

Supporting person-centred care in Scotland:

What enables effective self management?



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**Relationships are
the bedrock of
self management**

Professor Lisa Kidd, 2023

Introduction

Self Management Reflective Practice (SMRP) is an in-depth, CPD-accredited training session delivered by the Self Management team at the ALLIANCE. The Self Management Programme within the ALLIANCE is funded by Scottish Government. The session was designed with the voices of lived experience at heart and aims to enable staff working or studying in health and social care settings to look at what they are already doing in their role to support individuals with self management and how this can be strengthened through relevant tools and support. Self management is a way of living and working that means people living with long term conditions feel more in control of their own health and wellbeing. It puts people 'in the driving seat'¹ of their care.

Since 2017, the team has delivered over 50 tailored sessions to health and social care staff working in a range of settings, from district nurses in Ayrshire to Long Covid carers in Aberdeenshire. The sessions have supported participants to understand the principles and best practice around self management, provided tips, techniques and resources to support self management, and assisted participants to explore the barriers and potential enablers in adopting self management supporting approaches in the workplace. Additionally, the interactive and bond-reinforcing nature of the sessions have provided a space for participants to share their experiences and return to their work with new connections and fresh plans to improve their practice. The understanding participants gain of self management is grounded in theory, underpinned by context and accompanied by clear actions for moving forward.

In addition to the sessions providing valuable learning experiences for health and social care professionals, the Self Management team has used them as an opportunity to learn. By distilling recurrent themes from the sessions, the team has been able to identify the key barriers and enablers involved in supporting individuals with self management. To do this, a thematic analysis was undertaken of data from session discussion notes and feedback gathered via surveys from approximately 600 participants. This report presents these findings and sets out the challenges that exist and the opportunities to strengthen self management supporting opportunities within health and social care in Scotland. It also highlights how the sessions have been a valuable resource for health and social care professionals and what support they still need to be better placed to help individuals with their self management.



¹ [Gaun Yersel, the Self Management Strategy for Scotland](#)

Supporting self management

Before setting out the barriers and enablers, it is necessary to clarify first what it means to support self management and why it matters. Based on the views of session participants, and informed by Gaun Yersel, the Self Management Strategy for Scotland, it can be defined as a person centred approach towards an individual, where the whole person is considered and support plans are tailored and enable individuals to feel empowered, informed and motivated. This requires effective collaboration across services, to ensure the individual is an equal partner in their wellbeing. It also implies open and clear communication that ensures individuals feel listened to while gaining knowledge to make informed decisions that are right for them. Receiving quality care in this way – which is proactive, navigable and flexible to the needs of the individual – supports early intervention and ensures that individuals access the right support at the right time, leading to improved health outcomes. Furthermore, preventing long term conditions from escalating into crises minimises the demand for emergency care and eases pressure on services.

Barriers to supporting self management

Analysis of the data revealed a complex landscape of challenges impacting patient engagement and service delivery across health and social care, with emphasis on NHS environments. The barriers experienced by health and social care professionals when supporting self management can be separated into three principal themes: systemic challenges driven by underlying processes and policies, challenges within the role of the professional and challenges at the level of the individual.

