

## **Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE2128: ‘Increase funding for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions and ensure that waiting time information is accurate’, lodged by Christy Esslemont**

### **Brief overview of issues raised by the petition**

[PE2128](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to provide additional funding to reduce waiting times for post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions in Scotland, and assess whether the communication section of its waiting times guidance is being followed by Health Boards.

The petition highlights that post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstructions were paused in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to long waiting lists for the procedure. The petitioner has lived experience of waiting for this procedure, and feels that information regarding waiting times is not currently clearly communicated to patients.

### **Post mastectomy (delayed) breast reconstruction procedure**

[A mastectomy](#) is a surgical procedure to remove a breast. It is mainly offered as a treatment for breast cancer, or to lower the risk of breast cancer developing. Women who have undergone a mastectomy may choose to have breast reconstruction surgery. Some women may decide to have breast reconstruction surgery at the same time as a mastectomy, known as immediate breast reconstruction. However, others may choose to wait to make this decision, and opt for delayed breast reconstruction. Additionally, immediate breast reconstruction surgery [may not always be possible](#) for some women with breast cancer, such as those who require further treatment following their mastectomy. There is [currently no time limit](#) for accessing delayed breast reconstruction surgery; some women may make the decision several years after their mastectomy procedure.

## **Funding and waiting times for delayed breast reconstruction in Scotland**

Funding for breast reconstruction surgery is ordinarily determined at Health Board level, from funding allocated to Boards by the Scottish Government. In July 2024, £30 million of [targeted additional funding](#) was allocated by the Scottish Government to Health Boards to address long waits across a range of treatment areas. As part of this £30 million, some Boards [received funding specifically to address backlogs](#) in mastectomy and immediate breast reconstruction surgery. However, delayed reconstruction surgery was not included in this funding allocation.

Waiting times for breast reconstruction surgery have not been routinely reported since 2020. During a [meeting of the Parliament](#) on 10 October 2024, the First Minister stated that the Scottish Government is currently working to determine how this information could be published, and is working with Boards to address waits for delayed breast reconstruction surgery.

### **Scottish Government waiting times guidance**

The Scottish Government's [NHS Scotland Waiting Times Guidance](#) document, published in November 2023, sets out guidance for Health Boards regarding management of waiting lists for planned care. It states the importance of ensuring that patients are provided with "clear, accurate and transparent communications at the beginning of their care journey". Health Boards are expected to have "consistent, effective processes for communicating with patients on a regular basis."

If a Health Board cannot meet a patient's [Treatment Time Guarantee](#) (TTG) before it breaches, the Board must contact the patient to apologise and explain the reason for the delay. The Board must also provide details of an online platform on which the patient can access further information about current waiting times for the relevant specialty, and a named point of contact regarding waiting times for patients who cannot access the online platform.

Patients who initially opt out of post-mastectomy reconstructive surgery, then request surgery at a later date, would be treated as new patients and covered by the Treatment Time Guarantee. However, many women awaiting delayed reconstruction surgery would not be covered by the TTG, as the timescale for their reconstruction surgery would be agreed at the time of their initial treatment. They would therefore be treated as "returning" patients when waiting for their surgery, and would not be covered by the TTG. Patients in this category may face longer waits for surgery, as patients requiring urgent cancer treatment would be given clinical priority.

### **Scottish Government actions**

In a meeting of the Parliament on [10 October 2024](#), the First Minister stated that the Scottish Government is working with Health Boards to address the issue of delays to reconstructive surgery. The First Minister also stated that

the Scottish Government has prioritised addressing the treatment backlog for patients currently experiencing cancer. The Scottish Government also committed to addressing the issue of a lack of published information on current waiting times.

## **Scottish Parliament actions**

Questions regarding access to delayed breast reconstruction surgery have been raised in the Parliament on a number of occasions, most recently on [6 November 2024](#).

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7 January 2025

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](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

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