

## Independence: An Opportunity for Scottish Healthcare to Flourish

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The NHS is one of Scotland's great success stories. We can be rightly proud of the care it delivers - day in and day out - to thousands of people across Scotland. As Health Secretary my focus is to ensure we continue to deliver this high level of care that patients expect.



There are stark differences between the NHS north and south of the border. In Scotland we are fortunate that by having a devolved health service we have not been subjected to Westminster's privatisation policy that is having a profound and damaging effect on the NHS in England. Privatisation goes totally against the founding principles of the NHS: a health service in public hands, free at the point of need. In contrast, the mutual NHS model we have in Scotland is the right model for providing the very best care for patients.

In Scotland, we already have some of the safest hospitals in the world thanks to our Patient Safety Programme – praised by Don Berwick, adviser to President Obama. Waiting times are amongst the lowest ever recorded, and people in Scotland benefit from free eye tests, free prescriptions and free personal care. This government is continuing to invest in our NHS workforce, with more qualified nurses per head of population in Scotland (8.0 per 1,000 in Scotland), compared to 5.8 per 1000 in England<sup>1</sup>. In addition, we have in place the £50 million unscheduled care action plan<sup>2</sup>, to significantly improve access to A&E care, and a mandatory nursing workforce planning tool is now in place to ensure we have the right mix and number of staff in the right place at the right time.

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<sup>1</sup> The Herald (2014). 'Scotland has more Nurses per Head of Population'. [Herald Scotland](http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/health/scotland-has-more-nurses-per-head-of-the-population.24001264). Available From: [<http://www.heraldscotland.com/news/health/scotland-has-more-nurses-per-head-of-the-population.24001264>]. Last Accessed: 22.04.14.

<sup>2</sup> Scottish Government (2013). 'A&E Waiting Times'. [Scottish Government](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2013/05/AEwaitingtimes28052013). Available From: [<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2013/05/AEwaitingtimes28052013>]. Last Accessed: 22.04.14.

One of the most significant reforms to the health service - Health and Social Care Integration - was recently passed by the Scottish Parliament. From April 2016, people in Scotland will now experience a joined-up, seamless transition between health and social care services – a landmark reform that the UK government is coming under increasing pressure to implement. This is clear evidence that a Scottish health service independent from Westminster rule delivers high-quality, world-leading care best suited to the needs of the people of Scotland.

*As Scotland's Future* makes clear, all these gains would be protected under Independence. Not only this, but with the full powers of Independence we would be in a position to do more to tackle the scandalous inequality in health between the richest and poorest parts of our society. It is shameful that children born in the most deprived parts of our country can still expect to live eleven years less than those in the wealthiest areas. Life expectancy should not be decided on where you are born, and Independence gives us the levers and opportunity to end generations of failure on this issue from Westminster.

We are doing what we can with the powers we have available, for example through a range of measures to tackle Scotland's complex relationship with alcohol and to regulate tobacco. This country was the first in the UK to introduce the smoking ban in public places, legislate to impose a minimum unit price of alcohol and commit to plain packaging of cigarettes. However these measures will only go so far and the injustice of health inequality in Scotland can only be solved by tackling the root causes of inequality, and taking the fight beyond the NHS.

Health inequalities are caused by entrenched problems of poverty, educational under-attainment, unemployment and poor mental well-being. Yet despite our best efforts, extreme Westminster cuts and welfare reforms have made our attempts to tackle health inequality considerably more difficult. I firmly believe that only with Independence can we create a fairer society where we can really get to the fundamental causes of health inequality.

While I continue to be proud of all that we have achieved in Scotland, there is still more to be done. It is important that as we drive this continuous improvement, we protect the founding

principles of our National Health Service. Our blueprint for the future of the NHS in Scotland is one which would see Scottish patients at the heart of services by delivering safe, effective, world-class care supported by the hard-working staff of our NHS. With Independence we will continue to deliver and invest in this vision, and with the full powers of Independence we will be able to face head-on the challenges of improving the nation's health.

As an Independent country, we would be in a position to achieve the transformation to the nation's health that successive UK governments have repeatedly failed the people of Scotland on.

With Independence, the NHS will be safe in Scotland's hands.