



Supporting the Women's Health Plan 2022-2024

Highlights Report



ALLIANCE
HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE
ALLIANCE SCOTLAND
people at the centre

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The ALLIANCE women's health programme

2022-2024

14,000+



video views



1,100

event participants



400+

subscribers



21

lived experience group members



28

events

Background

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) has been contributing to progressing women's access to health information and services throughout its history as a third sector champion of lived experience. Ensuring that women are informed and supported with their health is an important element of ensuring that our services are inclusive, flexible and person centred. This sits at the heart of our commitment to addressing health inequalities and tackling barriers in our society.

The ALLIANCE has been delivering a women's health programme since 2022 working with the Scottish Government in support of the Women's Health Plan 2021-2024. Over this time, we have aimed to create opportunities for women to share their experiences to influence progress and innovation, whilst also ensuring that supportive and comprehensive information on women's health is readily available and accessible. This programme follows previous ALLIANCE engagement work in 2020 and 2021 to hear from women about their experiences of accessing services in Scotland [1].

Within our engagement work, we've heard from women that prevailing stigma, misinformation, and myths around women's health, as well as difficulty accessing services, remain significant barriers to getting the support and information they might need. Therefore empowering and supporting women with information about their health, and promoting a culture change where women's health is understood and supported have been key aspects of our programme.

[1] Women's Health Plan – Lived Experience Survey Report (2020) <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/womens-health-plan-survey-report/> and Women's Health Plan – How Scotland's women want to plan future services. Event Report (2021) <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/blog/resources/scotlands-first-womens-health-plan-how-scotlands-women-want-to-plan-future-services/>

The Women's Health Plan and the ALLIANCE's programme uses the term 'women/woman' throughout but it is important to highlight that it is not only those who identify as women who require access to women's health and reproductive services. All healthcare services should be respectful and responsive to individual needs.



Report overview

This report outlines the highlights from working with women and supporting the Women's Health Plan over the last two and a half years of our programme.

It covers the priority areas of our programme and our work with partners, including the Scottish Government, and lived experience stakeholders to put women's health at the centre and reduce health inequalities for women and girls.

You will find details of key moments within the programme so far, the resources we've produced, and reflections from third sector organisations and community groups that we've worked with. These partnerships have been particularly important in sharing the objectives of the Women's Health Plan, and providing women with direct access to support for their health.



The ALLIANCE

The ALLIANCE is the national third sector intermediary for a range of health and social care organisations. We have a growing membership of over 3,600 national and local third sector organisations, associates in the statutory and private sectors, disabled people, people living with long term conditions and unpaid carers.

We work 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.



You'll see from reading through our report that we've been on quite a journey.

We've met and made friends along the way, and working together we've made a start on improving outcomes and raising awareness of issues that affect women's health and wellbeing.

At the first meeting for the Women's Health Plan in Scottish Government HQ St Andrew's House in February 2020, we recognised that a huge challenge lay ahead but even then we couldn't possibly have anticipated the effect that the pandemic would have on how we engaged and understood the issues affecting women. Despite all the barriers, the Women's Health Plan and the ALLIANCE's associated programme has had significant outreach and impact.

Importantly we gave women a voice and we listened to what they said. Our programme of work was based on the priorities that women themselves identified. Amongst many other things women told us that they wanted to feel listened to; to have access to information that was clear and concise; and for there to be proactive discussions around stigmatised topics which remained a barrier for so many to access support. These are just some of the areas we've focused on which you can find details of within this report.

Thank you to everyone who came on the journey with us, who supported us and shared their experiences. We haven't quite reached our destination where gender inequality is eradicated but we're learning, listening and bit by bit changing things. Working together and collaboratively I believe we will get to where women's health and wellbeing is recognised as a different challenge requiring particular actions and where women are equally valued and respected.

Irene Oldfather, ALLIANCE Director of Strategic Partnerships, External Affairs and Outreach



The Women's Health Plan

The Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan was published in August 2021.

The Plan outlines actions to improve women's health inequalities by raising awareness around women's health, improving access to health care and reducing inequalities in health outcomes, both for sex-specific conditions and in women's general health.

The Women's Health Plan includes 66 short, medium and long term actions to drive forward improvements in women's health, primarily across a number of key priority areas: access to information and services; contraception, abortion, sexual health and pre-pregnancy; menopause, menstrual health including endometriosis; heart health; and gender and health.



