

# Our manifesto for the 2026 Scottish Parliament election



## About the British Geriatrics Society

The British Geriatrics Society (BGS) is the membership organisation for all healthcare professionals engaged in the treatment and care of older people across the UK. Since 1947 our members have been at the forefront of transforming the quality of care available to older people. Our vision is for a society where all older people receive high-quality patient-centred care when and where they need it. We currently have over 5,600 members, including nearly 500 in Scotland. Our members work across the multiprofessional team, including geriatricians, nurses, GPs, allied health professionals and pharmacists and in acute, primary and community care settings.

2026 marks the start of the BGS's new Strategic Plan in which we have reframed our mission around five themes: a health system fit for purpose; healthy ageing for all; the right care for older people in the right place; high standards of care; and a workforce skilled to meet the healthcare needs of older people.<sup>1</sup> These five themes will underpin all of our work over the next three years and form the basis of our asks of the next Scottish Government in this manifesto.

### Context

The population of Scotland is ageing at a faster rate than other parts of the UK. The median age\* in Scotland is projected to be 45.2 years in 2039, compared to 42.9 years in the UK overall. Lower fertility levels and lower net migration are contributing factors to the faster rate of population ageing in Scotland.<sup>2</sup> The number of people in Scotland aged 75 and over is projected to increase by 85% by 2039.<sup>3</sup>

An ageing population is something to be celebrated – it is a triumph of healthier lifestyles and advances in medicine. However, not everyone lives into older age in good health and an ageing population also means increasing numbers of people living with frailty, dementia and other long-term conditions. The health and social care system in Scotland is under immense pressure, with workforce shortages being felt particularly in rural and island communities, and attempts to reform social care having stalled.

# Our calls for the incoming Scottish Government

## 1. Address delayed discharges

One in nine hospital beds in Scotland in 2024/25 were occupied by people who medically did not need to be in hospital but whose discharge had been delayed. The vast majority of those affected by delayed discharges are older people with 66% aged 75 or over. In 2024/25, people experiencing delayed discharges spent 720,119 clinically unnecessary days in hospital with the cost of the hospital bed days estimated to be over £440 million per year.<sup>4</sup>

Delayed discharges cause harm for older people as they are more likely to decondition while in hospital and are at higher risk of developing delirium or contracting hospital-acquired infections. Many of those experiencing delayed discharges will be living with dementia (either diagnosed or undiagnosed) and are likely to struggle even more with the unfamiliar and often distressing environment of the hospital ward.

Delayed discharges are not inevitable and there are steps that systems can take to ensure that all older people are discharged from hospital as soon as they are medically well enough. This includes ensuring that rehabilitation begins in hospital and is continued in the community so that older people do not decondition in hospital and are supported to recover. Better links across acute, community and social care will also enable community-based care to be arranged more quickly so that older people can leave hospital as soon as they are medically well enough to be discharged.

**Call 1: We call on the incoming Scottish Government to commit to addressing delayed discharges and ensure that older people are supported to leave hospital as soon as they are well enough.**

## 2. Community-based care for older people

As the population of Scotland continues to age, it will be increasingly important to ensure that high quality care is available in community and primary care settings so that older people are supported to live well at home for as long as possible. Older people should be able to receive care at or as close to home as possible, regardless of their geographic location. The implementation of proactive care in the community can identify people at risk of deterioration and intervene early to prevent or delay the onset of ill health. This has clear advantages for the individual as they are supported to live independently for longer. There are also advantages for systems as unplanned hospital admissions are avoided and overcrowding at the front door of hospitals is reduced.

**Call 2: We call on the incoming Scottish Government to ensure that community and primary care services across Scotland are adequately resourced to provide proactive community-based care for older people.**



### 3. Review of social care

Plans for the reform of the social care system have stalled under the current Government with the National Care Service Bill attracting significant criticism and eventually being halted. Progress on this issue is desperately needed with increasing numbers of older people in Scotland requiring social care support. Plans to reform the sector must include measures to value and support carers, both formal and informal, and particularly to acknowledge that many informal carers are older people themselves, who may have their own health and social care needs.

There are also growing concerns about the sustainability of the sector with providers in remote parts of the country struggling to continue operations. Rural areas do not have the population to support bigger care homes and increasing costs mean it is not financially viable for smaller providers to continue operating. As the population continues to age, this issue will become even more urgent with the impact felt the most in Scotland's rural and island communities.

