

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland

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# Rights Wellbeing Fairness

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Manifesto for the 2024  
UK general election

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# Summary

The 2024 UK general election comes at a pivotal point, following Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the cost of living crisis, all of which have had serious but unevenly felt impacts. It presents an opportunity to restore the UK's status as a global leader in human rights - not simply defending our existing framework but taking further action to progressively realise human rights.

It's a moment where, learning from our experience of COVID-19, renewed investment in health, social care and reducing health inequalities can transform lives. It's time to move on from an economic model rooted narrowly in GDP growth, towards a wellbeing economy and a rights based approach to public finances that values investments like care and social security.

Ahead of the 2024 UK general election, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) and our members call for all political parties to make the following commitments:



## Human Rights

- Uphold the Human Rights Act and European Convention on Human Rights
- Strengthen the existing human rights framework
- Deliver a fair immigration system that supports recruitment and upholds the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers

## Health, Care and Wellbeing

- Invest in health and social care
- Reduce health inequalities
- Address gambling harms



## Financial Fairness

- Reimagine investment and the economy
- Ensure social security and work deliver dignity for disabled people
- Repair the broken social security system
- Deliver a fair, renewable deal on energy



# Human Rights

Human rights are for everyone, and we all benefit from upholding and strengthening human rights protections.

## Uphold the Human Rights Act and European Convention on Human Rights

- **Oppose any attempt to repeal or reduce the scope of the Human Rights Act.**
- **Maintain UK membership of the European Convention on and Court of Human Rights.**

The UK has played a leading role in developing, advancing and embedding human rights domestically and internationally. There is much to be proud of in that history, from putting respect for human rights at the centre of European political life after the horrors of World War II, to the landmark passage of the UK's own Human Rights Act (HRA) in 1998.

Despite this laudable record, in recent years the UK has been on a worrying trajectory in relation to human rights. Proposals to replace the Human Rights Act with a more limited Bill of Rights were deeply concerning. The ALLIANCE welcomed the abandonment of this Bill and continue to strongly oppose any revival of these plans or any attempts to otherwise repeal or reduce the scope of the Human Rights Act.

Similarly, recent rhetoric in relation to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), incorrectly describing it as a "foreign court"<sup>1</sup>, has been worrying. The ECtHR is an international court, charged with Europe-wide enforcement of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which the UK was instrumental in drafting. This is a highly effective model for advancing human rights, ensuring that national governments are not left as the ultimate authority on their own compliance. The UK's membership of the ECtHR is a fundamental cornerstone of domestic human rights protections and must be maintained.



## Strengthen the existing human rights framework

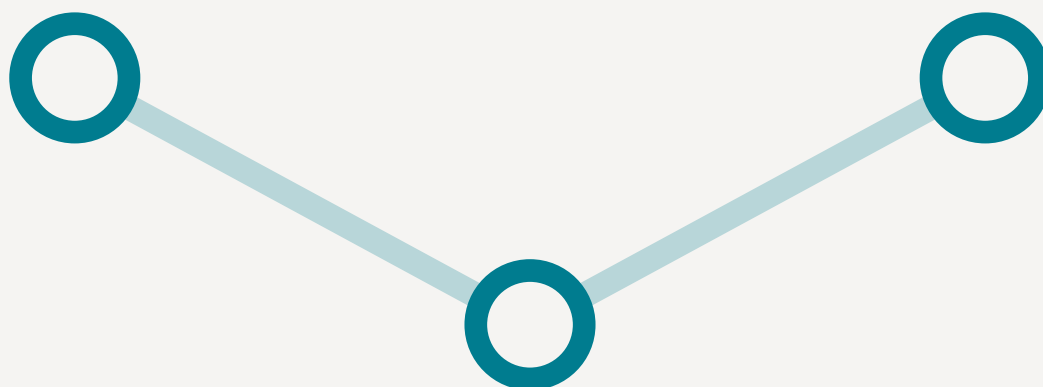
- Amend the Scotland Act to remove unintended restrictions on the Scottish Parliament's ability to legislate for human rights.
- Fully incorporate international human rights treaties into domestic law.
- Ensure respect for the right to inclusive communication, particularly for people with sensory impairments.

Whilst the HRA and ECHR provide a strong framework for human rights protections, there remain opportunities to embed human rights more firmly throughout all areas of law and government. The Scottish Parliament voted unanimously for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Incorporation Act, and there are plans to incorporate more international human rights treaties into Scots law.

