

# Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport submission of 13 December 2022

## PE1989/A: Increase defibrillators in public spaces and workplaces

Thank you for your email of 16 November 2022 inviting me to respond to petition PE1989 calling on Scottish Government to support the provision of defibrillators in public spaces and workplaces.

I am grateful to Ms Montague for raising this issue. I am sorry to hear of the loss of a close family member, and extend my sympathies.

I note the challenge that Ms Montague has faced regarding the provision of a defibrillator in her local supermarket. I should outline for the committee that decisions about the provision of life saving equipment, such as defibrillators, in private businesses, is the responsibility of those organisations and it is for them to determine the appropriate resources to put in place. I will therefore focus my response on the wider efforts to improve survival from Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA), including efforts to increase defibrillator usage in Scotland.

Every year over 3,000 people are treated by the Scottish Ambulance Service after having an OHCA. The key factors in determining survival from OHCA are early, high quality hands-only cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and counter-shock therapy (defibrillation), which must be applied within a matter of minutes in order to be successful.

The Scottish Government are key partners in Save a Life for Scotland (SALFS). This is a partnership which includes the emergency services, third sector organisations, and academic researchers with a joint aim of increasing OHCA survival rates in Scotland.

Through the delivery of the initial [Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy \(2015-2020\)](#), bystander CPR rates rose from 43% to 64% and survival rates rose from 1 in 20 to 1 in 10. To date, the SALFS partnership have equipped 666,605 people with the skills to save a life. The bystander CPR rate has continued to increase, even throughout the pandemic, to 66%.

This progress has been significant, but we recognise that there is still more to do. The SALFS partnership therefore set out their refreshed strategy, which can be found here [Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy \(2021 – 2026\)](#) .

This includes the key aims of

- Increasing the number of people in Scotland equipped with CPR skills to 1 million people by 2026.
- Increasing bystander CPR rates to 85%.
- Increasing survival from OHCA to 15%.

Of particular relevance to this petition is the strategy's aim of increasing the percentage of OHCA which have a defibrillator applied before the ambulance service arrive from **8% to 20%**. [Scotland's Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Report 2019-2022](#) illustrates 2021-22 rates are currently at 8% . Defibrillator usage appeared to be impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic but there has been substantial recovery returning to pre-pandemic rates, which is positive.

We agree that it is vital that defibrillators are optimally placed and are as accessible as possible in times of need. SALFS are working to build the evidence base required to make strategic decisions about the placement of defibrillators, to encourage their registration with Scottish Ambulance Service and to increase public confidence and knowledge around defibrillation through embedding defibrillator usage within awareness raising campaigns and the delivery of CPR training.

On the first point, the University of Edinburgh Resuscitation Research Group is undertaking work to analyse the placement of defibrillators across Scotland and map this against the areas which have the highest risk of cardiac arrest occurring. This important work could help defibrillator guardians make informed decisions about where to place their device in order to have the most impact.

Registration of defibrillators is vital to this work as it enables us to understand the current defibrillator footprint. It also ensures that in an incident of cardiac arrest, Scottish Ambulance Service call handlers can locate nearby devices and direct bystanders to it. In Scotland, "[The Circuit](#)", developed by British Heart Foundation and Microsoft, is used by the Scottish Ambulance Service. We would take this opportunity to strongly encourage all defibrillator guardians to register their defibrillator on The Circuit.

[Scotland's Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Report 2019-2022](#) highlights that the number of Public Access Defibrillators (PAD) in communities across Scotland that are registered with "The Circuit" has more than doubled since 2019 and is now at almost 5,000.

I would highlight to the committee that defibrillation is one part of a complex chain of survival from OHCA and it is important to note that SALFS work to implement actions across all aspects of this chain. Recent progress includes;

- The launch of the [Play your Part campaign](#) which seeks to make CPR training inclusive to everyone in Scotland specifically for individuals living with a disability
- The launch of [GoodSAM](#), an app that allows the Scottish Ambulance Service to notify volunteers to attend and provide CPR at a cardiac arrest before the ambulance arrives.

Finally, as noted by Ms Montague, the impact of witnessing an OHCA can be significant. We therefore recognise that the provision of aftercare support is a vital element of the chain of survival. To address this, Scottish Government have recently provided funding to Chest, Heart & Stroke Scotland and the Research Resuscitation Group (Edinburgh University) to deliver a pilot project of aftercare support for people who witness an OHCA.

I hope you find the information in our response helpful, and it assures you of our ongoing commitment to improving survival from OHCA in Scotland.