

# UNISON

## *Influencers 2026*

### NHS SCOTLAND

The pandemic exposed fundamental staffing, structural and funding weaknesses in NHS Scotland. But that crisis did not cause the problems we see today, it exposed long standing issues that had been building for many years.

Here, as in other areas of the public sector, there are issues of underfunding. This is compounded by the NHS being the service of last resort.

The issues currently facing the NHS in Scotland will not be solved by politicians trying to grab headlines or continual restructuring plans. It will be solved by listening to workers, investing in public services, and putting patients first. The next Scottish Government must deliver real, lasting solutions — because the future of our NHS, and the dignity of those who work within it, depends on it.

### Key facts

- Despite reduction efforts, long waits (over one year) still exist for tens of thousands of patients in Scotland.
- Delayed discharges in Scotland, driven by social care shortages and rising demand, resulted in over 720,000 unnecessary hospital bed days in 2024/25.
- Safe-staffing issues remain a major concern for NHS staff, our survey showed 85% of staff did not think their employer was doing enough to tackle concerns.
- Over 126,000 ambulances waited over an hour outside Scottish hospitals in 2025, with over 9,000 waiting for 4 hours or more.
- UNISON 2026 survey of members showed a third of NHS staff reported having taken time off for mental health issues in the past year, with many staff talking about reaching “breaking point”. Four in five (83%) have experienced stress at work over the past 12 months.

### Key actions UNISON is calling for:

- End corridor care and make reporting of care in non-standard areas mandatory.
- Invest in workforce planning and a modern reward and recognition package.
- Recognition of the critical interrelationship between health, social care, social work, and primary care.
- Fair Work commitment for GP and community-based staff delivering NHS services.
- New technology and just transition agreement for the NHS
- Realistic bed modelling and resource allocation underpinned by a just transition agreement.
- Maximum one-hour limit on ambulance wait-times, guaranteed rest-breaks and meaningful early-retirement option for staff.
- The NHS workforce should be developed through greater investment in education training and staff development, alongside building capacity from within existing staff and academic structures.

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the heart of a fairer  
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