



Minister for Social Care and Mental Wellbeing
Tom Arthur MSP

T: 0300 244 4000
E: scottish.ministers@gov.scot

Clare Haughey
Convenor
Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

13 January 2026

Dear Clare,

Following publication of the draft Scottish Budget on 13 January, I wanted to provide some context around the Mental Health direct programme budget and why this looks different to previous years.

The draft Scottish budget confirms the mental health budget will be £149.8 million in 2026-27, a 12% increase against the 2025-26 Post ABR budget. Given concerns which the publication of the Autumn Budget Revision for 2025-26 generated in October, I am keen to offer some insight into the process and structural changes within the draft budget.

As you'll be aware, most of the Scottish budget which will go into mental health won't be formally labelled as such within the Level 4 budget tables. This year, for example, we expect NHS Boards to spend around £1.5 billion on mental health, funded mainly from their core budgets.

So it's helpful to view the direct mental health programme budget - which for the 2025-26 published budget was £270.5 million and for 2026-27 is £149.8 million - as part of that bigger picture.

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A key point to note is that while those figures look different, **the budget for mental health has not been subject to any savings**, despite a very challenging financial context. As the draft 2026-27 budget document highlights, a number of mental health programmes were baselined over 2025-26, transferring the funding to other portfolios and recurring allocations to NHS Boards for spend on mental health. With the move to baselining, which permanently transfers budget in particular to NHS Boards, the programme budget therefore looks quite different in 2026-27.

For information, the table below sets out the NHS Board allocations that were baselined in 2025-26 to NHS Boards core budgets as recurring transfers.

Programme	Amount baselined (£M)
Enhanced Mental Health Outcomes Framework	£123.5m
Mother and Baby Unit, staffing, peer support and MBUFF	£1.1m
Digital Mental Health Programme Licences and Support	£0.9m
NHS24 Mental Health Hub	£2.2m
Total Board allocations baselined in 2025-26	£127.7m

Baselining funding into NHS Board budgets across the portfolio supports greater long term funding stability and allows for better planning and continuity when providing local services and support. Other transfers which impact on the 2026-27 draft budget relate to mental health initiatives led by other Scottish Government portfolios, for example workforce initiatives to increase pharmacy supply and psychiatric training places.

The 2025-26 Autumn Budget Revision for mental health heralded this move by presenting the programme budget figure once a number of transfers had been made. Further adjustments are made at the Spring Budget Revision. This is likely to be published for 2025-26 later in January 2026.

It is worth noting that other mental health funding has also been baselined in previous years, including £16 million for school counselling and £15 million for children and young people's community-based mental health support which is now part of the local government general settlement.

I would like to emphasise that investment in mental health remains a priority for this government. In addition to maintaining other elements of the mental health programme budget, we are pleased to confirm that the budget reflects £10.6 million increased investment - £7.6 million to improve neurodevelopmental assessments and care for children and young people; and an additional £3 million for the Changing Places toilets programme. We will ensure the programme budget continues to support our work across mental health priorities, including our focus on early intervention and prevention – for example through our Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults, to which we have already committed £15 million in 2026-27, as part of the Fairer Funding pilot.

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I hope this information helps to clarify the mental health budget proposed as part of the draft Scottish budget on 13 January.

Yours sincerely,



TOM ARTHUR

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