

PE2126/A: Ensure abortion services are available up to 24 weeks across all parts of Scotland

Scottish Government written submission, 7 January 2025

I refer to your email of 28 November 2024 asking for the Scottish Government's views on the action called for in the above petition.

The petition calls for the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to ensure abortion services are available up to the twenty-fourth week of pregnancy across all NHS health boards in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has committed to ensuring abortion services are available within Scotland up to 24 weeks gestation for all patients who require it. We are working urgently with NHS Boards and other key stakeholders to determine the most appropriate way forward.

In June 2022, the Scottish Government wrote to all Health Boards to request that all mainland Boards provide abortions to at least 20 weeks gestation, with the aim of providing services at later gestations where possible, in line with Healthcare Improvement Scotland's Sexual Health Standards. All mainland Boards subsequently confirmed that they are providing services to at least 19+6 weeks gestation.

There are a range of complex, inter-related issues that have prevented a service being established within Scotland thus far, and the Scottish Government is continuing to explore all options to ensure this service is readily available in Scotland.

In early 2023, the Scottish Government formally commissioned NSS National Services Division (NSD) to produce a specification on the optimal delivery proposal for a later stage abortion service. Significant work was completed to develop a proposal. With no Health Board at that stage able to host the national service proposed, a Short Life Working Group was established to recommend the most attainable and sustainable way of delivering services in Scotland. The Scottish Government hopes to agree a solution with Boards as soon as possible.

We understand concerns around this issue and remain committed to working with Health Boards to agree a solution. This is expected to involve consideration of a regional service so that later stage abortions would be provided in more than one location in Scotland.

The Scottish Government has also committed to providing funding to any clinician who wishes to train to provide later stage abortion services within Scotland.

In the meantime, we are clear that where Health Boards cannot provide these services locally, they must provide patients with a patient-centred pathway to access the healthcare they need.

Separately, the Scottish Government continues work ongoing to improve access to abortion services. This includes an Expert Group established to take forward the first

phase of a review into the law on abortion, with the aim of ensuring that abortion is first and foremost a healthcare matter.

I hope this response is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Abortion Policy Team