

Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE2235](#): Mandate automated external defibrillator (AED) registration on The Circuit defibrillator network and compulsory maintenance checks in Scotland, lodged by Stephen David Jelfs

[PE2235](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to mandate the registration of all publicly accessible automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in Scotland on [The Circuit](#) national defibrillator network. Additionally, the petition calls for the placement of a legal duty on AED owners or guardians to undertake regular inspection, maintenance, and readiness checks.

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

AED registration and maintenance

[Automated external defibrillators](#) (AEDs) are devices that give a jolt of energy to the heart. They can help to restore a person's heartbeat when someone is experiencing cardiac arrest and their heart has stopped. Anyone can use an AED; the devices give step-by-step audio instructions once switched on.

AEDs are installed in [a range of public spaces](#) in Scotland, including schools, businesses, and community spaces. Many of these AEDs are made publicly accessible for use by community members and the emergency services. These publicly available AEDs are sometimes referred to as Public Access Defibrillators (PADs).

AED owners and guardians are encouraged to register their defibrillator on [The Circuit](#), a UK-wide network managed by the British Heart Foundation that connects defibrillators to NHS ambulance services. This enables AEDs to be quickly located and accessed by emergency service workers attending a cardiac arrest.

There is currently no legal requirement to register AEDs on The Circuit. However, for community groups and others who receive funding for an AED, registration on The Circuit is a common condition of funding. For instance, the British Heart Foundation's [Community Defibrillator Programme](#), which provides free defibrillators to community groups, supplies AEDs on the condition that they are registered with The Circuit.

Once installed, AEDs require a degree of maintenance. Many AEDs [conduct regular self-checks](#), and have a status display on the front of the device, which should notify the owner or guardian if something is wrong. If the display status is green, the AED is operating normally. If it is beeping, flashing, or displaying

an X, this usually means that the device has failed its self-test and requires attention. Common faults include a low battery or expired electrode pads, both of which can impair the use of an AED in an emergency. For this reason, AED owners and guardians are encouraged to physically check their AED on a regular basis. The [British Heart Foundation advises](#) that they should be checked weekly. Some AED retailers offer [service and maintenance plans](#).

When an AED owner or guardian registers their defibrillator on The Circuit, they receive regular reminders to check their defibrillator and replace their electrode pads.

Although there is currently no universal legal requirement to ensure that AEDs are properly maintained, some AED owners and guardians may have legal duties to fulfil under related legislation. For instance, employers have a duty under the [Health and Safety \(First-Aid\) Regulations 1981](#) to ensure that first aid equipment is adequate and appropriate, and by extension, properly maintained. As an example, the Scottish Parliament's Resilience team conducts fortnightly checks of the three AEDs within the Parliament building. Additionally, the public access defibrillator on the exterior of the building is checked daily to ensure the cabinet is intact and the self-check and cabinet indicator lights are lit.

Though they may not be bound by legislation, other organisations and community groups may have developed their own procedures to ensure that their AEDs remain rescue ready. The British Heart Foundation offers a [defibrillator maintenance guide](#) on its website.

Prevalence of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests and defibrillator use

According to the Scottish Ambulance Service's most recent annual [Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest report](#), from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025 there were 3,741 out-of-hospital cardiac arrests (OHCAs) in Scotland where resuscitation was attempted. Overall, the 30-day survival rate following an OHCA was 9%; however, among patients presenting with a shockable rhythm when an AED was applied, the 30-day survival rate was 27.5%. AED use by the public before ambulance arrival occurred in 9.8% of OHCAs.

The Scottish Ambulance Service's report noted that socioeconomic inequalities can affect the outcome of OHCAs. People living in the most deprived quintile are twice as likely to experience an OHCA, and less likely to survive compared to those in the least deprived quintile. The frequency of bystanders intervening with [cardiopulmonary resuscitation](#) (CPR) is fairly consistent across all deprivation quintiles, suggesting that members of the public are willing to take action to help people experiencing cardiac arrest. However, use of AEDs when people experience an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest is lower in more deprived areas. It has been suggested that this is due in part to lower availability of AEDs in these areas. A [2023 study found](#) that on average, the closest 24/7 publicly accessible defibrillator was 317.1 metres further away in Scotland's most deprived communities compared to the least

deprived areas. More equitable access to AEDs could therefore improve OHCA survival outcomes in Scotland's socioeconomically deprived areas.

Scottish Government actions

In its [written response to the petition](#), the Scottish Government stated that it does not consider the petitioner's requests to be actionable. The response stated that the Scottish Government received an informal briefing from the University of Edinburgh's Resuscitation Research Group, stating that there is insufficient evidence to determine whether a mandatory AED registration system would be more effective than a well-supported voluntary system. This briefing does not appear to have been published.

Additionally, the Scottish Government's response noted that the introduction of mandatory registration and maintenance requirements may carry unintended consequences, as people may be deterred from installing AEDs.

However, the Scottish Government has taken other actions intended to improve out-of-hospital cardiac arrest survival rates. Its [out-of-hospital cardiac arrest strategy 2021-26](#) follows on from the previous 2015-20 strategy, aiming to ensure that as many people as possible survive OHCA. Data [published by the Scottish Ambulance Service](#) shows an overall increase in 30-day survival rates following OHCA since the publication of the first strategy, with some variation due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

In February 2026, the Scottish Government announced an additional [£2.5 million of funding](#) to increase community capacity to respond to OHCA. The funding will be used to install more AEDs in public spaces and provide CPR training.

Scottish Parliament actions

In March 2020, former MSP Lord Anas Sarwar [proposed a Member's Bill](#) to mandate the registration of AEDs with the Scottish Ambulance Service. The [consultation conducted to inform the Bill](#) demonstrated widespread support for the principle of mandatory AED registration, but mixed views on issues such as who should bear the legal responsibility for registration, how often the Scottish Ambulance Service should be required to check that registered AEDs are in place, and whether sanctions should apply to AED owners or guardians who fail to register their device. The proposal fell at the end of Session 5 of the Parliament, and was not re-introduced during Session 6.

Key Organisations and relevant links

[Out-of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy 2021-26](#) – The Scottish Government's strategy for improving OHCA survival rates

[Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland \(CHSS\)](#) – Charity supporting people with chest, heart, and stroke-related conditions, including people who have experienced cardiac arrest. Raises awareness of issues including OHCA.

[Save a Life for Scotland](#) – a campaign to equip people in Scotland with CPR skills

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The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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