

Healthcare and forensic medical services standards

Introduction

This document provides an overview of the key changes between the 2017 and newly published standards for [Healthcare and forensic medical services for people who have experienced rape, sexual assault or child sexual abuse](#).

The standards are also available on the [Right Decision Service](#) – which also supports services to undertake internal quality assurance, using a self-assessment tool, against the standards.

Policy context

The updated standards take account of recent changes in legislation, policy and service delivery. This includes the commencement of the [Forensic Medical Services \(Victims of Sexual Offences\) \(Scotland\) Act](#) (2022).

The policy context and related guidance is further described within the standards document.

Key amendments

The standards have been amended to reflect changes related to

- Bairns' Hoose
- responding to initial disclosure
- timing of forensic examinations
- specific service delivery relating to children and young people and adult services.

Alignment with Bairns' Hoose standards

The [Bairns' Hoose standards](#) provide an operational and organisational framework for a new, high-quality model for the response to abuse which is designed around the needs and rights of children. The Scottish Government has set out the scope for who will access [Bairns' Hoose](#).

These standards are intended to support children and young people who have experienced rape, sexual assault or child sexual abuse and should be implemented alongside the Bairns' Hoose standards. Standard 7 in the document specifically reflects the additional responsibilities and requirements for services supporting children and young people.

Responding to initial disclosure

New standard to reflect that initial disclosure of rape, sexual assault or child sexual abuse may occur in any healthcare setting at any time.

Healthcare professionals should take a trauma informed approach in supporting the person and follow the guidance.

Role of SARCS post-seven days

A new standard has been added on “access to coordinated healthcare and support” which expands the role of SARCS, including their role after seven days. Further work is expected to be taken forward to develop these pathways.

Timing of forensic medical examination

The current timeframes for undertaking a forensic medical examination are detailed within the national healthcare and forensic medical services indicators. These are:

- three hours for adults
- 12 hours for children and young people.

A review of the evidence base, data from the indicators and feedback from stakeholders has resulted in the removal of the specifics of the timelines from the revised standards. However, it is expected that NHS boards continue to report against these timeframes. Any change to the indicators will be following a robust review of evidence and data, involving key stakeholders and disseminated appropriately.

Overarching standards

Within the document, standards 1-3 are applicable across adults, children and young people. These standards are:

- Standard 1: Trauma informed care and shared decision making
- Standard 2: Collaborative leadership and governance
- Standard 3: Staff training, education and support

Standards relating to adults are covered in:

- Standard 4: Supporting and responding to initial disclosure
- Standard 5: Access to coordinated healthcare and support
- Standard 6: Forensic medical examination

Standard relating to children and young people covered in:

- Standard 7: Healthcare, medical examinations and support for children and young people

We have published a comparison of the draft and final standards and this is available on request.

Further information is available from [Healthcare Improvement Scotland](#).

April 2025