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Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2255: Reinstate the Minister for Women's Health, lodged by Elizabeth Carr-Ellis on behalf of Support Her Health

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

Petition PE2255 calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to reinstate the Minister for Women's Health. The petitioner states that the removal of this ministerial post while women still face barriers to accessing healthcare risks reducing visibility, accountability, and momentum at a time when significant challenges remain.

Current and previous Ministerial responsibility for women's health

During Session 6 of the Scottish Parliament, the Scottish Government appointed a dedicated Minister for Women's Health. From 2021-23, Maree Todd MSP held the post of Minister for Public Health, Women's Health, and Sport. In 2023, Jenni Minto MSP was appointed Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, a role that she held until the dissolution of the Parliament in April 2026.

Following the May 2026 Scottish Parliament elections, the First Minister announced a streamlined Cabinet, with a smaller number of Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers. Maree Todd MSP was given a new role as Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol & Drugs. Although not explicitly stated in her title, Ms Todd now holds ministerial responsibility for women's health.

In its written response to the petition, the Scottish Government stated that the women's health portfolio has always been held alongside wider portfolio responsibilities.

Overview of key challenges affecting women's health

The petitioner expressed concern that removal of this dedicated ministerial role may affect implementation of the commitments made within the Women's Health Plan to address inequalities affecting women's access to healthcare. According to Public Health Scotland, women in Scotland spend 25% more of their lives living in poor health compared to men. Public Health Scotland states that gender inequality plays a significant role in shaping women's health outcomes.

The Scottish Government commissioned a research project in 2023 exploring women's experiences of discrimination, and the impact on their health. This research informed the development of the Scottish Government's Women's Health Plan. The researchers highlighted a number of broad issues identified by participants in relation to their experiences of healthcare. Women reported feeling ignored and dismissed when attempting to seek healthcare, a common theme across research in this area.

Participants also highlighted systemic gender bias in the healthcare system, feeling that health and healthcare are informed by "default male" stereotypes.

Women also felt that they faced additional discrimination based on factors such as age, socioeconomic status, and race. Many disabled women report experiencing additional barriers to healthcare in Scotland, as this research paper explores. Phase Two of the Women's Health Plan commits to taking an intersectional approach to women's health, recognising that some women face overlapping stigma and discrimination due to factors including race, age, and disability.

Scottish Government actions

As stated earlier in this briefing, Maree Todd MSP, the Minister for Mental Wellbeing, Public Health, Sport, Alcohol, and Drugs, currently holds ministerial responsibility for women's health. Ms Todd chairs the Women's Health Plan Phase Two Oversight Group, which monitors delivery of the Plan.

The Scottish Government's written response to the petition highlighted the actions it has taken to reduce women's health inequalities through its Women's Health Plan. The response also noted relevant commitments from the Programme for Government 2026-31, including:

- Implementing the second phase of the Women's Health Plan and the National Plan for Gynaecology, backed by £13 million of investment to reduce waits, and invest in research in women's health, funding new research into menstrual health and recognising endometriosis as a chronic condition.

- Developing Christina's Card, to be sent to every woman resident in Scotland shortly after their 50th birthday, which will share information about checking for lumps and bumps, accessing menopause support and their eligibility for various screening and testing programmes.

- Delivering actions to eradicate cervical cancer by 2040, launching a national campaign to increase uptake of HPV vaccination and cervical screening, and expanding the use of self-sampling kits.

Scottish Parliament actions

There has been no Scottish Parliament action on this topic to date.

Key Organisations and relevant links

- The Women's Health Plan: Phase Two

- Maree Todd MSP's list of ministerial responsibilities

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Researcher
26 October 2026

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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