**Call 3: We call on the incoming Scottish Government to commit to ensuring that the social care sector is sustainable and the system is fair to the increasing numbers of older people in Scotland requiring social care.**

### 4. Appointment of a Commissioner for Older People

The population is ageing and the need for someone to advocate for their needs is crucial. 64% of older people in Scotland do not feel represented by the Scottish Government and 52% feel that they are not represented by their MSPs.<sup>5</sup> The incoming Scottish Government must ensure that older people have an independent advocate for their needs by appointing a Commissioner for Older People. This person would be able to hold the Scottish Government and other bodies to account and ensure that older people are central to decision-making. The individual in this role could help decision-makers to understand the demographic change underway in Scotland and support plans to ensure that everyone in Scotland is able to age well.

**Call 4: We call on the next Scottish Government to appoint an independent Commissioner for Older People.**

### 5. A resilient workforce caring for older people

The ageing population means that more people are living longer with long-term conditions and complex health needs. To care for this population, a strong and resilient older people's healthcare workforce is required. BGS figures recommend that there should be one consultant geriatrician for every 500 people aged over 85.<sup>6</sup> According to data from the Royal College of Physicians census, Scotland tends to meet this ratio. However, this hides the complexities of Scotland's population and there will be some areas of Scotland, typically urban areas, that are well-served in terms of geriatrician numbers, while others will struggle to fill posts. It is also important to remember that older people's healthcare is a multiprofessional endeavour with colleagues from across nursing, allied health professions, pharmacy and general practice playing key roles,



in addition to geriatricians. The entire workforce should be supported to provide high-quality care for the older population.

It is also crucial that healthcare professionals from other specialties have the skills they need to care for older people living with frailty, dementia and other long-term conditions. Most healthcare professionals, with the exception of those working in paediatrics and obstetrics, will care for older people more than any other population group and it is likely that most of the older people they care for will have other conditions in addition to the one they specialise in. This means there is a need to upskill the multiprofessional workforce with education and training in conditions of older age, including frailty and dementia.

**Call 5: We call on the incoming Scottish Government to prioritise the development of a resilient workforce for older people's healthcare to ensure that all older people in Scotland can get the care they need, when and where they need it.**

### 6. A whole-Scotland approach to supporting people to remain healthy and independent into older age

As Scotland continues to age, it will be ever more important to ensure that older people are supported to remain healthy and independent. This should include supporting people to navigate health and social care services and enabling them to have control over their own care. Supporting people to live independently in this way has clear benefits for older people who are able to remain in their own home for longer and are supported to age with dignity. There are also clear system benefits as people who are supported to remain well are less likely to need unplanned healthcare, therefore saving the health system money.

**Call 6: We call on the new Scottish Government to put in place support to enable older people in Scotland to navigate their own health and to age independently.**

\*The age at which half the population are older and half are younger.

## 7. Ensure equality of care across the entire population of Scotland

The older population of Scotland is spread throughout the country with rural and remote areas in particular seeing increasing numbers of older people. Between 2001 and 2022, the over 65 age group in Accessible Rural areas<sup>†</sup> increased by 74% and increased by 53% in Remote Rural Areas<sup>‡</sup>.<sup>7</sup> Older people in Scotland generally rate their health as worse than other age groups. In the 2022 census, 15% of people aged over 65 rated their health as either bad or very bad, compared to 5% of the population aged under 65. Reports of poor health increase with age, with 42% of those aged 85 and over reporting that they are in bad or very bad health.<sup>8</sup> 15% of people above pension age in Scotland are living in relative poverty after housing costs. While this is lower than other age groups, it still represents 160,000 older people in Scotland who are living in poverty.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>†</sup> Defined as areas with populations of less than 3,000 located within a 30 minute drive time of a Settlement with a population of 10,000 or more.

<sup>‡</sup> Defined as areas that are more than a 30 minute drive from a Settlement with a population of 10,000 or more.

More must be done to bridge the gap between different communities in Scotland and to ensure that high quality care is available to everyone across rural and urban settings and across the socioeconomic divide.

**Call 7: We call on the incoming Scottish Government to commit to ensuring that everyone in Scotland is able to access high quality healthcare, regardless of where they live and their socioeconomic circumstances.**

The new Scottish Government will take power at a time when the NHS and social care are under immense pressure. However, there are opportunities to make changes that will improve the healthcare experiences of the biggest patient group, older people. We know that if services work well for older people, they are more likely to work well for the rest of the population. Experts from the British Geriatrics Society stand ready to support the incoming Government in developing services that will deliver the best care for older people living with multiple long-term conditions, including frailty and dementia, and support them to live well for longer.

If you wish to arrange a meeting to further discuss older people's healthcare, please contact BGS Policy Manager Sally Greenbrook ([s.greenbrook@bgs.org.uk](mailto:s.greenbrook@bgs.org.uk)) to make arrangements.

### References

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