Systemic challenges

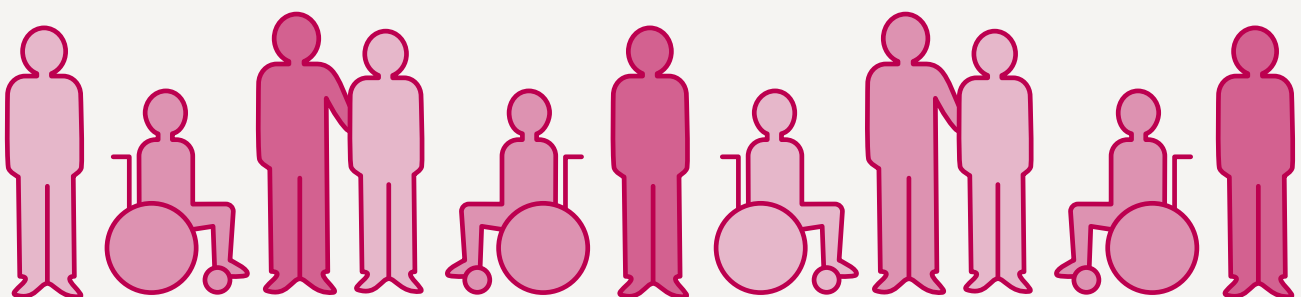
When considering the systemic challenges, a key facet is the limited funding and resources available to health and social care professionals. In practical terms this looks like staff shortages and heavy caseloads leading to time constraints, and insecure funding impacting service availability, which in turn makes signposting difficult. Added to this are long waiting lists, which can undermine self management by causing emotional distress and worsening symptoms, and target-driven cultures, which are contradictory to the very principles of self management. Physical and environmental barriers, often stemming from socioeconomic disparities, also inhibit self management, as individuals living in poverty or rural areas often experience housing and transport issues, limited internet connectivity and a postcode lottery of service provision. Cost of living pressures can leave people struggling to meet their basic needs, leading to worsening health and wellbeing. Another major systemic challenge can be found in the deeply rooted cultural barriers that play out at the level of everyday practices. For example, the prevailing deficit model within health and social care settings can reinforce implicit power imbalances and a 'fixer' mindset. At an organisational level, this may manifest as paternalistic models of care, alongside reluctance from both staff and patients to adopt change or embrace new ways of working.

Within the role of the professional

These systemic challenges have been shown to have a knock-on effect for both the professional and the individual. For the professional, insufficient resources and time limitations can mean short appointment times, hindering the ability to provide appropriate holistic care or fully understand the support required. This can eventually lead to individuals requiring more support and resources as their health deteriorates. In addition, a lack of time prevents trust-building between professionals and people which is necessary for meaningful conversations. Limited awareness and a lack of clarity were identified as major barriers, both around the principles of self management and available resources, as well as in understanding the roles and responsibilities of other professionals and services. This was closely connected to staff confidence; with many reporting a sense of 'information overload' when trying to navigate and interpret the wide range of self management resources. A further challenge affecting confidence was the transition from a 'doing for' approach to one of 'doing with,' which demands a significant shift not only in practice but also in underlying mindset.

At the level of the individual

System-wide challenges can affect patient engagement in self management in several ways, mainly in terms of access, motivation and understanding. The prevalent 'fixer' culture and inherent power imbalances within service provision can generate a dependence on healthcare staff and a lack of motivation or reluctance to self manage. It can also lead to individuals having unrealistic expectations of staff, which can reduce engagement. For individuals who have experienced poverty, lower levels of self-esteem and social connection can make it challenging to encourage and enable self management behaviours, while lower digital literacy and accessibility can prevent access to support and resources. Misunderstanding around self management and implications for welfare entitlements may arouse fear and suspicion, and decrease willingness to engage. Mental health factors such as depression, anxiety, fatigue, and cognitive impairments can significantly limit an individual's ability to engage with self management effectively. In addition, social influences, particularly within family dynamics, can contribute to challenges, especially when there is a lack of support for the individual's autonomy. For example, when an individual's family has differing expectations, are overprotective, or enabling of negative behaviours. Interpersonal and communication factors also significantly impact an individual's capacity for self management and include language, cultural and health literacy barriers. All these factors can inhibit the ability to access the appropriate holistic care that empowers an individual to feel in control of their self management.



Enablers to supporting self management

Analysis of reflective practice session notes and feedback also considered the potential enablers that exist for health and social care professionals to support self management. While the challenges that were identified were categorised as systemic or at the level of the professional or individual, the enablers and opportunities explored during reflective practice sessions centred on the role of the professional and things that are within their capacity to address. It was recognised that some challenges encountered were due to factors beyond the individual professionals' control, often with solutions that require whole systems change. The different enablers are outlined in more detail below.

