

# Taking Action for Scotland's Mental Health

SAMH's Manifesto for the 2026  
Scottish Parliament election



**SAMH**

Scottish Action for Mental Health

# Foreword

Scotland is in a mental health crisis. Two people die by suicide every day<sup>1</sup>, loneliness is reaching epidemic proportions<sup>2</sup>, and demand for mental health support is through the roof.

In the most recent census, one in nine Scots said they have a mental health condition – more than double the rate in 2011<sup>3</sup>. Poor mental health is increasing at a higher rate than any other health condition.

We need urgent action to address this crisis. Yet the current Scottish Government has made little progress against their funding and reform commitments<sup>4</sup>. Access to services is appalling. National waiting time targets for NHS Psychological Therapies have never been met and over a third of children and young people referred to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are rejected<sup>5</sup>.



Meanwhile, mental health stigma remains a huge issue. People with mental health problems face prejudice and discrimination in all aspects of their lives, including in the health system meant to support them. Nowhere is this more starkly demonstrated than in the life expectancy gap which sees people with mental illness dying on average 15 years earlier than people without.

Scotland's mental health is as bad as it has ever been, and the current system is not meeting the needs of the people it was set up to help. The case for radical reform and increased investment has never been stronger.

**It's time to take action and create change for mental health in Scotland.**

*Billy Watson,  
Chief Executive, SAMH*

# We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:

**Support our 'Show Up' anti-stigma campaign** and commit to closing the mortality gap between people living with mental illness and people without by at least 10% by 2034 and by 25% by 2046.

**Roll out a dedicated Community Link Work Service to all CAMHS teams in Scotland** – costing just £600,000 annually – while ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of decision-making about their care more broadly.

**Immediately increase both direct and NHS mental health spending** to meet the commitments made by the current Government and then grow these over the course of the next parliament, while prioritising a genuine shift in funding to early intervention and prevention.

**Increase national suicide prevention funding to at least £6 million annually** – in line with spending by the then-Scottish Executive between 2003 and 2006 – and ring-fence local funding to facilitate action to reduce deaths by suicide.

**Consider the evidence we bring forward from The Nook**, our community mental health model, and provide sustainable funding towards a national rollout when the evidence shows it is effective – so that every community has easy, immediate access to quality mental health support.



# Stigma

Mental health stigma remains a huge issue, particularly for people living with mental illness. Nowhere is this more stark than in the life expectancy gap.

People with mental illness die on average 15 years earlier than people without<sup>6</sup>. Of these early deaths, two-thirds are from preventable causes<sup>7</sup> which are too often overlooked or dismissed because of a person's mental illness diagnosis. This injustice needs to end.

Urgent action and investment to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination in Scotland is vital. That is why we have launched our **'Show Up'** campaign, with an early focus on closing the life expectancy gap for people with mental illness.

We want to tackle all forms of stigma – from the stigma we face from others – and often internalise – to the structural stigma in policy and institutions which allows inequality and discrimination to endure.

## Take Action:

Click to write to your local candidates asking them to support our **'Show Up'** campaign.

# We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:



**Support our 'Show Up' campaign against stigma and commit to closing the life expectancy gap between people living with mental illness and people without by at least 10% by 2034 and by 25% by 2046.**

## To facilitate this, the next Scottish Government should:

- Introduce an entitlement to annual physical health checks for people with mental illness, backed by a fully funded and co-produced take-up strategy. All eligible people should be offered, and at least 50% should receive, a full annual physical health check by 2031.
- Tackle poverty as a leading cause of poor mental health and earlier deaths, by funding a national roll out of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) employability programme by 2031, and ensuring our social security system is adequate and works for people with mental illness – including by implementing the recommendations of the Independent Review of Adult Disability Payment.
- Ensure everyone living with a mental illness has access to social prescribing opportunities to support their mental and physical health. These should be tailored to the needs of people with mental illness and include specific help to stop smoking and free access to exercise referral schemes like SAMH's Achieving Active Lives.
- Improve the collection and publication of robust data about mental health-related stigma, including intersectional data, to inform action and interventions to tackle stigma. This should also include regularly published data on the mortality gap between people living with mental illness and people without.

