

Committee Inquiry into Community Empowerment Act 2015

NHS Lothian and NHS Lothian Charity welcome the opportunity to provide written evidence to Committee Inquiry into Community Empowerment Act 2015. We are committed to supporting communities to do things for themselves and make their voices heard in the planning and delivery of services. Working in partnership with a wide range of third sector and community organisations our Greenspace and Health programme is an excellent example of how we embody this principle.

Key points

1. Community participation in the NHS estate creates significant opportunities to increase local food production, improve health and enhance biodiversity. When delivered well this has a positive impact for communities, patients and NHS staff.
2. To ensure we are tackling health inequalities initiatives need to be well supported, staffed and resourced. Specific skills are required to ensure both local communities and NHS patients and staff benefit.
3. Working in partnership we can unlock the skills and experience of a wide range of community organisations and long term investment in capacity building is required.

Background

NHS Lothian provides a comprehensive range of primary, community-based and acute hospital services across more than 120 sites that include 81 ha of greenspace¹ in Edinburgh, Midlothian, East Lothian and West Lothian. NHS Lothian Charity is the official charity of NHS Lothian, dedicated to supporting all of NHS Lothian's work, all its patients and their families, and their staff.

There is a long history of growing and greenspace projects on the NHS Lothian estate. Working with greenspace scotland the NHS Lothian Charity published the Greenspace and Health: Strategic Framework for Edinburgh & Lothians² in June 2019. The framework sets a policy context and evidence review for this work and brings together the wide range of activities and partners under a shared vision to make the most of the NHS estate as a community health and climate

¹ [NHS Lothian Biodiversity Audit and Climate Change Assessment Summary 2021](#)

² [Greenspace and Health: Strategic Framework for Edinburgh & Lothians, 2019](#)

change asset. The co-ordination and leadership of this work is resourced as key part the NHS Lothian Charity funding programme and this has now become an integral part of the board's response to the climate emergency forming a key focus are in the NHS Lothian Sustainable Development Framework³.

There are a range of greenspace and health opportunities provided on the NHS Lothian estate and these can be broadly categorised into:

- **NHS Community gardens** – There are three formal community gardens used by local communities, staff and patients to grow food and deliver therapeutic activities. There is a strong focus on health outcomes and community participation as well as the production of food and enhancement of biodiversity. The gardens at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital and the Midlothian Community Hospital have been developed and managed by the [Cyrenians](#). The garden at [Belhaven hospital](#) has been developed and managed by Sustaining Dunbar.
- **Growing spaces** – With the support of the NHS Lothian Charity local interventions have been developed at a number of sites at the request of NHS staff and local communities. These mainly consist of raised beds and planters that are publicly accessible and are managed by local volunteers. An excellent example of this can be seen at Prestonpans Health Centre and [Mill Lane Surgery](#).
- **Hospital & ward gardens** – There are a number of hospital and ward gardens that are not accessible to the public but are used for therapeutic activities and food growing by NHS staff and patients. These are private spaces that have been developed to meet the needs of specific groups of staff or patients for example the [A&E courtyard](#) at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. Activities within these spaces are often delivered by third sectors organisations such as Cyrenians, Artlink and Volunteer Edinburgh.

How was the partnership with Cyrenians formed, and what investment was required to establish the community gardens?

The Cyrenians use a values and relationship based approach tackle the causes and consequences of homelessness, with a particular emphasis on including people who might face barriers to being involved in activities due to a range of complex needs.

NHS Lothian invited the Cyrenians to be involved with the Royal Edinburgh Hospital in 2009, when the then Chair of NHS Lothian saw the potential of developing greenspace and environmentally-based activities. A steering group was established by NHS Lothian to support the development of the garden and over the years this expanded to cover a wider range of sites working with partners who share a common goal.

³ [NHS Lothian Sustainable Development Framework and Action Plan](#)

The key to the success of the growing spaces is the skills and expertise that the different partners bring to the projects. Partners such as Sustaining Dunbar, Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust and The Conservation Volunteers have created connections to local communities and provided practical skills and training. National organisations such as NatureScot, Scottish Forestry, greenspace scotland and Social Farms and Gardens have provided advice, advocacy and funding.

Each growing space has developed differently, from the purpose built garden at Midlothian Community Hospital to the retrofit of the gardens at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital and Belhaven Hospital. As these gardens were established over time, we do not have a total cost, however, our experience has shown that due to the complexity of NHS sites it is reasonable to assume that the cost is higher than in other community settings.



Figure 1 – Cyrenians volunteers working in the Royal Edinburgh Hospital Community Garden © Will Collier

What resources are required to run the community gardens, and how they operate?

Our person centred approach means that a wide range of volunteers and participants contribute to the running of the gardens and co-design the services offered. The Cyrenians gardens at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital and Midlothian Community Hospital are open every day to members of the public, with volunteer and group work programmes running on weekdays.

There are over 325 individual visitors each week and the focus on tackling health inequalities and supporting and vulnerable people means that the gardens need to be professional staffed and volunteers need to be properly supported and trained.

