

Highland Senior Citizens Network Chairman's Annual Report April 2024 to March 2025

For the financial year 2024 to 2025 the Network continued to receive funding from NHS Highland in recognition of the role HSCN plays in representing service users for which we were grateful. We also thank The Great Wilderness Challenge for continuing to support HSCN as one of their nominated charities and Dingwall Academy pupils for championing HSCN in a successful bid for Youth Philanthropy Initiative funding. Currently we have approaching 400 individual members and 110 Group members. What do we get up to? A flavour of work undertaken by the Network is detailed below.

Our Coordinators have continued to provide an excellent service on behalf of the Network. Above all we strive to provide a point of contact for all older people across the Highlands that is trusted and readily accessible. We support opportunities for older people to engage, get involved and be heard in planning activities, care, and services that contribute to our wellbeing and prevent ill-health/harm. We make particular efforts to engage with older people disadvantaged by social isolation; living in remote and rural areas; facing difficulties accessing information and support; being digitally excluded or disadvantaged; living with dementia, caring for someone, or living in a care home; living with disability, long-term conditions, sensory impairment; or just feeling that their voice isn't being heard.

What follows is just a fraction of the service we provide by both our Coordinators and Trustees.

Activities connecting with and supporting groups and services

- Badenoch Men's Shed Steering Group: supporting initial public meetings
- Café to Connect: holding 2 events in Badenoch and planning for future
- Connecting through Indoor Kurling: 4 groups borrowed equipment and held sessions
- Sunday Lunch Club Inverness: supporting to appoint new Co-ordinator to continue opportunity
- Talk Lochaber: recruiting new volunteers to continue service
- Annat Village Gathering Project: supporting the group in planning/promoting and at the event
- Playlist for Life Musical Tea: event, radio show and media articles promoting the charity
- Lochaber Action for Moss Park: giving and gathering support throughout this campaign
- Voluntary Action Lochaber Befriending Project: assisting with scoping and seeking funding
- Improving Information Exchange: bringing Third Sector and NHS representatives together
- Alzheimer Scotland Inverness and Badenoch & Strathspey: strengthening links
- Highland BlindCraft Sensory Services: promoting information re new service
- Care Inspectorate: research in Care Homes project – Ambivalent Noise
- NHS Highland 'Near Me' in Fort William: connections for promoting new venue
- Scottish Care: supporting Care Home Olympics and Care Homes Career events
- NHS Highland Vaccination Service: encouraging participation in consultation
- Age Scotland: collaborating on "How to Age Well" workshops" Highland Roadshow
- Youth Philanthropy Initiative: Dingwall Academy successfully bid to fund HSCN £3000

- Inverness OpenArts: Steering Group and joint funding application for new project
- Generations Working Together: promoting and contributing to planning for conference

We also connected through giving talks, holding information stalls and attending meetings and events throughout Highland.

Engagement as Stakeholders

- Joint Monitoring Committee
- Highland Health & Social Care Partnership Strategic Planning Group
- Fort William Community Action Group
- Lochaber Area Place Planning Stakeholder Group
- NHS Highland Re-design Stakeholder Group
- NHS Highland Lochaber District Planning Group and Waiting and Keeping Well Working Group
- Safety on Highland Public Transport Meetings
- AbilityNet BT Digital Voice Roll-out
- Highland Hospice – End of Life Care Together Oversight Group
- Social Security Scotland
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Consultation
- Highland Council re Equalities Outcomes engagement planning
- End of Life Support for Everyone (EASE)

Individual and Group Requests – some examples

- Individual request for information re visual impairment following closure of Sight Action
- Older Carer looking for information/signposting re dementia diagnosis
- Individual needing help with overpayments to energy company
- Where to borrow, hire or buy mobility scooters
- Where to get a Stair Lift
- How to avoid dementia
- How to deal with suspected neglect of an older person
- Support for older person without English language
- Where to get advice with Computer Virus
- Linking an individual with NHS Lead re service re-design
- TOLL NHS Project re promoting final events and shaping legacy
- Scams Talks requests
- National Trust for Scotland, Torridon: how to engage with and involve older people
- Connecting Carers Disabled Carers Consultation – promotion to potential participants
- Inverness OpenArts Project – participation in new joining project
- Befriending Caithness - loaned Kurling Equipment
- Community Council re Digital Voice and impact on Help Call
- Avoch School re Intergenerational Gardening

HSCN Tea-Breaks

The hour long weekly on-line Tea-breaks have continued, providing a forum for connection for those attending regularly from Ross-shire, Skye, Sutherland, Inverness and its environs. Once a month an invited guest spoke to their specialist interest. These included Glaucoma UK, Alzheimer Scotland, Red Chair (Digital Support), Marie Curie Right to Palliative Care Consultation, Caithness Museum Archive, Highland Folk Museum, Pension Age Disability Benefit Launch, Home Energy Scotland, NHS Highland Health Improvement Specialist, Highland Council Welfare Support Team, Highland Council Equalities Strategy.

Scam Talks

Trustees continued to offer Peer-to-Peer talks on Scams and have also developed new talks on a variety of topics

HSCN News-Sheets

Our bi-monthly News-sheets have continued to be well received and valued by our members and affiliated groups. They provide a forum for information exchange and social contact.

Gatherings and Get-togethers

Gatherings of our members took place at our AGM held at Inshes Church on 12th September. Members's Get-togethers were held in Badenoch & Strathspey on 20th May, in partnership with Age Scotland and, on 18th November, a Lochaber Get-together was held in partnership with Caol Bite and Blether Group and the Highland Council Tenant Participation Team.

The financial year ends with the knowledge that our funding from NHS Highland has been halved for the coming financial year and will stop thereafter. This resulted in redundancy notices being issued to our Coordinators which become effective on 31st July 2025. Apart from the amazing work they have undertaken on behalf of HSCN and older people in the Highlands what will be lost most is their listening voice at the end of a phone willing to find answers to an individual's worries.

The Trustees have submitted funding applications to support the continued work of the Network, specifically local Tea-break Gatherings and our News-sheets, and we will continue to identify projects and funding streams which enable us to benefit older people in Highland.

On behalf of the Network I wish to record our thanks to our Trustees, who give freely of their time and expertise, to our two Coordinators and Donna Maclaren, our Administrator and Finance Officer, who made it all happen.



Dr H I McNamara (Chairman)

July 2025