Enablers for professionals within their role and place of work

- **Networks and collaboration:** Fostering strong cross-sector working, building relationships with colleagues, referrers and third sector organisations and improving communication and information-sharing between teams and systems enhances outcomes and reduces fragmentation. Making better use of and promoting community resources such as ALISS and links workers ensures coordinated, joined-up support for individuals.
- **Learning, reflection and personal development:** Ensuring there is protected time for staff to learn and reflect on practice and outcomes, both in supervisory settings and team meetings and informally with peers, to share experiences, challenges and successes and best practice. Investment in ongoing training and skill development and opportunities to learn across teams strengthens capacity.
- **Role clarity and professional practice:** This ensures shared understanding of roles across teams and is critical for effective practice and managing expectations. It also builds confidence in clinical judgement and decision-making, ensures boundaries are set and communicated confidently and individuals receive the right support.
- **Promoting education on self management:** This helps set boundaries around workload capacity and time. It is also important for nurturing a culture of support and openness, which maintains staff wellbeing and encourages staff to support others with their self management.



What worked well was having the space to share experiences with colleagues and collectively think about challenges

Enablers for professionals when working with individuals

- **Person centred care and relationships:** Using active listening to ensure individuals feel valued and heard, focussing on what matters to them and recognising the whole person, their lived experience/environment and readiness for self management is essential and central to building trust and creating meaningful engagement.
- **Open communication:** Using simple, jargon-free language and explaining the 'why' behind range of options, decisions and actions promotes better understanding and confidence in individuals, while setting clear role parameters ensures alignment of expectations.
- **Empowering approach:** Moving from traditional 'fixer' dynamics to a more collaborative relationship of supported self management where individuals are supported to set realistic goals, take small, meaningful steps and progress at their own pace helps with motivation, independence and allows individuals to feel in control, whilst also enabling sustainable change.

Other system-wide enablers for self management support

- **Organisational support:** Organisations must recognise pressures on staff due to shortages, workloads and limited time and offset this by prioritising staff wellbeing, supporting teams to set realistic expectations for what can be achieved and advocating for investment in resources to sustain high-quality care.
- **Improved IT systems:** Integrated systems and records would improve access to up-to-date information and directories for staff and would ensure efficiency and consistency in documentation. It would also ensure individuals receive the appropriate information, at the right time and in the right way.
- **Promoting a culture of self management:** For staff to be enabled to adopt self management supporting approaches, they need to operate within a workplace culture that values and upholds the principles of self management. This means focusing on meaningful outcomes by co-creating realistic, shared goals with individuals and taking an empowering, asset-based approach that challenges the deficit model of healthcare and recognises social determinants.

Impact of the sessions

How sessions have supported professionals' approach

At the end of each reflective practice session, feedback was sought from participants to gauge the impact and understand the ways that professionals feel they need support to encourage self management. Analysis of the feedback underlines a highly positive experience of the sessions, both in terms of the format and delivery method and the subject matter and opportunity for learning. The small group discussions encouraged participation while the mix of activities kept momentum and engagement, and facilitators were consistently described as knowledgeable, approachable, and skilled in guiding the discussions. Several consistent themes emerged that demonstrated the effectiveness of the approach taken, particularly in fostering engagement, reflection, and collaborative learning.

With respect to the learning content, the sessions were described as informative and relevant, with clear explanations of self management, helpful practical tools, resources, and examples and content that is directly applicable to participants' day-to-day roles. Participants shared that they had improved their understanding of self management and identified ways to apply the new learning in practice. They also strongly valued the opportunity to connect with colleagues from different roles and services and the exposure to new ideas and approaches. They recognised the significance of this for better joined up working and strengthened professional relationships and networks.

The format of the sessions supported engagement and learning and participants consistently found the sessions as informal, relaxed, and welcoming. The atmosphere was described as inclusive and respectful and conducive to open and honest discussions. This environment enabled individuals to contribute confidently without fear of being wrong, supporting honest dialogue and shared learning. A key strength was the interactive nature of the sessions. Attendees highlighted the opportunities for meaningful discussion and that the effective use of group work, discussions, and activities helped maintain energy and focus throughout. One of the most valued aspects was the opportunity to share real-life experiences. Listening to one another's stories allowed participants to gain insights from different perspectives and recognise common challenges across roles, and the environment of peer learning fostered connection and enriched understanding. Participants also appreciated the dedicated time to reflect on their own work; an opportunity which led to greater awareness of how self management is embedded in their roles, increased confidence in their current practice, and recognition and validation of the positive impact they are already making. The reflective element was therefore both reassuring and motivating. Lastly, participants frequently noted the sessions were enjoyable, fun and inspiring, which contributed significantly to overall satisfaction.