However, the UNCRC Act was delayed and significantly reduced in scope by a decision of the UK Supreme Court which ruled some provisions to be outwith the Scottish Parliament's powers. This decision has been described as "wholly unexpected" and "incoherent" by Professor Aileen McHarg, who has raised concerns about the implications on the Scottish Parliament's ability to fully incorporate other treaties.<sup>2</sup>

The ALLIANCE does not believe this is an intended feature of devolution and urge parties to commit to amending the Scotland Act to remove it. We also believe international human rights treaties (UNCRC, ICESCR<sup>3</sup>, UNCPRD<sup>4</sup>, ICERD<sup>5</sup> and CEDAW<sup>6</sup>), and the right to a healthy environment, should be incorporated and applied across the UK, underpinned by adequate ability to access justice and redress in relation to rights across all public services, whether devolved or reserved.

More must be done to ensure equal access to services and information for people with sensory impairment or loss. Communication must be respected as a human right, including through the provision of accessible information and inclusive communications.



## Deliver a fair immigration system that supports recruitment and upholds the human rights of refugees and asylum seekers

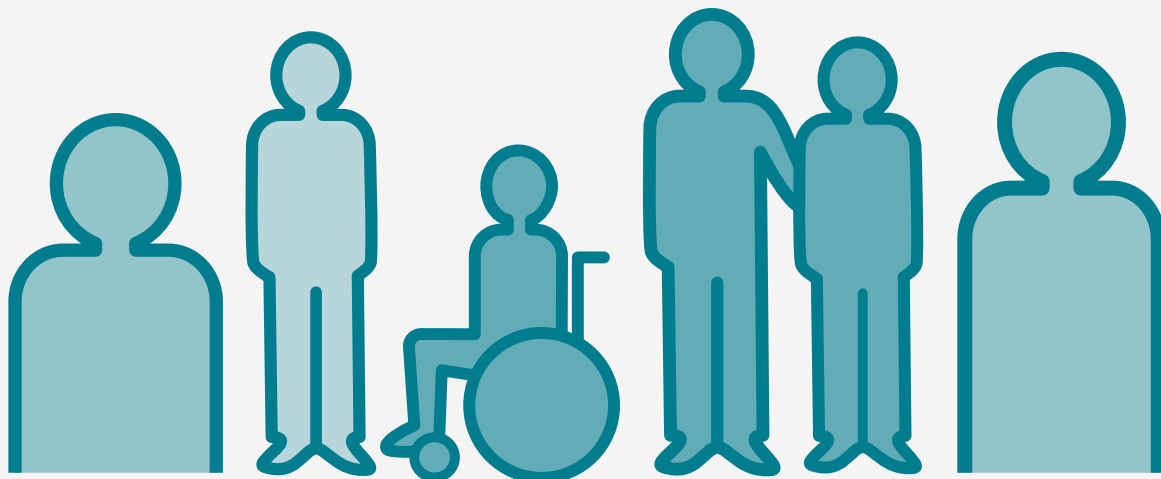
- Ensure there is a supportive immigration environment for people seeking to move to the UK to work in health and social care.
- Repeal the Rwanda Bill.
- Ensure human rights protections are not removed from any groups or individuals.

The health and social care sectors across both Scotland and the UK benefit enormously from people choosing to move to the UK for work. Brexit has already negatively impacted the ability of the sector to recruit internationally, and this has been further impacted by additional restrictions imposed by the UK Government.

To attract and maintain the skilled workforce needed in health and social care, there must be a supportive immigration environment for people seeking to move to the UK to work in those sectors. This should include exempting workers from minimum income requirements, if those requirements are to exist at all, and restrictions on bringing spouses and dependents with them, in breach of their right to family life.

The Rwanda Bill, which seeks to disapply human rights protections for refugees and asylum seekers, must be repealed as a matter of urgency. This and any attempts to disapply the HRA or ECHR from any specific group or individuals are in direct contravention of the basic principles of human rights, and in breach of international law.

Human rights are universal and inalienable. Everyone's human rights must be upheld, and rights must apply equally to everyone. Removing human rights protections from some individuals or groups risks subjecting people to severe abuses of their human rights and dignity. This sets a dangerous precedent that rights could be removed from other groups in the future.



# Health, Care and Wellbeing

Health and wellbeing in every part of the UK depends on the UK Government investing in care, whilst acting on wider public health and tackling inequalities.

