

Focus on Dementia: Reducing stress and distress

Progress update March 2026

Improvement programme

Programme aims to ensure people living with dementia have improved experience of and access to person-centred approaches to prevent and support stress and distress in hospital and care home settings.

Programme is jointly delivered by Healthcare Improvement Scotland, Care Inspectorate and NHS Education for Scotland. In 2026 we are working with 51 care home and hospital teams.

What we do

- Work with hospital and care home teams across Scotland.
- Deliver a quality improvement programme that supports teams through online group learning and one-to-one coaching sessions.
- Capture evidence and learning to enable spread.
- Work in partnership with a range of national partners and lived experience networks.

Programme delivery update 2025

- We worked with 54 hospital and care home teams over the year. 100% of teams completed their Self-Evaluation tool and identified improvement priorities.
- A series of online collaborative sessions were delivered to support ongoing learning. Topics covered included Namaste care, role of Allied Health Professionals, development of meaningful activities, the impact of noise in care settings.
- Teams reported impact in several ways: reduction of when necessary antipsychotic medication, reduction in falls, reduction in incidence of stress and distress, positive experience of people living with dementia, families and unpaid carers.

Programme reflections

'Well worth persevering even when other challenges are occurring. Support from facilitators has been excellent - all very helpful and have supported the cohort with any issues/offering guidance and ideas.'

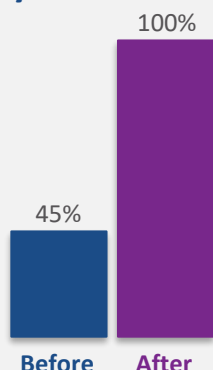
Participant 2025

'It has given the group time to reflect on current practise, what works well [and] what doesn't. Focused our mind on areas of improvement.'

Participant 2025

Examples of impact so far...

Early identification of pain to reduce stress and distress



55% increase in APS completed within 48 hours of admission

One hospital team introduced the Abbey Pain Scale (APS) to identify patients who were experiencing pain but unable to self-report. The APS was completed during admission to enable early identification and management of pain to prevent and reduce stress and distress. Impact:

- At 6 weeks of testing, 100% of patients requiring APS have it completed within 48 hours of admission and appropriate pain medication provided.
- Reduction in levels of stress and distress seen through reduction of anti-psychotic medication administered.
- APS is now embedded in care plan ensuring sustainability of change.

Programme delivery 2026

Participating teams

Applications for the 2026 programme opened in January with 103 applications received.

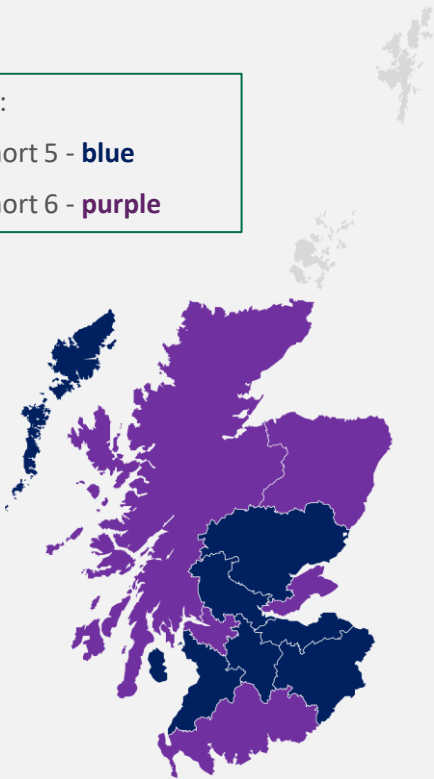
- 51 teams met admission criteria and have been selected to participate across 2 cohorts.
- Cohort 5 will begin in April 2026 and includes:
 - 15 hospital teams, and
 - 12 care home teams.
- Cohort 6 will begin in July 2026 and includes:
 - 7 hospital teams, and
 - 17 care home teams.

A welcome webinar for all teams was held on 17 March 2026.

Key:

Cohort 5 - blue

Cohort 6 - purple



Programme activity

- Participating teams will be supported to progress through a structured improvement cycle during a 12-month period.
- Months 1-6: teams will use self-evaluation to identify an improvement priority then design and test a change idea.
- Months 6-12: teams will continue to refine and test new change ideas and collect data to measure their impact.
- Teams will be supported via 1:1 coaching sessions, group learning sessions and site visits.

Self-evaluation tool: version 2

- The Reducing Stress and Distress self-evaluation tool supports teams to evaluate their current practice under 7 key criteria and to identify their improvement priorities.
- The tool was tested with all participating teams in 2025. Based on their feedback and learning the tool has now been refined and an additional criteria added on 'Transitions of Care'.
- The updated tool was published in March 2026 and is available on our [website](#).

Sharing learning

A case study from Auchtermairnie care home looks at how the team have improved use of their lounge area to reduce early evening stress and distress. The team tested having a staff member based in the lounge each evening. More residents used the lounge with impact identified on:

- Reduced number of falls
- Improved fluid and food intake
- Improved sleep
- Improved resident experience

Read the [full case study](#) here.

Next steps



- 2025 Programme evaluation report to be published in June 2026.
- The first learning session for cohort 5 is on 28 April 2026.
- The first learning session for cohort 6 is on 14 July.