

# Minister for Public Health and Women's Health submission of 9 January 2024

## PE1989/G: Increase defibrillators in public spaces and workplaces

Thank you for your email of 8 December 2023 inviting me to provide further information. I have organised my response into sections corresponding to the questions asked.

### **Funding**

The committee has asked if the Scottish Government has considered providing a specific fund for the provision of defibrillators. At present the purchase of defibrillators is mainly through fundraising in the community, or from business or organisational resources. In 2021/22 we provided financial support to the [Scottish Football Supporters Association \(SFSA\) fund to improve grassroots access to defibrillators](#).

Applications are currently open for community groups across the UK to apply for a [British Heart Foundation funded defibrillator](#) (closing date 15 March 2024). Importantly, schemes like the one provided by British Heart Foundation (BHF) also provide Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) and defibrillator training resources.

It is important that defibrillators are placed in areas of need, are publicly accessible and registered on The Circuit. This is noted in the BHF Scotland response to the petition and is the approach set out in the [Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest \(OHCA\) Strategy \(2021 – 2026\)](#). Both BHF Scotland and Scottish Government are working together alongside other Save a Life for Scotland partners to deliver this strategy.

There are already over 7000 defibrillators in Scotland currently registered on The Circuit, but a significant proportion of those are not available 24/7 and there is variation in proximity of defibrillators to locations of OHCA occurrence<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, there remains work to be done to ensure that existing defibrillators in Scotland are as accessible as possible when a cardiac arrest occurs.

It is important that we are guided by evidence about where cardiac arrests are most likely to occur to encourage optimal placement. We are working alongside the Resuscitation Research Group at the University of Edinburgh to better understand the evidence around placement of defibrillators in Scotland and to

---

develop a tool, which would help defibrillator guardians make informed decisions about where best to place their device in order that it could have most impact.

## **Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1947**

Any legislative action would have to be based on strong evidence that it would achieve the aim of improving OHCA survival. As the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1947 is a reserved policy area it would be the responsibility of the UK Government to consider the evidence and assess the benefits or consequences of updates to the Act to include defibrillator provision as part of the minimum First Aid requirements.

Our priority is to continue the collaborative partnership approach to improving outcomes from cardiac arrest which has been successful to date in Scotland.

## **Data on the lifesaving benefits of defibrillators**

The Committee has requested relevant information that could indicate how many lives have been saved by increased access to public access defibrillators. The following references may provide some useful information.

- The Public Access Defibrillation Trial Investigators. Public-access defibrillation and survival after out-of-hospital cardiac arrest. *New England Journal of Medicine*. 2004;351(7):637-646.
- Pollack RA, Brown SP, Rea T, et al. Impact of bystander automated external defibrillator use on survival and functional outcomes in shockable observed public cardiac arrests. *Circulation*. 2018;137(20):2104-2113.
- Hansen SM, Hansen CM, Folke F, et al. Bystander defibrillation for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in Public vs Residential Locations. *JAMA Cardiology*. 2017;2(5):507-514.
- Marengo JP, Wang PJ, Link MS, Homoud MK, Estes NAM. Improving survival from sudden cardiac arrest: The role of the automated external defibrillator. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 2001;285(9):1193-1200.
- Blom MT, Beesems SG, Homma PCM, et al. Improved survival after out-of-hospital cardiac arrest and use of automated external defibrillators. *Circulation*. 2014;130(21):1868-1875.
- Weisfeldt ML, Sitlani CM, Ornato JP, et al. Survival After Application of Automatic External Defibrillators Before Arrival of the Emergency Medical System. Evaluation in the Resuscitation Outcomes Consortium Population of 21 Million. *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*. 2010;55(16):1713-1720.

Defibrillation is one aspect in a chain of survival and other aspects, such as bystander CPR, also have an important impact on improving survival rates in the

population. Since the first Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy was launched in 2015, in Scotland bystander CPR rates have increased from 43% to 66.1% and public access defibrillator deployment before the arrival of the ambulance service has increased from 2.5% to 8% in 2021/22. Correspondingly, in 2021/22 1 in 10 people with OHCA survived to leave hospital, as compared to 1 in 20 in 2015<sup>1</sup>.

The Scottish Ambulance Service publish annual updates on out of hospital cardiac arrest data, including data on defibrillation. The most recent can be found here ([Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Annual Report \(scottishambulance.com\)](https://www.scottishambulance.com/out-of-hospital-cardiac-arrest-annual-report))

## **Local Authority Planning**

Decisions on the installation and maintenance of defibrillators on local authority premises are a matter for local authorities to consider at the local level. Scottish Government is not aware of any local authorities that have refused to engage with charities or community groups, nor do we know the details of decisions relating to planning permission requests for defibrillator installations in individual local authorities.

You may wish to contact the relevant local authorities on this matter. The Scottish local government page of the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) provides contact information:  
<https://www.cosla.gov.uk/councils>.

The Committee also asks for information on how Scottish Government intends to work with local authorities to improve their engagement with charities and community groups seeking to install defibrillators. As noted previously, we are a key partner in the Save a Life for Scotland (SALFS) partnership.

SALFS is currently working with a number of local authorities to support community-based activities to strengthen OHCA survival, including initiatives to increase the number of defibrillators in communities. SALFS has engaged with three local authorities who are undertaking innovative work in this area and has facilitated meetings to share learning and ideas. The intention is to produce a blueprint for other local authorities and encourage the sharing of best practice across Scotland.

I hope you find this response useful.

<sup>1</sup> [Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Annual Report \(scottishambulance.com\)](https://www.scottishambulance.com/out-of-hospital-cardiac-arrest-annual-report)