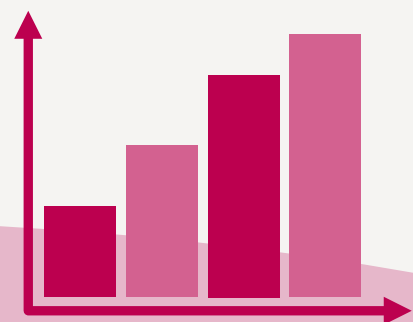
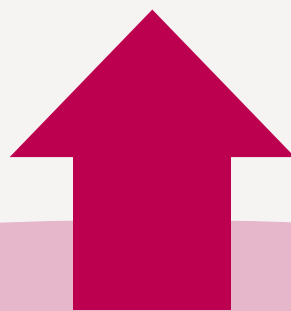
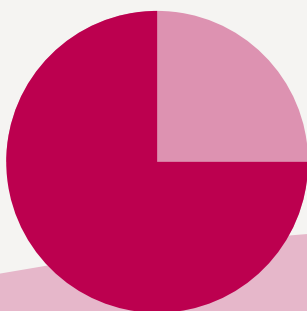
## Invest in health and social care

- Deliver sufficient and sustainable funding for health and social care, including capital investment.
- Deliver parity of esteem between health and social care.

Although health and social care are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru and the Northern Ireland Assembly, the quality and funding of public services across the UK is fundamentally dependent on the approach the UK Government takes in England. The next UK Government must therefore ensure that there is sufficient and sustainable funding for health and social care services, including the capital investment necessary to ensure the NHS estate is safe and fit for purpose.

In Scotland, there is a long term aspiration to deliver “parity of esteem” for social care relative to healthcare. Currently, social care does not receive the level of investment necessary to ensure everyone who should be able to access care can do so, with strict eligibility criteria instead being used to ration care. At the same time, the social care workforce continues to experience poorer pay and conditions than workers doing equivalent jobs in the NHS.

The UK Government should work towards delivering this parity of esteem in England, ensuring more people can access care and improving pay and conditions for the workforce, creating consequential that could be used for the same purpose in the devolved nations.



## Reduce health inequalities

- **Improve the availability and affordability of healthy, nutritious food.**
- **Increase investment in housing, public transport and active travel infrastructure.**

Entrenched health inequalities continue to blight lives across the UK, especially for people living in the least affluent parts of the country and groups like disabled people, people living with long term conditions, unpaid carers, ethnic minorities, and LGBT people. In many cases, these inequalities are driven by factors beyond simply direct spend on health and social care services.

Government action to support health and wellbeing must therefore extend beyond investment in health and social care, and into tackling the wider social and commercial determinants that impact on the health of the population. This should include further advancing policies that support the availability of affordable, healthy, nutritious food, shifting the balance of affordability away from less healthy foods and making it easier for people to make healthier choices that reduce their chances of developing long term health conditions.

Health and wellbeing should also be supported through increased investment in housing and infrastructure for active travel and public transport, and the links between them. Improved active travel infrastructure enables more people to take regular exercise whilst going about their day, helping to improve their health. Significant work is also required to improve the accessibility of public transport infrastructure for wheelchair users, others with reduced or limited mobility, and people with sensory impairments. This will help ensure that people are able to access leisure, public services and employment opportunities that are essential for their mental health and wellbeing.





## Address gambling harms

- **Recognise gambling harms as a public health issue.**
- **Regulate industry practices in new and emerging sectors.**
- **Make all gambling marketing and advertising opt-in.**

The ALLIANCE's Scotland Reducing Gambling Harm programme<sup>7</sup> champions the lived experience of people impacted by gambling, including through hosting the Scottish Gambling Harm Lived Experience Forum. We advocate for a public health approach to gambling harm rooted in improved treatment and support. The Gambling Act Review is an opportunity to explicitly recognise gambling harms as a public health issue, as well as to engage with people with lived and living experience of gambling harms to ensure the review delivers a blueprint for meaningful change.

Steps must also be taken to further regulate the gambling industry. Recent years have seen increasing "gamble-ification" through existing sectors like gaming and emerging ones such as cryptocurrencies. Current regulation is not equipped to deal with these new approaches, requiring a dynamic legislative process that is future proofed and can keep up with industry developments.

Gambling advertising and marketing must be further regulated. All forms of advertising and marketing should be opt-in, with a view to reducing the number of people induced into gambling. This should be backed up with effective accountability measures which ensure industry compliance, and restrictions on data selling and sharing that may be used to further target people at risk of gambling harms.



