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Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2282: Accelerate a Unified NHS Scotland Patient Record System, Share Data and Save Lives, lodged by Kareen Howden

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

This petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to accelerate the implementation of the Digital Health and Care Record (DHCR) and to introduce interim measures for specific conditions, such as blood cancer, to improve the sharing and accessibility of patient data for multi-disciplinary teams, including test results, imaging and previous treatments, across all 14 territorial health boards until the DHRC is implemented, to strengthen patient safety and reduce the risk of harm.

Digital Health and Care Record

There have been longstanding calls for the development of a digital health and care record. In its inquiry into Technology and innovation in health and social care (2017), the Session 5 Health and Sport Committee heard issues around data sharing and the plans of the Scottish Government for a single data platform.

The Scottish Government published its refreshed digital health and care strategy in 2021. This moved away from the core commitment to develop a National Digital Platform to a "collaborative and integrated approach to delivering cloud-based digital components and capabilities that will play a significant role in our health and care digital ecosystem, underpinning our commitment to improve the availability and accessibility of health and care information and services".

It set the vision "To improve the care and wellbeing of people in Scotland by making best use of digital technologies in the design and delivery of services" and had three aims:

1. Citizens have access to, and greater control over, their own health and care data – as well as access to the digital information, tools and services they need to help maintain and improve their health and wellbeing.

2. Health and care services are built on people-centred, safe, secure and ethical digital foundations which allow staff to record, access and share relevant information across the health and care system, and feel confident in their use of digital technology, in order to improve the delivery of care.

3. Health and care planners, researchers and innovators have secure access to the data they need in order to increase the efficiency of our health and care systems, and develop new and improved ways of working.

More recently, the Care Reform (Scotland) Act 2025 placed a duty on Scottish Ministers to enable everyone who receives health care or a social service in Scotland to have a digital care record. This is intended to draw together information about the person from health care and social service providers.

An update on progress towards this is provided in answer to written question S7W-02818 (September 2026):

> "Public Service Delivery Scotland and Local Government Digital Office have accepted a formal commissioned to develop a programme around the Digital Health and Care Record. £3.6m will be invested this year to begin the necessary initial technology testing and business case work needed to set out the path to delivery and estimated delivery cost.
>
> Given the scale and complexity of the health and social care landscape, it is expected that full delivery of a future record will be major multi-year programme that will be delivered in phases."

The petition calls for the introduction of "interim measures for specific conditions, such as blood cancer, to improve the sharing and accessibility of patient data for multi-disciplinary teams". However, in its written response the Scottish Government said:

> "The Scottish Government does not consider it practical to establish separate interim information-sharing solutions for specific clinical conditions […] Delivering condition-specific solutions could increase complexity, create duplication, and risk diverting resources from the development of a sustainable national approach that benefits all patients and services. Existing mechanisms already support the sharing of key patient information between Boards. For example, most NHS Boards have access to clinical portals that enable staff to access patient information, including Emergency Care Summary and relevant clinical records to ensure delivery of safe and effective care for patients".

Health Board Reform

In his speech on the Programme for Government 2026 to 2031, the First Minister announced plans to reduce the number of NHS boards in Scotland from 14 to two, one covering the east of Scotland and one covering the west. The aim of these reforms is "improving services and removing barriers to better patient care". These reforms intend to build on the move to sub-national planning which was set out in a communication to health boards in November 2025.

Key Organisations and relevant links

- Digital Health and Care Innovation Centre
- COSLA
- Public Service Delivery Scotland
- Blood Cancer UK

- South East Scotland Cancer Network (SCAN)
- North Cancer Alliance (NCA)
- The West of Scotland Cancer Network (WoSCAN)

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16 November 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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