To read the Women's Health Plan in full visit:
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/womens-health-plan>





As Women's Health Champion,

I firmly believe that women's health is everybody's business. The ALLIANCE have brought this sentiment to life through their innovative conversation café model which brings together a diverse range of people and organisations for positive conversations about women's health, to share their unique experiences and access consistent, reliable health information.

The opportunity to work in collaboration with the ALLIANCE has been incredibly valuable to me in my role as Women's Health Champion. Perhaps most importantly the ALLIANCE have enabled me to hear from women directly about what matters to them through their Lived Experience Stakeholder Group.

I have also had the chance to raise awareness, and share reliable information, about a range women's health topics such as heart health, menopause, PCOS with a wide audience through participation in a series of webinars hosted by the ALLIANCE.

At the start of the year I was invited to join Irene Oldfather on the ALLIANCE's YouTube video series. It was a welcome opportunity to reflect on my time as Women's Health Champion and discuss our hopes for women's health in the future.

By building on the progress that's been made and with collective effort I believe that over time we can achieve the societal change we need to improve health outcomes for all women and girls across Scotland.



Professor Anna Glasier DSc, OBE is an internationally renowned physician in the field of reproductive medicine. Prof Glasier was appointed the First Women's Health Champion for Scotland by the Scottish Government in January 2023.

Programme priorities

The ALLIANCE's women's health programme is delivered in support of the Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan, and is aligned with the priority areas of the Plan and the areas for improvement that are identified within it.

We have therefore delivered our programme in conversation with Scottish Government colleagues, the Women's Health Champion, the Women's Health Plan Implementation and Delivery groups, and key experts in the field of women's health.

Our women's health programme over the period 2022-2024 was divided into 3 main priority areas:

1. Creating opportunities for women and people with **lived experience** to share their experience and feed into the progress and implementation of the Women's Health Plan and innovation in the field of women's health

2. Signposting people to accessible resources and sharing trusted and engaging **information on women's health**

3. Promoting a **positive culture** of learning, support and confidence around women's health experiences and conditions that challenges stigma and misinformation.

1. Lived Experience

Lived Experience Stakeholder Group

In 2020/2021 we were pleased to engage with women about their experiences accessing healthcare in Scotland. Their stories fed directly into the development of the Women's Health Plan and its objectives.

Women's Health Plan action:

Seek women's lived experience, through the continuation of a lived experience group, to inform health policy and improve healthcare services and to ensure women are meaningfully involved in decision making and priority setting going forward.

Following the publication of the Plan, the ALLIANCE were tasked with reconvening a lived experience group to ensure that women were directly involved in the Plan's implementation. The Lived Experience Stakeholder Group brings together people with lived experience from across Scotland, from different backgrounds and with diverse experiences, as well as representation from certain third sector organisations dedicated to work on women's health.

We advertised rolling membership on social media, our website, in our bulletins and via partners.

The Group meets quarterly, and meetings to date have provided opportunity for members to share their experience to influence change, stay updated on progress of the Women's Health Plan, and learn about current priorities and innovation in women's health in Scotland. Meetings often include updates from Scottish Government or NHS professionals working on the Women's Health Plan, followed by Group members' reflections.

It's so important to hear directly from women themselves about their health and experiences of healthcare, and I was very grateful to be part of these interesting discussions.

Professor Anna Glasier

It was a great meeting and I always learn so much!

Group member



I joined the Women's Health Plan Stakeholder Group at the end of 2022.

I was interested because of my lived experience as a woman with long term health conditions and the harmful gender gap within health, but also because of my roles as a patient representative in health strategies, peer support, and health research.

I've been able to contribute to a variety of initiatives such as heart health information, the Menopause Civtec Challenge, peer support in women's health, medication monitoring, "Near Me" services and more. I've also been able to give feedback to the Women's Health Champion and contribute to future plans.

I've learnt a lot from my involvement which has enhanced all of my other patient representation and helped me champion the objectives of the Women's Health Plan in improving women's health and life outcomes.

Caroline, Lived Experience Stakeholder Group member



Caroline with other Group members and members of the Digital Citizens Panel at ALLIANCE International Women's Day event 2024



The SWC have worked closely with women all over Scotland

to learn about their lived experience and support their input into the Women's Health Plan. We attended the quarterly meetings of the Women's Health Lived Experience Stakeholder Group run by the ALLIANCE, where we commented on specific progress areas of the Plan.

