

Focus on Dementia: Reducing stress and distress

Evaluation report summary August 2026

What we do

The Reducing Stress and Distress Improvement Programme works with care home and hospital teams across Scotland to improve person-centred approaches to support stress and distress for people living with dementia

The evaluation report summarises the impact and learning from the programme for the period January 2025-March 2026, delivered by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Care Inspectorate and NHS Education for Scotland.

Improvement programme

In 2025, the programme supported 55 hospital and care home teams to develop and implement improvement.

The main programme aim was to improve outcomes for people living with dementia. We also to support teams to:

- reduce the length of hospital stay
- reduce reliance on pharmacological interventions, and
- reduce falls.

Examples of impact so far...

A self-evaluation approach

Participating teams used the self-evaluation tool to assess current practice against six quality criteria and identify priorities for improvement

Benefits of this approach include strong team collaboration, space to share perspectives, development of clear improvement aims, and recognition of existing good practice.

Teams then developed and tested change ideas to achieve their local improvement aim.

The self-evaluation process helped focus us on an improvement plan. It was great to see the multidisciplinary team come together.

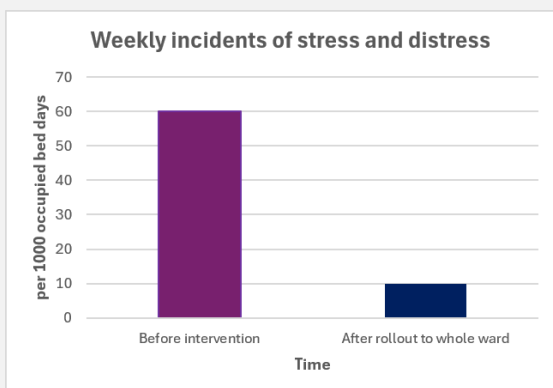
Participant 2025

Impact reported by teams

- Reduced stress and distress across care home and hospital settings.
- Reduction in use of PRN (when necessary) psychoactive medication.
- Fewer falls.
- More person-centred care through meaningful activity, Getting to Know Me and family involvement.
- Improved staff confidence, skills and wellbeing in supporting stress and distress.
- Better experiences and outcomes for patients, residents, families and unpaid carers.



Impact story: Taking a holistic approach to supporting stress and distress



One hospital team developed a checklist to enable early identification of factors that can contribute to stress and distress and used this to create support plans and improve activity and engagement on the ward. Impact included:

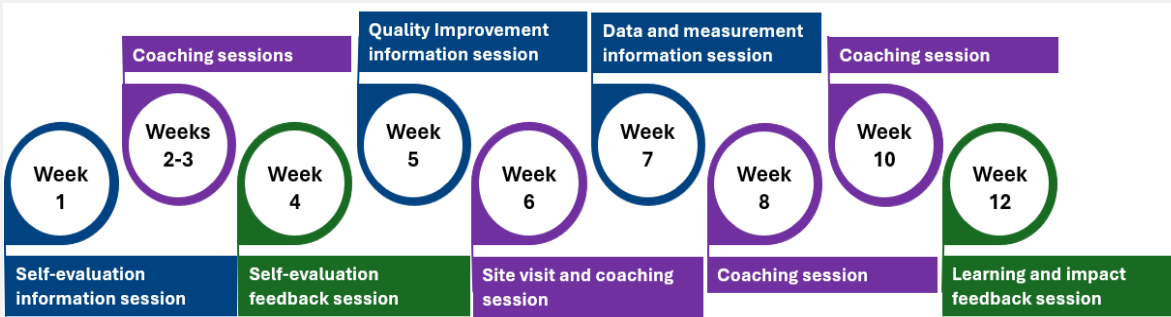
- reduced incidence of stress and distress
- lower use of PRN psychoactive medication
- improved patient and carer experience, and
- improved staff confidence.

Further case studies from care home and hospital homes teams on our [website](#)

Key learning on delivery approach

Programme delivery

- Participating teams completed a 12-week quality improvement programme combining group learning sessions, one-to-one and group coaching calls and a site visit.
- The first 4 weeks focused on self-evaluation, followed by 8 weeks to develop and test improvement ideas. 80% of teams successfully tested their ideas.
- Due to the short programme timeframe, there were challenges in capturing data to evidence the impact of changes and few teams reached the point of considering spread and sustainability.



Experience of participants

Participants feedback was consistently positive including praise about the:

- quality of teaching and learning sessions
- support from programme facilitators
- provision of practical tools, and
- value of small group sessions to enable peer support and learning.

One key challenge was about the time needed to fully participate.

We have really enjoyed working together as disciplines on the one project, it has really brought everyone together in becoming more stress and distress focused.

Participant 2025

National Collaboration

Learning was also captured about the different way of working across the three partner organisations delivering the programme (Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Care Inspectorate and NHS Education for Scotland). The collaborative approach:



- developed cross-organisational relationships and learning across health and social care
- improved the quality of the programme by building on unique strengths of different organisations, and
- provided wider networking and learning opportunities for participating teams.

Next steps

Based on the learning highlighted in the evaluation report, the Reducing Stress and Distress Improvement Programme has been redesigned for 2026. Changes include:

- programme duration is now 12 months, enabling teams to progress through the whole quality improvement journey
- learning sessions are delivered in smaller, regional groups, and
- clear expectation on activity and commitment required is shared during application process (data collection highlighted as a mandatory component).

Further information

All resources can be accessed on our programme webpages, including:

- Self-evaluation tool for reducing stress and distress for people living with dementia (and guidance)
- Toolkit for person-centred approaches to reducing stress and distress for people living with dementia
- Reducing Stress and Distress Programme: Evaluation report 2025, and
- Case studies from participating teams.

