

MOVEMENT FOR HEALTH

Movement for Health's 2026 Scottish Parliament Manifesto



Moving together for a healthier Scotland.

For too long, Scotland has waited for people to fall ill rather than helping them stay well. While our dedicated NHS Scotland staff and professionals in other related fields do incredible work every day, Scotland's reactive healthcare model presents us with serious challenges – a rising tide of preventable illnesses, an unsustainable strain on our NHS, and a widening health inequalities gap that disproportionately impacts our most vulnerable communities.

In Scotland, the statistics are undeniable, with nearly half of Scotland's adult population living with at least one long term health condition. This makes it more than just a health issue; it's a societal one, eroding our collective wellbeing and placing immense pressure on our economy and public services. Barriers to movement can have a devastating impact on people's health and life chances. At a time of ever-increasing health inequalities, movement has never been more important, and more needs to be done to put preventative healthcare front and centre of the reform agenda.

The numbers also show us where the opportunity lies: around 3,000 preventable deaths in Scotland are directly linked to a lack of physical activity, and barely half our adult population meets the recommended guidelines. We cannot afford inaction. The WHO estimates that, globally, the cost of physical inactivity to public health care systems between 2020 and 2030 will be about \$300 billion, or approximately \$27 billion per year, if levels of physical inactivity are not reduced. By refocusing on preventative measures and making them a priority investment on an equal footing with clinical interventions, our members, Chest Heart & Stroke

Scotland, estimate there could be as much as £14 return on every £1 invested. With an ageing population, preventative spend can address the 'fiscal gap' in Scotland's finances. Health spending accounts for the largest share of the Scottish Budget.

This is why, at Movement for Health, we believe that a preventative approach with movement and physical activity should be placed at the centre of all political parties' efforts at the 2026 Scottish Parliament election. We must take this opportunity to create a healthier, more resilient Scotland.



3,000

**preventable deaths are
directly linked to inactivity**



Our priorities

To realise this vision, there are five areas where political parties can make a real difference in the next Parliament:

1. Recognising every movement matters

All movement matters. For some, movement is hard to do in any form. For people to be able to achieve the global physical activity guidelines of 150 aerobic minutes of movement per week and the essential strength and balance minimums, we need to engage using positive framing that suits the individual and their circumstances.

Appreciating that minor movement is absolutely crucial to achieving those longer-term goals. We are therefore asking all political parties to show the leadership required to support physical activity initiatives that focus on the inactive and least active members of Scotland's communities.



2. A whole systems approach

Movement for Health believes a healthier, more resilient Scotland can only be realised through a fundamental shift in our approach to healthcare.

The solution is to move from a reactive, short-term model to a proactive, preventative one with physical activity at its heart. The solution already exists, with Public Health Scotland pioneering the “whole systems approach” that breaks down the silos between the NHS and other sectors.

However, it must be accompanied by a significant reprioritisation of existing funding with sustained and long term investment in community and leisure services, embedding decision-making processes at all levels and recognising the vital role of the third sector in designing, triaging and delivering preventative health services.

3. Social prescribing

Another key component of this shift is the strategic implementation of social prescribing and the creation of a new pathway for care that connects people to the support they need within their own communities.

This proactive investment will not only improve public health but also alleviate the unsustainable strain on NHS Scotland, creating a more resilient and effective health system for the future.

We're asking political parties to commit to long-term and sustainable funding of social prescribing, including the Community Link Worker network.