The community gardens are managed by a full time Garden Service Manager and each site has a Garden Co-ordinator who is responsible for the development of the garden. Activity Co-ordinators work at both sites to ensure that we are supporting a wide range of people to access the opportunities and connect with NHS staff and services that can benefit. Where higher staffing ratios are required to support people with complex needs sessional workers lead activities with volunteers and participants. The resources required for each of the Cyrenians gardens are summarise in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - Cyrenians resource for NHS community gardens in 2022/23

Resource	Royal Edinburgh Hospital	Midlothian Community Hospital
Garden development & management		
Garden Service Manager	18.5	18.5
Garden Coordinator	28 hours	21 hours
Activity delivery		
Sessional support staff	20hrs (approx.)	20hrs (approx.)
Patient Activity Co-ordinator	32 hrs	
Community Activity Coordinator	18 hrs	7hr
Community Gardener (community payback supervision)		25hrs
Volunteers & participants		
Supported volunteers & participants	150 hrs	67 hrs

The running cost of the Cyrenians community gardens ranges from £100,000 to £125,000 per annum per garden. Funding for these activities and services is managed by the Cyrenians and comes from a wide range of sources including:

- **Charitable donations** – Grants from NHS Lothian Charity, individual giving, other charitable trusts.
- **National statutory organisations** – Strategic funding from NatureScot, Scottish Forestry and Scottish Government.
- **Regional statutory organisations** – Service Level Agreement with NHS wards, Local Area Partnerships, Health and Social Care Partnerships, other Local Authority funding.

How do you evidence the impact of the community gardens?

The impact of the community gardens is measured on a project by project basis with evidence gathered for funders. Overall data on the usage of the gardens is tracked and measured by the Cyrenians and incorporated into an annual impact report. This includes quantitative on numbers of visitors, volunteers and sessions as well as qualitative evidence on the impact for participants. Mike's story below sums this up well.

"Mike's life changed significantly in 2020 when he had a serious car accident and was left with a permanent brain injury. He was encouraged to come along to our gardening sessions by his Occupational therapist, having never done any gardening before. These groups have been a turning point for him. He says it's been life changing, and has given him a way of connecting with his family and in particular with his grandchildren that he didn't have before. He didn't feel he had a way to connect. Now he feels he has something to pass on."

The biodiversity of the gardens has been measured through the NHS Lothian Biodiversity Audit⁴ which identified these spaces as key assets in tackling the climate emergency. The audit assessed these spaces to be in 'good' ecological condition. It found that these gardens are well used and maintained, supporting a diversity of semi-natural habitats such as rough grassland and broadleaved trees; habitats considered of higher biodiversity.

A cost-benefit analysis of two existing therapeutic gardening activities, that have 350 participants annually, showed that these activities produced a return on investment (RoI) of 2.00. That is, every £1.00 spent on therapeutic gardening results in direct health benefits with a value of £2.00. The scale of this is smaller than wider social returns on investment as it focuses solely on the health benefits.

Future impact evaluation will focus on the outcome maps developed in the programme's interim evaluation⁵ and we have planned collaborations with a range of academics to improve the evidence capture and service design.

Are aware of similar programmes led by other Health Boards?

- NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde: [Gartnavel](#); [Possilpark Health and Care Centre](#);
- NHS Lanarkshire: [Airdrie's Road Centre](#); *University Hospital Hairmyres*
- NHS Tayside: Ninewells Hospital Community Garden
- NHS Fife: [Stratheden Hospital](#)
- NHS Highland: [New Craigs Hospital dementia garden](#)
- NHS Dumfries & Galloway: [Midpark Hospital](#);

⁴ [NHS Lothian Biodiversity Audit & Climate Change Assessment](#)

⁵ Greenspace and Health Interim evaluation (available on request)

Have you undertaken any other partnership work or do you intend to expand the programme in future?

NHS Lothian and NHS Lothian Charity have recently developed Climate Challenge Grants which are now available for NHS Lothian staff who want to take action to reduce climate change. These grants include support for enhancing biodiversity and food growing on the NHS estate.

We are collaborating with University of Edinburgh and Queen Margaret University to embed our approaches into health care professional training and research programmes. This means that the gardens have hosted a wide range of student and professional placements for nursing, occupational therapy and social work.

Our partnership work goes beyond the community gardens and we are working to unlock the NHS Lothian greenspaces as a community and climate change asset. Our green social prescribing⁶ work in the wider community focuses on how we embed these models into health and social care systems and processes. The growing spaces on the NHS estate can play a critical role in this as they are often close to where health professionals are situated and therefore provide good opportunities to raise awareness and connect potential providers and prescribers of green health activity.

At a regional level NHS Lothian covers four Local Authority areas and we plan on engaging with each of their open space strategies and food growing strategies when appropriate. We are developing partnerships at the newly constructed East Lothian Community Hospital and engaging with partners to scope opportunities at the Western General Hospital and the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh. We are working with colleagues in Strategic Planning and Public Health to inform how the estate creates opportunities for the NHS as an Anchor Organisation.

Finally we are working closely with NHS colleagues to meet Scottish Government targets for the NHS Scotland response to the climate emergency

- Scottish Government - [Policy for NHS Scotland on the Global Climate Emergency and Sustainable Development DL \(2021\) 38](#)
- Scottish Government - [draft Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy 2022 to 2026 for NHS Scotland](#) (The finalised strategy is expected this year)

Making healthcare better, together

NHS Lothian Charity was formerly Edinburgh & Lothians Health Foundation



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