## Mental health funding

Scotland's mental health crisis will not be solved without significantly increasing investment in NHS and community mental health services.

Greater and more effectively targeted funding is needed to revitalise the mental health system and support people to stay well

and live independent, fulfilling lives. Mental health services are currently unable to meet rising demand and experiencing a workforce crisis.



# We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:



**Immediately increase both direct and NHS mental health spending to meet the commitments made by the current Government and then grow these over the course of the next parliament, while prioritising a genuine shift in funding to early intervention and prevention.**

## To facilitate this, the next Scottish Government should:

- Immediately provide increased, multi-year funding to Integration Joint Boards - which have responsibility for community mental health - to ensure community mental health provision can be prioritised and expanded over the next parliamentary term.
- Increase the proportion of frontline NHS spend on mental health to 10% in the new parliament's first budget with an additional percentage point each year, reaching 15% by the end of the next parliamentary session, using Ministerial Directions to ensure NHS Board compliance if necessary.
- Commit to year-on-year real-term increases to direct Scottish Government mental health expenditure, starting from a baseline of £342 million in the new parliament's first budget<sup>8</sup>.

We cannot afford not to spend on mental health, with poor mental health costing the Scottish economy £8.8 billion a year in lost productivity and costs associated with unpaid caring<sup>9</sup>. **Money spent on mental health is an investment in not just Scotland's people but our economy.**

# A radical approach to community support – The Nook

The current approach to planning, funding, and delivering community mental health provision is not working.

Demand is increasing while provision is fragmented, inconsistent and challenging to access – where it exists at all. We need full system change which makes consistent, high-quality, and evidenced-based community mental health support available to anyone in Scotland who needs it. That is why **we are investing our own money to create The Nook - Scotland's first ever national network of free walk-in mental health support hubs** – which is finally giving people experiencing mental health problems a place to ask once and get help fast.

There is no need to book an appointment or be referred and there are no waiting lists. The Nook offers non-clinical help including: 1-on-1 and group support; capacity-building workshops; information, advice, self-help tools; wellbeing coaching;

talking therapy; and suicide-related bereavement support. An extensive outreach programme runs alongside this, helping many thousands more people in surrounding areas. We will actively engage with under-served communities, ensuring services are not only accessible but culturally relevant and tailored to local needs.

Our first Nook opened in Glasgow in October 2025, with the next in Aberdeen in summer 2026 – and more to follow. The initial locations were chosen to prioritise communities experiencing poor mental health outcomes but also poverty, unemployment, and social exclusion, ensuring support reaches those who need it most. But **we know all communities would benefit from access to The Nook.**

# We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:



Consider the evidence we bring forward from **The Nook**, our community mental health model, and provide sustainable funding towards a national rollout when the evidence shows it is effective – so that every community has easy, immediate access to quality mental health support.

The Nook will reduce pressure on statutory services by supporting people early and preventing their mental health from worsening. It will also support people to 'wait well' for NHS mental health treatment such as psychological therapies. With the ability to reach thousands of people, we believe **The Nook will provide**

**clear value for money – which is why we are investing £10m of our own money, raised through donations, to create the first round of Nooks.** Making The Nook available across Scotland will provide a systematic and consistent approach to community mental health support.



## Children and young people

Young people's mental health is in crisis, with a six-fold increase in people aged 16 to 24 reporting a mental health condition between 2011 and 2022<sup>10</sup>.

Despite increased investment in recent years, young people still face significant challenges accessing appropriate mental health support. Over one in three referrals to CAMHS are rejected<sup>11</sup>,

and we have little confidence that these young people receive appropriate alternative support within the community when they're told no.



# We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:



**Roll out a dedicated Community Link Work Service to all CAMHS teams in Scotland – costing just £600,000 annually – while ensuring that children and young people are at the heart of decision-making about their care more broadly.**

## To facilitate this, the next Scottish Government should:

- Consider the evidence from our existing Community Link Work Services in Edinburgh and Glasgow, which 100% of participants found beneficial and would recommend, scoring it an average 9 out of 10. Link Workers support people to 'wait well' while on CAMHS waiting lists by facilitating access to community support suited to their individual needs. We estimate that a Link Worker in every health board that does not currently have one would cost just over £600,000 annually.
- Support our Young People's Panel's campaign for mental health community link workers to be embedded in secondary schools in Scotland to ensure young people can get mental health support earlier<sup>12</sup>.
- Adopt the principle of co-production - working with and responding directly to young people when taking decisions which will impact young people's mental health. We have committed to this ourselves by launching our **Young People's Panel**, bringing together a group of young people aged 15-25 to help shape our own young people's services and campaigning activities<sup>13</sup>.