We attended webinars and meetings run by the ALLIANCE and partners and encouraged the women in our network to sign up to empower themselves with knowledge that we knew was evidence-based and provided women with a framework for understanding their own experiences. Our very own Chair Agnes Tolmie spoke at the ALLIANCE conference about 'Why we need a Women's Health Plan' in June 2022, and The ALLIANCE Director Irene Oldfather spoke at the conference we held in January 2022 on the Women's Health Plan.

Partnership and collaboration are important for our organisation to ensure that the lived experiences of the women we speak to is reported to key decision makers at a national and international level to ensure that their voices are included across decision making processes.

Scottish Women's Convention, Lived Experience Group member (Organisation)



Involvement in other research

The Women's Health Plan has led to innovation and developments which aim to better understand and better serve women's specific health needs. We were pleased to be able to contribute our expertise within a number of these initiatives, and ensure lived experience representation.

SPOTLIGHT

Women's experiences of discrimination and the impact on health: research

[A Scottish Government research project](#) was developed to respond to a medium-term action within the Women's Health Plan: *To build an evidence base on women's health inequalities, with specific focus on the impact of sexism, racism, ableism, and other forms of discrimination including homophobia and transphobia on women's health.*

The purpose of this research was to investigate and better understand experiences of discrimination among women in Scotland and the impact those experiences have on women's health.

Throughout the project the ALLIANCE collaborated with the project lead to contribute our expertise in lived experience engagement. The ALLIANCE was pleased to co-host a series of focus groups that explored the instances of discrimination that specific groups of women had experienced and how they perceived the impact of this on their short and long term health outcomes.



Highlighting women's experiences of the health system and wider society is essential if we are going to narrow inequalities.

The efforts of the ALLIANCE to involve marginalised women in that research illuminated seldom heard voices and uncovered a range of discriminatory experiences impacting on their health and healthcare access.

We continued to use this work to inform policy and interventions that directly address inequalities experienced by women

Dr Laura Tinner, Project Lead



2. Information and signposting

Women have shared with us that dealing with health concerns can be quite isolating, as conversation and information on certain areas of women’s health are not widely discussed or understood. For inequalities in women’s access to support and services for their health to be reduced, it is essential to build knowledge and confidence in women, healthcare professionals, and wider support systems of family, friends and employers.

Over the course of the programme the ALLIANCE prioritised disseminating information about the priority areas of the Women’s Health Plan with clarity and accuracy. Through our successful events programme and the creation of a variety of resources, we aimed to provide a platform for learning and discussion that was solution-focused and provided options for accessing support.

Events

900+ webinar attendees



Online information events

- Stakeholder Introductions
- Why we need a Women’s Health Plan?
- Menopause Mythbusting
- Menopause and the Workplace
- Menopause, sex and relationships
- Periods are normal – but what’s a normal period?
- Understanding endometriosis
- PCOS mythbusting
- Talking menopause
- Everything you need to know about PMS
- Mythbusting women’s heart health
- Hysterical Health with Ipsos



Participants of our webinars and information events have shared the impact that attending has had on their knowledge and confidence about their own health, or the health of family, friends and colleagues.

Increased understanding about women’s health and specific experiences across the life course

“Everything was explained simply, without medical or scientific jargon, and with humour”

“I thought I was fairly knowledgeable in this area but learnt a lot!”

Encouraged them to support those close to them

“I found the event so useful for me personally and for people I work with. I will be able to transfer information to them and also be able to direct them to useful links / websites. It has also given me confidence”

“I have been reflecting on the message that as a (peri)menopausal woman in the workplace, I am an asset to be supported, rather than a problem to be dealt with. This was a positive message to hear and I plan on sharing it and passing it on”

Improved confidence and strengthened capacity to self-advocate

“The event also reminds me to accept what I’m going through is normal and to adapt my life and embrace it”

“I always come away from these events feeling more positive and although I haven’t shared my personal experience it makes me feel like I have and I’ve been given support”

Prompted changes in health behaviours

“It was a transformative event”

“I will probably go to the doctors sooner if I have symptoms as a result”

Resources

Our print and online resources complemented the topics of many of our webinars, and were produced alongside Scottish Government and expert clinicians to guarantee that the information was accurate, understandable and helpful.

Women shared with us that finding accurate sources of information on their health was often complex and confusing, with many services and support not widely known about, while misinformation was difficult to navigate.

The ALLIANCE women's health resources align with information from [NHS Inform's Women's Health Platform](#), and direct people to multiple organisations and groups that offer further information, advice and support.