# Financial Fairness

Fairness must be at the heart of public finances and the economy, with investment in the services people rely on, recognition for the value of care, and a human rights based approach to social security.

## Reimagine investment and the economy

- Embed a human rights budgeting approach within all aspects of public finance.
- Develop a taxation and revenue raising system rooted in human rights, poverty reduction and climate action.
- Work towards the principles of a Wellbeing Economy.

The current approach to the economy and public finances has left far too many people behind. A narrow focus on GDP growth figures says little about the quality of people's lives, whether there is equality of opportunity, or their needs are being met and their human rights upheld. At the same time, a flawed narrative comparing public finances to household budgets has been used to justify sweeping cuts to essential public services, with little regard to the effects on those reliant on them.

We need a completely different approach to budgeting and the economy. The ALLIANCE is a long-standing advocate for embedding human rights budgeting within all areas of public finance. Taking a human rights approach to revenue generation, budget allocation and spending would support the progressive realisation of rights as well as transparency and accountability in public finances.

This should be complemented by an approach to taxation and revenue raising geared towards delivering on rights and key policy objectives including poverty reduction and climate action. Fair taxation is essential for delivering high quality public services for everyone, and there is now clear public support for raising taxes if that leads to better public services<sup>8</sup>.

The UK Government should also work towards the principles of the Wellbeing Economy<sup>9</sup>, seeking to develop an economy in service of people and the planet. Essential areas such as care must be fully included and valued, recognising the huge economic contribution that is made by both paid and unpaid carers.

## Ensure social security and work deliver dignity for disabled people

- Scrap proposals to align WCA and PIP criteria.
- Develop better working arrangements between the Scottish and UK governments to make the devolution of social security more flexible.
- Enforce the duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees.

Although disability social security payments have been devolved, interactions between the Scottish and UK social security systems are complex, especially in relation to employment. Welfare reforms over the past 14 years have had an especially negative impact on disabled people, and proposals for further reform appear to prioritise cost cutting over human rights and wellbeing.

Research by Scope has shown that disabled people face additional costs averaging £975 per month<sup>10</sup>. Proposals to align Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and Personal Independence Payment (PIP) criteria, and to change PIP from a recurring payment to limited reimbursements for expenses should be scrapped. A distinction must be maintained between income replacement payments and support for additional costs of disability.

We are concerned that future changes to UK level social security payments could have significant consequences for devolved payments, against the policy intentions of the Scottish Government and Parliament. As far as is possible, UK Government decisions to change their payments should not negatively impact Scottish equivalents.

Closer inter-governmental working arrangements on social security should be established, and better use made of the flexibility underpinning the devolution of social security payments. Greater divergence between Scottish and UK payments should be allowed where the respective government funds resulting changes in liability for their counterparts.

There must also be stronger enforcement employers' duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers, including people with sensory impairments or loss. Further measures to support disabled people who can and want to work are required to help close the disability employment gap, without penalising those who cannot work or have not been granted reasonable adjustments.



# Repair the broken social security system

- End the cruel sanctions regime.
- End the system of unjust caps and deductions.
- Work across both governments to develop the potential of a Minimum Income Guarantee.

Social security is a human right and an essential financial support for millions of people across the UK. Despite this, the current system has become defined by its inadequacy and its punitive nature, with welfare reforms leading to real-terms reduction in the value of payments, significantly increased conditionality, and frequent application of sanctions.

The UK Government must end the cruel sanctions regime which has caused immeasurable financial, physical and mental harm to people. They must end the system of unjust caps and deductions, including the two child limit, bedroom tax and benefit cap, which have deepened poverty and inequality, and in particular child poverty. They must significantly reduce the role of conditionality in the system, taking a human rights based approach towards social security as an entitlement.

There should also be closer intergovernmental working between the UK and Scottish Governments to develop the potential of a Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG). This should include identifying any further permanent devolution of powers necessary for the Scottish Government to implement the policy if it so chooses, and what time, geographically or demographically limited changes are necessary to the UK social security system to enable targeted pilots of a MIG.