**The Nook is part of the solution to easily accessible support, embedded within communities.** It includes resources and support for young people and their families, as well as facilitating links within the community.

## Suicide prevention

Two people die by suicide in Scotland every day, with 704 probable suicide deaths in 2024<sup>14</sup>.

We know that empowered local communities are key to reducing deaths by suicide, but they need the support and resource to take the local actions needed to prevent and respond to suicide. While we welcome

the ambitions set out in the current National Suicide Prevention Strategy<sup>15</sup>, Scottish Government spending on suicide prevention is far too low, preventing effective interventions being rolled out across the country.



# We are calling on the next Scottish Government to:



**Increase national suicide prevention funding to at least £6 million annually – in line with spending levels of the then-Scottish Executive between 2003 and 2006 – and ring-fence local funding to facilitate action to reduce deaths by suicide.**

## To facilitate this, the next Scottish Government should:

- Significantly increase dedicated suicide prevention funding, as existing Scottish Government commitments of £2.8 million by 2026 is insufficient to meaningfully address the suicide rate and associated distress. Current funding commitments pale in comparison to the ring-fenced £12 million (equivalent to almost £18 million today) that the then-Scottish Executive spent on delivering Scotland's suicide prevention strategy between 2003 to 2006.
- Roll out the Sam's model for A&E peer support nationally. Sam's is SAMH's peer-led, drop-in service for people over 16 experiencing mental health issues, with an increasing focus on suicide prevention.
- Ring-fence local suicide prevention funding, to ensure suicide prevention is prioritised in all our communities, with local actions tailored to local need.

# How can you get involved?

## Together we must end Scotland's mental health crisis.

We believe our manifesto provides clear answers to the next Scottish Government – ensuring everyone has easy access to mental health support in their communities, free from stigma; that Scotland's young people are at the heart of decisions about their lives; and actions to tackle suicide are community-led and properly funded.

But we need your help to ensure that mental health is at the heart of the 2026 Scottish election and that the next Scottish Government and Parliament act to end Scotland's mental health crisis.



For more information about how you can help us end Scotland's mental health crisis and support mental health during the 2026 Scottish parliamentary election campaign, visit our website at:

[samh.org.uk/election2026](https://samh.org.uk/election2026)



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[www.samh.org.uk](https://www.samh.org.uk)



## References

<sup>1</sup> National Records of Scotland (2025) [Probable Suicides 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2023) [Social isolation and loneliness: Recovering our Connections 2023-26](#)

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Government (2024) [Scotland's Census 2022 - Health, disability and unpaid care](#)

<sup>4</sup> Audit Scotland (2023) [Adult mental health](#)

<sup>5</sup> Public Health Scotland (2026) [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) waiting times - Quarter ending December 2025](#)

<sup>6</sup> Audit Scotland (2023) [Adult Mental Health](#)

<sup>7</sup> Dregan et al. (2020) [Potential gains in life expectancy from reducing amenable mortality among people diagnosed with serious mental illness in the United Kingdom](#)

<sup>8</sup> Audit Scotland (2023) [Adult mental health](#)

<sup>9</sup> Mental Health Foundation (2022) [The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions](#)

<sup>10</sup> Scotland's Census (2025) [Scotland's Census 2022 - Health, disability and unpaid care](#)

<sup>11</sup> Public Health Scotland (2026) [Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) waiting times - Quarter ending December 2025](#)

<sup>12</sup> SAMH (2026) [Improve mental health for young people - Introduce mental health link workers in schools](#)

<sup>13</sup> SAMH (2025) [Young People's Panel](#)

<sup>14</sup> National Records of Scotland (2025) [Probable Suicides 2024](#)

<sup>15</sup> Scottish Government (2022) [Creating Hope Together: suicide prevention strategy 2022 to 2032](#)



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