I liked being able to reflect on what we already do well and what else we can do to improve things for our service users

What support professionals still need

As outlined above, several enablers exist systemically and at the individual and organisational levels for health and social care professionals to support self management. Feedback highlights a strong commitment to self management and reassurance in knowing support is available. Key needs include staying informed, accessing resources easily, building confidence, and maintaining connections across teams and services. Participants elaborated that the following specific measures would support them in their roles:

- **Information and communication:** Regular updates on developments, training opportunities, services and local events via email bulletins or network updates.
- **Access to resources and signposting:** Simple, central access to up-to-date resource lists, especially on local and third sector services and condition-specific information, which would enable effective signposting. This includes digital platforms and resources such ALISS.
- **Training, learning and development:** Ongoing training, CPD and practical refreshers in the practical application of self management, to build confidence in supporting patients with their self management.
- **Networking and peer support:** Opportunities to connect with peers, to share practice and learn from others' experiences, challenges, and successes.
- **Ongoing practical support on self management:** Practical tools and tips, such as templates and case studies, and knowing that additional support is available and can be accessed as needed, e.g. from ALLIANCE Self Management team, especially if there is a named contact, clear route for support and ongoing engagement.
- **Time and capacity to embed self management in practice:** Protected time to explore resources, engage with tools and training, and reflect and implement learning around self management approaches. This includes time to share knowledge with colleagues and improve awareness and encourage wider team buy-in/consistent approaches across teams.
- **Increased public understanding of self management:** Promoting self management and improving signposting and access for individuals to community and third sector support.
- **Emotional support and staff wellbeing:** Some feedback highlights an ongoing need for staff support, encouragement, and confidence-building.

Staff already feel somewhat supported, but need consistent updates, accessible resources, practical training, and strong networks to confidently embed self management into everyday practice.

Conclusion

This report highlights the challenges and enablers for adopting supporting self management practices in health and social care. It also draws attention to the significant value of Self Management Reflective Practice (SMRP) sessions in equipping professionals with the requisite understanding, confidence, and practical tools to support self management effectively. Grounded in lived experience, the sessions enhance individual practice and foster collaboration, shared learning, and a stronger sense of professional connection across services.

The findings demonstrate that while there is a clear commitment among staff to adopt more person centred, empowering approaches, this is often constrained by systemic pressures such as limited resources, workforce capacity and entrenched cultural norms. Barriers at organisational, professional, and individual levels interact in complex ways, reinforcing the need for both localised practice change and broader system-wide transformation.

Encouragingly, as the report spotlights, there are tangible opportunities within the control of professionals and organisations. Strengthening networks and communication, prioritising learning and reflection and embedding cultures that value self management would help build capacity among health and social care professionals. The positive impact of reflective practice sessions demonstrates that creating safe spaces for discussion and development can be a powerful mechanism for change. However, to sustain and build on this progress, ongoing support is essential. Professionals require accessible resources, protected time and strong organisational backing to fully integrate self management values and approaches into everyday practice. Alongside this, there is a need to raise public awareness and understanding of self management as key components of long-term preventative care, to encourage greater engagement and shared responsibility for health and wellbeing.

In conclusion, supported self management plays a crucial role in prevention and delivers benefits for both staff and individuals. By investing in the identified enablers, there is a strong opportunity to build a more person centred, collaborative and sustainable health and social care model in Scotland - one that enables individuals to take an active role in managing their own health and wellbeing.



Self Management is about people living with long term conditions being in 'the driving seat'