All resources can be accessed via our resource hub: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/policy-and-research/policy/supporting-the-womens-health-plan/resources/>



SPOTLIGHT - our resources in use



“As part of our commitment to ensuring that the national resource for Relationships, Sexual Health & Parenthood ([rshp.scot](#)) remains current and fit for purpose, the Steering Group contacted colleagues within the ALLIANCE about a [visual resource they had produced on menstruation](#). This resource was an excellent addition to our existing activities on menstruation and with permission from the ALLIANCE, it was added to two different activities aimed at S1 to S3 within the resource. Schools across Scotland were then able to download the resource and share directly with pupils as part of the lesson”

Elaine McCormack, Chair of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Steering Group

SPOTLIGHT - our resources in use

Glasgow Caledonian University received a number of ALLIANCE women's health resources which are now part of [the Relax and Renew space](#) within the University Library, and are accessible in the space for staff and students to access freely.

“We used the ALLIANCE resources to start a conversation with colleagues within GCU who we knew were involved in running a menopause café at the University. This had moved online during lockdown but had lapsed. As result of our reaching out with the ALLIANCE resources this resulted in the following events taking place:

- The Relax and Renew space hosted a Women's Health event to coincide with International Women's day in March 2024
- From that event the Menopause Café has been relaunched with both an online and in person offer – the ALLIANCE resources were on display at the first relaunch event. The Library also created a Menopause resource list , available for all staff/students at GCU, which includes ALLIANCE resources as well as NHS Inform “

Julie Smith and Kimberly Bryce, Academic Librarians

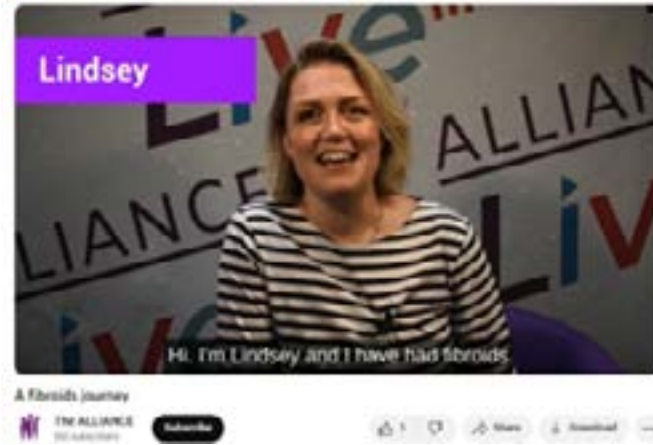


Video content

Engaging and shareable video content on women's health provides people with an additional option for accessing information. Our video playlist 'Women's Health at the Centre' features a mix of webinar recordings, and original information videos which have highlighted clinical information and lived experience perspectives on multiple areas related to women's health and the priorities of the Women's Health Plan.

Giving space to women's own stories of how they became aware of symptoms, sought diagnosis, got treatment, and continue to manage their health conditions has provided supportive examples for other people to feel more comfortable in their own experiences, or understand the conditions better.

A number of our videos have since been uploaded to NHS Inform, to be directly accessed by anyone seeking medical information on a condition. A number of our webinar recordings have also been requested by medical professionals to use as learning tools for health care workers and have been uploaded to learning modules via NHS Education for Scotland.



I've had a lot of women saying to me about the video and how it feels good to know they are not alone.

Lived Experience video participant

Watch all here: <https://bit.ly/3yCSBkq>

14k+ video views

Community sessions

There is a wealth of community, public and third sector organisations within Scotland that have established networks for women to come together to learn, to support each other and to get support for themselves. These groups often work with specific groups who may experience additional barriers to accessing support and services for their health needs.

As part of our programme we worked with a number of organisations and groups to provide non-digital information sharing on women's health, visiting each in their local area to share resources and encourage discussion. These community sessions ran either on a one-off basis or were repeated.

Within these sessions we heard from women about their specific experiences and priorities, and were able to signpost to support and information that may help them progress further with their health queries.

SPOTLIGHT - Stirling Council Refugee Women's Support



"The ALLIANCE delivered a session for an Empowering Women Group that supports the resettled refugees from Syrian, Sudan, Afghanistan and Ukraine. The women really appreciated a space to discuss women's health and learn more about different period products. Culturally a lot of the women did not grow up openly discussing women's health and therefore having the space to do so was very important to them."

Morag Reid, Stirling Council



SPOTLIGHT - Willow Service, Edinburgh



The Willow Service, a partnership between Edinburgh Council and NHS Lothian, provides a wide range of support services for women who are at any point in the justice system.