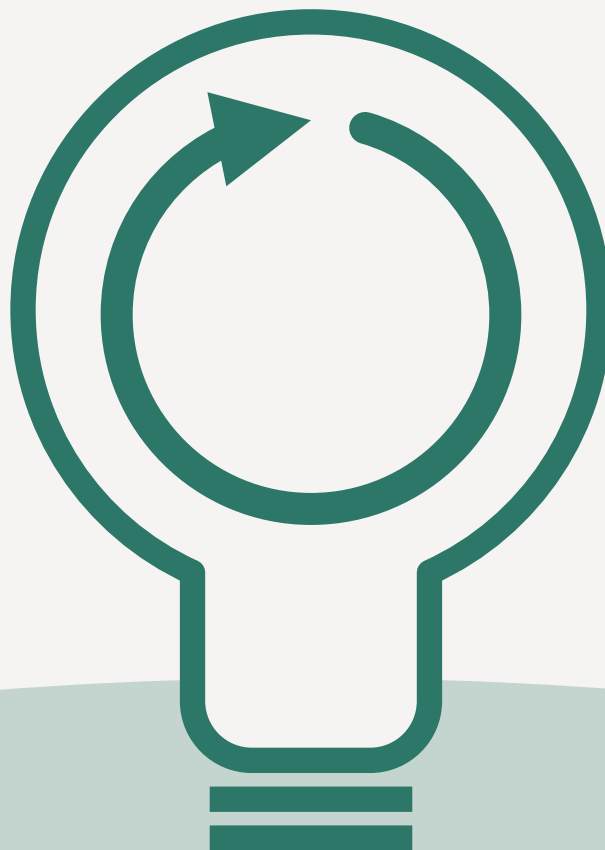
## Deliver a fair, renewable deal on energy

- Introduce a social energy tariff for disabled people, people living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers.
- Invest in the transition to renewables and energy efficiency schemes.

UK households have been facing extreme increases in energy bills over the past two years. Even as prices have fallen from their peak, the average bill remains twice as high as it was before the crisis. These increases have had a particularly negative impact on disabled people, people living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers. All of these groups often have significantly higher energy consumption than the general population, and who must therefore be prioritised for support and investment.

A social energy tariff should be introduced specifically for disabled people, people living with long term conditions and unpaid carers. This should offer lower prices and greater protection from price increases for those with the least flexibility to modify their energy usage in response to price fluctuations.

There must also be increased investment in the transition to renewable energy as a long term measure to reduce reliance on unpredictably priced fossil fuels which are also damaging to the climate. This should include greater investment in energy efficiency schemes to help reduce energy usage, offering generous financial support packages for retrofitting to households including disabled people, people living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers.



# Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The Guardian, 'Rishi Sunak "won't allow foreign court to block" Rwanda plan' (Dec 2023), available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/01/rishi-sunak-wont-allow-foreign-court-to-block-rwanda-plan>

<sup>2</sup> Professor Aileen McHarg and Human Rights Consortium Scotland, 'Implications of UNCRC Reference for Scottish Human Rights Bill' (April 2024), available at: <https://hrcscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Final-Aileen-McHarg-Implications-of-UNCRC-Reference-for-Scot-Human-Rights-Bill-April-2024.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-persons-disabilities>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-convention-elimination-all-forms-racial>

<sup>6</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

<sup>7</sup> The ALLIANCE, 'Scotland Reducing Gambling Harms', available at: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/lived-experience/networks/scotland-reducing-gambling-harm/>

<sup>8</sup> National Centre for Social Research, 'BSA 40: Role and responsibilities of government' (September 2023), available at: <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/bsa-40-role-and-responsibilities-government>

<sup>9</sup> Wellbeing Economy Alliance, 'What is a Wellbeing Economy?', available at: <https://www.weallscotland.org/what-is-a-wellbeing-economy>

<sup>10</sup> Scope, 'Disability Price Tag 2023' (May 2023), available at: <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/extra-costs/disability-price-tag-2023>

# About the ALLIANCE

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector intermediary for health and social care, bringing together a diverse range of people and organisations who share our vision, which is a Scotland where everyone has a strong voice and enjoys their right to live well with dignity and respect.

We are a strategic partner of the Scottish Government and have close working relationships with many NHS Boards, academic institutions and key organisations spanning health, social care, housing and digital technology.

Our purpose is to improve the wellbeing of people and communities across Scotland. We bring together the expertise of people with lived experience, the third sector, and organisations across health and social care to inform policy, practice and service delivery. Together our voice is stronger and we use it to make meaningful change at the local and national level.