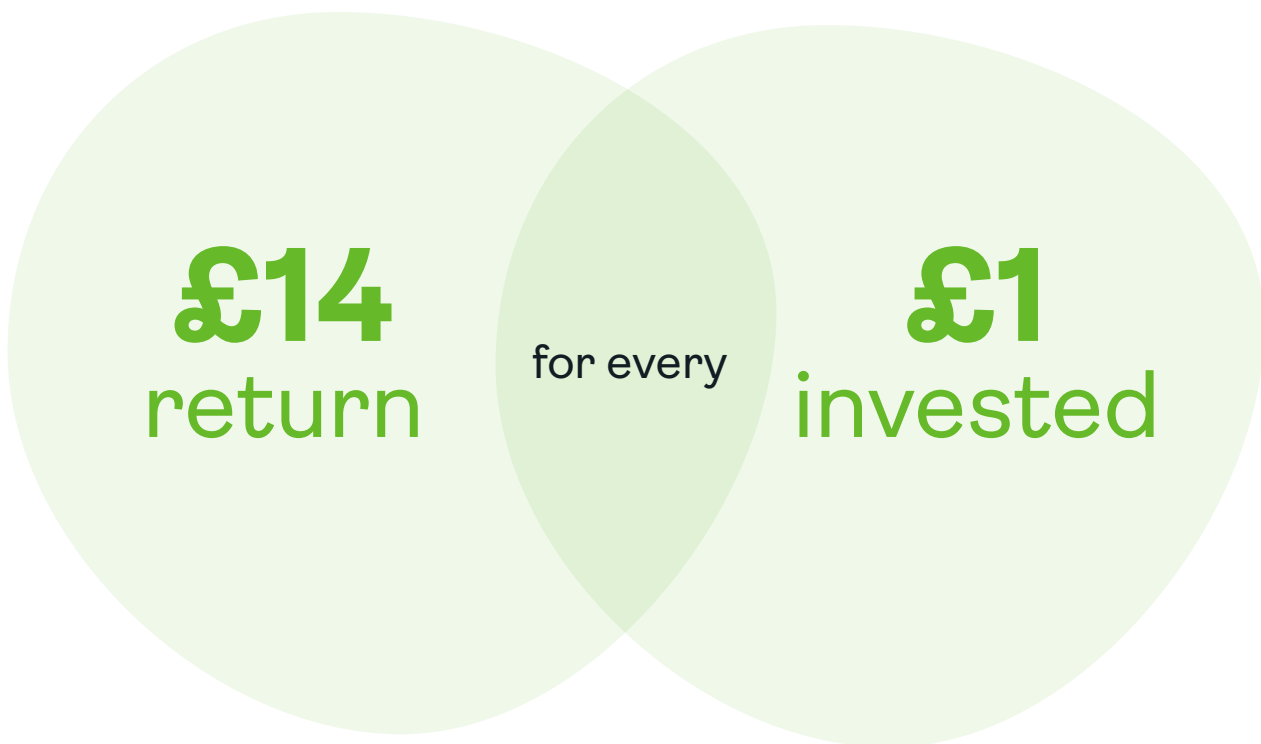
4. Improving health outcomes and reducing inequalities

In Scotland, we have a persistent and significant health gap between our most and least deprived communities. The data is clear: those in our most vulnerable areas face an unjust and unequal burden of poor health, with long term conditions disproportionately affecting them. Movement for Health believes that a dedicated health inequalities strategy must be developed that puts health equity as a core cross-cutting government priority in the Programme for Government. This strategy, underpinned by a whole systems approach, must ensure that physical activity is an achievable part of everyday life for everyone, regardless of their postcode.

This can be done by investing in and empowering community-based initiatives and the third sector, which are best placed to reach those most in need. By supporting a shift in care that connects people to the support they need in their own communities, we can create a healthier Scotland.

Without a dedicated health inequalities strategy prioritising local connections, Scotland faces a future where the health gap between our most and least deprived communities will continue to widen. The burden of preventable diseases will continue to fall disproportionately on our most vulnerable citizens, and the demand on our public services will grow at an unsustainable rate.





5. Driving change through our people and data

The current fragmented system, where frontline staff lack the specific training, skills, and resources to deliver preventative care, will continue to struggle and will leave us without the evidence required to justify this needed shift in investment and policy.

To truly transform Scotland's health, we need to empower the frontline staff responsible for making change happen and equip them with the tools to prove its impact. This requires a new approach to training and professional development, giving key workers the skills they need to connect with communities through the lens of preventative care. By pooling clinical and non-clinical knowledge and skills, we can move beyond a siloed model and create a cohesive network of support.

Alongside this empowered workforce, we must get smarter about how we collect and use data. By championing a new approach to data collection and sharing, we can measure what approaches work, demonstrate the value of preventative health, and direct resources to where they will have the greatest effect on reducing inequalities.

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#WeMoveTogether