Research shows that many women within the criminal justice system have complex health needs as a result of experiences such as socio-economic deprivation, mental ill health, history of abuse and trauma, and substance use. [2]

The ALLIANCE have been delivering information sessions on menstrual health and menopause within Willow in partnership with the service nurse.

“At Willow we are focusing on providing educational sessions on menstrual health and menopause, as we have identified that there are significant health disparities here for the women who use our service, unmet needs and that women are struggling to access appropriate healthcare services. As menstrual health and menopause can be surrounded by stigma, the sessions with the ALLIANCE offer women a safe place where they can learn new skills, grow and thrive.

The aim of the sessions is to empower women and equip them with the right skills and knowledge to manage of their own health and well-being. Delivering the menstrual health and menopause session with the ALLIANCE has been a significantly positive collaboration. The ALLIANCE bringing expertise, knowledge and insight on the topic of menstrual health and menopause has been very beneficial and has provided the women within Willow with relevant and accurate information, so they can make informed decisions when it comes to menstrual health and menopause. “

Ledi Krasniqi, Service Nurse, Willow

[2] http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1527/spotlight-summary-4-tomorrows-women-glasgow_aug17_english.pdf; http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1528/reducing-offending-reducing-inequalities_aug2017_english.pdf

3. Positive culture

Conversation Cafés

Across the ALLIANCE's engagement with women, peer support networks have been raised on multiple occasions as important spaces for accessing information. These spaces can help women to feel empowered to seek support, and also encourage a more positive culture around women's health that counters pervasive stigma and myths.

The ALLIANCE therefore produced a Conversation Café toolkit as part of our women's health programme, recognising the value that peer support networks can bring to self management, and helping people feel that they are not alone in their experience and/or condition.

Conversation Cafés can provide a space for connection, tackle isolation and make women feel valued. They are an informal space where a small group of people can come together in a facilitated but open conversation on a particular topic. There is emphasis placed on creating an environment where relationships are formed, where everyone feels comfortable to speak, but where listening is also a valuable act.

The Conversation Café toolkit was produced to support groups to host their own Conversation Cafés to discuss aspects of women's health experiences. It is a guide for delivery, which can be used flexibly to help groups set up, host and evaluate their independent Café.

Since its publication the toolkit has been requested and used by a number of organisations, libraries and community groups to explore the topic of women's health with their lived experience participants. The ALLIANCE continues to promote the toolkit widely across Scotland, and hosts ongoing facilitator support sessions with those using the toolkit to build a community of practitioners.



Great resources!
Opportunity
to connect
and grow
together.
Toolkit user (X post)

Have you thought or done anything differently about your health since attending?

"I am going to make a GP appointment"

"I am going to start HRT"

"I am going to start to improve my general health"

Cafe feedback form

This is an excellent piece of work, which will help provide women across Scotland with vital information on women's health and, in particular, for those who may not have access to online resources or who might need a little more support.

Professor Anna Glasier
(blog)



Keeping up-to-date with our work on women's health

The ALLIANCE is pleased to be continuing our work on women's health. We will be working closely with Scottish Government, our partners and our Lived Experience Stakeholder Group members to maintain our focus on reducing gendered health inequalities and promoting positive dialogue on women's health.

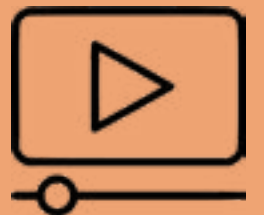
You can stay up-to-date with the programme moving forward by signing up to our mailing list to receive a monthly e-newsletter. Email whp@alliance-scotland.org.uk to subscribe.



All our resources can be accessed:

Via our Resource Hub: <https://www.alliance-scotland.org.uk/policy-and-research/policy/supporting-the-womens-health-plan/resources/>

Or on our Youtube channel: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLDgTzLd2QrJG9IRcU715S5_XgPiUeH4gw



For queries or more information about anything within this report email whp@alliance-scotland.org.uk





ALLIANCE

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE
ALLIANCE SCOTLAND
people at the centre

About the ALLIANCE

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector intermediary for a range of health and social care organisations. We have a growing membership of over 3,600 national and local third sector organisations, associates in the statutory and private sectors, disabled people, people living with long term conditions and unpaid carers. Many NHS Boards, Health and Social Care Partnerships, Medical Practices, Third Sector Interfaces, Libraries and Access Panels are also members.

Our vision is for a Scotland where people of all ages who are disabled or living with long term conditions, and unpaid carers, have a strong voice and enjoy their right to live well, as equal and active citizens, free from discrimination, with support and services that put them at the centre.

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