

Scottish Government Chronic Pain Framework 2021–22



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The Scottish Government Chronic Pain Framework 2021–22 is now out for public consultation as I write.

Consultation began in December 2021 and closed on 28 February 2022.

The Framework was put together by the National Advisory Committee on Chronic Pain which for the first time since its inception and included patient representation. My own charity, Affa Sair, like other new charities, was vetted and given a seat on the committee as one of the third-sector representatives along with Pain Concern, Pain Association Scotland, Versus Arthritis, The Health and Social Care Alliance and Friends of the Centre for Integrative Care.

In 2020, the Scottish Government's 'Programme for Government' set out commitments to:

- Publish a recovery framework for pain management services.
- Review the format and remit of the National Advisory Committee for Chronic Pain.
- Develop the current Scottish Service Model for Chronic Pain and to publish a new Framework for Chronic Pain Service Delivery in 2021.

In February 2021, the restructured NACCP met to begin its work to:

- Advise the Scottish Government on chronic pain to inform effective national policy and service improvement, considering available data on service provision, outcomes and harmful variation.
- Guide the improvement of chronic pain management at all levels of health and social care, including the delivery of the Scottish Government's commitments in the Programme for Government, the recommendations of the Scottish Access Collaborative report on Chronic Pain and the ongoing remobilisation and rebuilding of pain management services during and following the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Raise and maintain the profile of chronic pain with the public, NHS and Local Authority senior leadership and other relevant Scottish Government stakeholders.
- Oversee pain management content on NHS Inform.

NACCP members were asked to make suggestions for inclusion in the framework. The charities, or third-sector representatives, got together and submitted their suggestions as one report. Some of the suggestions put forward by my own charity, Affa Sair, were for a common Pain Management Programme for all of the Health Boards; Government-approved training sessions for trainee doctors and other health professionals on what living a life with chronic pain is really like; a common questionnaire for all health board areas to use when assessing patients' pain symptoms and which should be completed before the initial assessment, saving clinical time. We will keep pushing for these ideals in the years ahead.

The Framework's overall vision is for person-centred, effective and safe care that improves the quality of life and well-being of people living with chronic pain in Scotland and the aims of the new framework are as follows:

- To ensure access to appropriate information and support based on an individual's needs.
- To support people to access the care they need when they need it.
- To ensure people have a choice of effective treatments.
- To invest in training, data and research to improve care and support.

This Framework has been welcomed by Affa Sair trustees and members and commits the Scottish Government to:

- Improve the quality and consistency of information on chronic pain and make it more easily accessible. The Scottish Government will empower people to understand their condition and better manage its impact on their physical and mental well-being.
- Support people to access the right care, in the right place, at the right time by working with NHS Boards to improve how they plan and deliver care for people with chronic pain. This includes increased coordination across community-based, GP and hospital services.
- Improve the options people have in accessing chronic pain services, including digital technology where appropriate.

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- Support people with chronic pain and healthcare professionals to better understand and agree effective treatment options to manage pain.
- Ensure people have more consistent access to effective treatment options wherever they live in Scotland.
- Work with NHS Education for Scotland, professional bodies and partners to improve training and education on management of chronic pain.
- Establish and support health and care professional networks to share best practice in pain management at local and national levels.
- Support Health and Social Care Partnerships to improve how pain management support is planned and delivered locally by promoting more consistent use of performance and quality data.
- Work with Public Health Scotland to increase national reporting and analysis of clinical and patient experience data to improve services for people with chronic pain.
- Develop and agree national standards for pain management services to improve care for people with chronic pain.
- Support pain research in Scotland to develop improved care and treatment options for people with chronic pain.

All the commitments and aims of the Framework are very laudable but of course, at the moment are only words. As with everything else in life, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. I am heartened though that under a new chairmanship the NACCP has become more open in its dealings with patients and has shown a commitment to change the previous workings of the committee. Allowing patient representation

onto the committee is a major step forward and must surely be welcomed by chronic pain patients desperate to have their plight recognised by government officials. With every new organisation, there will always be a few bumps on the road, but chronic pain sufferers should be assured that there is at long last a willingness to make changes, albeit with all the problems that come with historic problems of unacceptably long waiting lists, lack of consultants, training and staff. What cannot be disputed is that when the Framework is finally adopted, it will give chronic pain sufferers something to hold the Scottish Government to account with.

Personally, I hope this is the start of a new working relationship between the Scottish Government and chronic pain sufferers (I hate the term 'lived experience' currently favoured by government officials) where proper discussion and debate take place. Both sides must concentrate on the daily needs of those suffering intractable pain and put aside past animosity and extremist behaviour while being mindful of the real-life problems of finite budgets, manpower and the ongoing problems COVID brings.

Chris Bridgeford is the founder and chairman of the Scottish Charity – Affa Sair (Scots for 'Awfully Sore'). The charity currently has around 620 members and is open to those affected by chronic pain wherever they may live. Members are encouraged to share their experiences and ideas for coping with chronic pain in the charity's closed Facebook Group which is only accessible to members. There is a free monthly newsletter and an information-packed website at www.affasair.org