radical programme of reforms designed to improve wellbeing.

### Reform of NHS Scotland

The Scottish Government [has called](#) for a 'National Conversation' about NHS reform. Few would disagree with the key areas of focus, including improving population health, investing in prevention and early intervention, providing quality services and maximising access to health and care services, or "standing against any and all attempts to privatise the NHS". However, other than some research funding, it is unclear where this conversation is leading.

The UK Labour Government commissioned Lord Darzi to conduct a quick review in England. Many of its [recommendations](#) merit consideration in Scotland, including the shift to community care, IT systems, and prevention. SHA Scotland has published its [discussion](#) paper, which includes:

- Funding the NHS. Investment in new technologies
- Build NHS capacity rather than use the private sector
- Integration of GP services into the NHS
- Build social care capacity to reduce pressures on hospitals
- Proper workforce planning ending reliance on agencies.
- A strategy for rural health care services.
- Improve democratic accountability

## Social Care and the National Care Service

The underlying problem facing the NHS across the UK is the failure to invest in social care, as the delayed discharge figures regularly remind us. As we set out in [our response](#) to the National Care Service consultation, the idea is right in principle, but the Bill fails to address the need for investment now. It would be better to scrap the current plan and start again. A [proper NCS](#) should address funding, scope, centralisation, workforce, care charges and marketisation.

## Role of local government and health services

Local government can make a huge contribution towards a healthier and fairer Scotland. Both directly through the services they deliver and in partnership with the NHS and others. Councils need to adopt health strategies, engaging with communities, that focus relentlessly on tackling health inequalities. And the Scottish Government must stop slashing council budgets and [devolve more](#), not less, powers.

We set this out in [our paper](#), *Local action on health inequalities*.

## Improving oral health

While the new contract has made some modest progress, access to a dentist is still a problem for many in Scotland, as private companies prioritise private patients over the NHS. The complaints system provides no redress for patients. We set out a plan of action at last year's Scottish Labour Party conference that includes:

- Developing a comprehensive workforce plan for dentistry.
- Expanding the salaried Public Dental Service to guarantee access to NHS dental care, focusing on the most deprived areas.
- Expanding the Childsmile programme and developing a preventive care pathway for all.
- Introducing public water fluoridation to Childsmile (SHA Scotland – [Water Fluoridation](#)).

## Mental health services

Mental health services remain the poor relation of NHS services. There needs to be a new focus on prevention with actions including:

- Workforce planning
- Funding of mental health services and CAMHS.
- whole-system, cross-sector approach to address the needs of individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (Autism and ADHD)
- Law reform, embed human rights approach

## Drugs and alcohol

The statistics on drug and alcohol deaths emphasise the need for better funding and services to tackle Scotland's national shame. This should [include](#) expanding funding for treatment and prevention, overdose prevention centres and licensing framework and an Independent Scottish Drugs Death Council. Alcohol use costs the Scottish economy up to £10 billion each year, including up to £700 million in health and social care costs. We should optimise Minimum Unit Pricing, restrict alcohol marketing and [introduce](#) an alcohol harm prevention levy.

## Health improvement

The global food system is intricately linked to many of the greatest health problems facing Scotland and the world. IPPR has set out how the food system could work for everyone. Other actions could include:

- Develop a National Food Plan and support the [Right to Food](#)
- Calorie labelling
- Sugar and other health improvement taxes. WHO calls to control the food industry rather than be subservient to it. There has been a rapid increase in Type 2 diabetes among young adults.
- Free school meals and breakfast clubs

If you have any views on the above issues, please email: [socialisthealthscotland@gmail.com](mailto:socialisthealthscotland@gmail.com).