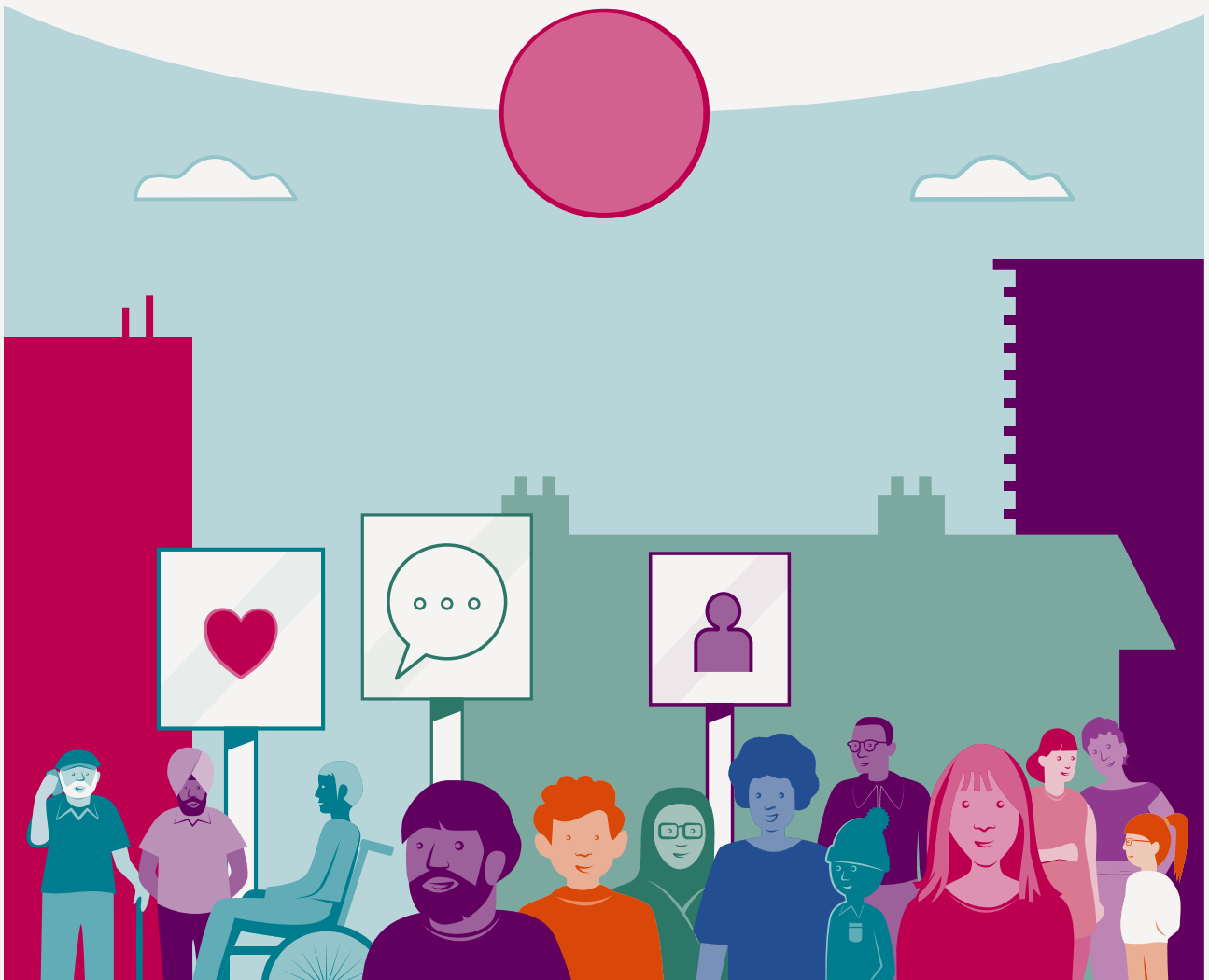
The ALLIANCE has a strong and diverse membership of over 3,600 organisations and individuals. Our broad range of programmes and activities deliver support, research and policy development, digital innovation and knowledge sharing. We manage funding and spotlight innovative projects; working with our members and partners to ensure lived experience and third sector expertise is listened to and acted upon by informing national policy and campaigns, and putting people at the centre of designing support and services.

## We aim to:

- Ensure disabled people, people with long term conditions and unpaid carers voices, expertise and rights drive policy and sit at the heart of design, delivery and improvement of support and services.
- Support transformational change that works with individual and community assets, helping people to live well, supporting human rights, self management, co-production and independent living.
- Champion and support the third sector as a vital strategic and delivery partner, and foster cross-sector understanding and partnership.



**ALLIANCE**  
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE  
ALLIANCE SCOTLAND  
people at the centre



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