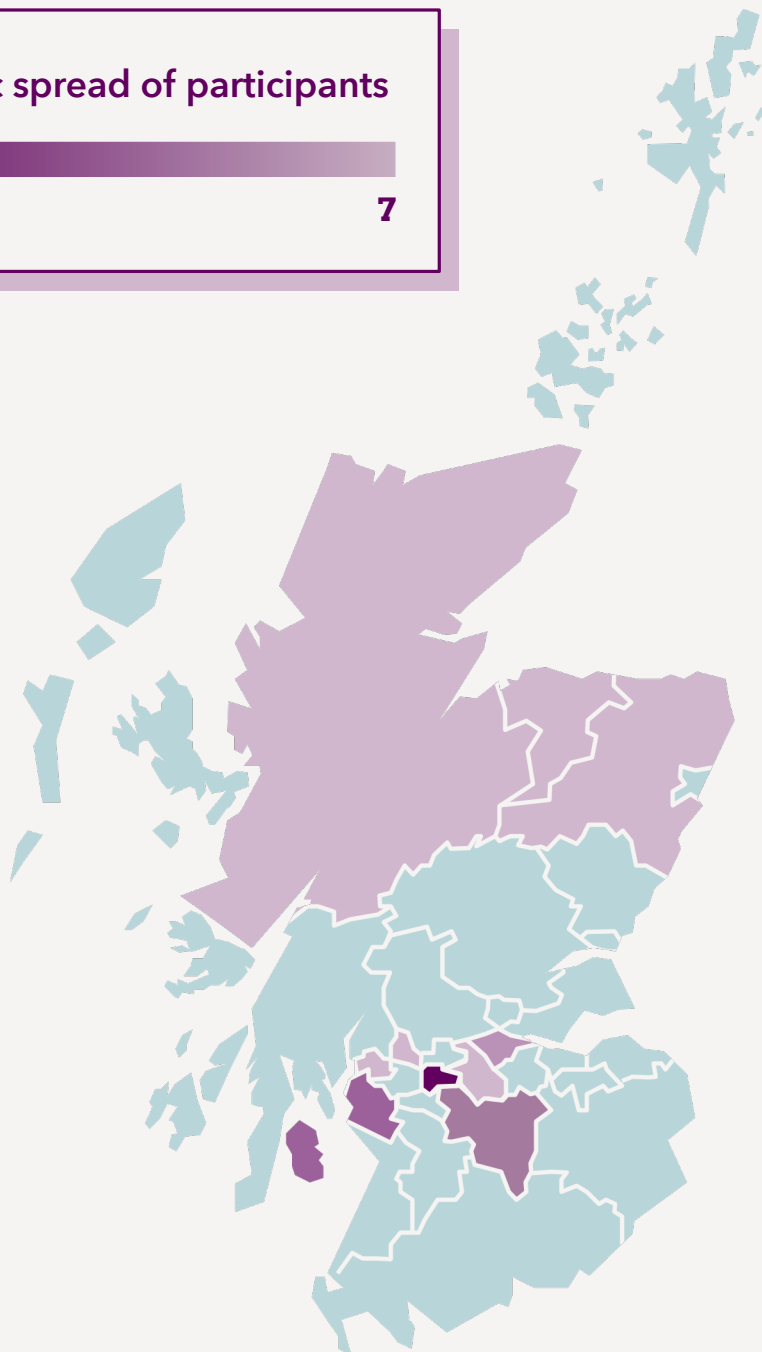
Gaun Yersel, 2008

Appendix:

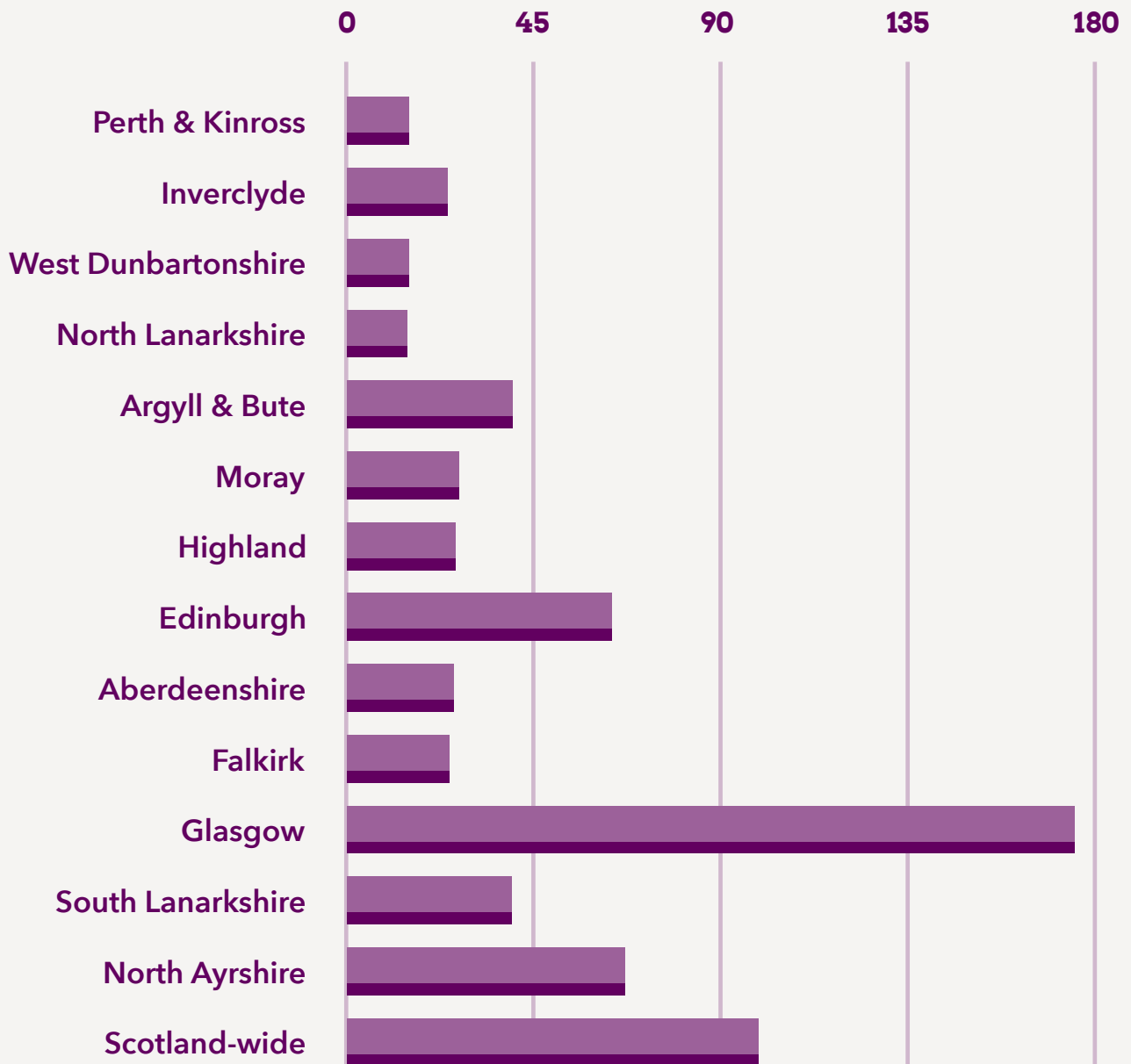
Quantitative information:

- 99% of surveyed participants rated the quality of the course content good or excellent.
- 98% rated the course delivery good or excellent.

Geographic spread of participants



Geographic spread of sessions



Professions of participants



About the ALLIANCE

The Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland (the ALLIANCE) is the national third sector membership organisation for the health and social care sector. We bring together over 3,500 people and organisations dedicated to achieving our vision of a Scotland where everyone has a strong voice and enjoys the right to live well, with dignity and respect. Our members are essential in creating a society in which we all can thrive, and we believe that by working together, our voice is stronger.

We work to improve the wellbeing of people and communities across Scotland by supporting change in health, social care and other public services so they better meet the needs of everyone in Scotland. We do this by bringing together the expertise of people with lived experience, the third sector, and organisations across health and social care to shape better services and support positive change.

The ALLIANCE has three core aims.

We seek to:

- **Empower people with lived experience:** we ensure disabled people, people with long term conditions, and unpaid carers are heard and that their needs remain at the heart of the services and communities.
 - **Support positive change:** we work within communities to promote co-production, self management, human rights, and independent living.
 - **Champion the third sector:** we work with, support and encourage co-operation between the third sector and health and social care organisations.
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The ALLIANCE is committed to upholding human rights. We embed lived experience in our work and aim to ensure people are meaningfully involved at every level of decision-making.

Working together creates positive, long-lasting impact. We work in partnership with the Scottish Government, NHS Boards, universities, and other key organisations within health, social care, housing, and digital technology to manage funding and develop successful projects. Together, our voice is stronger, and we can create meaningful change.

