

# MSP Parliamentary Briefing - Cardiac Arrest Survivorship

## February 2024

### Support Resuscitation Council UK's campaign: 'My Right to Cardiac Arrest Recovery'

Out-of-hospital Cardiac Arrest (OHCA – an often fatal condition where the heart stops beating and needs CPR +/- defibrillation) affects over 3,000 per year in Scotland. Despite advances in resuscitation science and increased bystander CPR rates, survival remains low (9.7%), especially when compared to other leading countries.

There are internationally and nationally recognised guidelines for patient and family follow up post cardiac arrest. However, there is significant variability in the application of these guidelines across certain areas of Scotland and the United Kingdom. This results in a wide variation of access to rehabilitation services and psychological support for those affected by cardiac arrest, with many patients and families feeling abandoned.

A programme of rehabilitation, targeted to the individual's needs, improves quality of life, is cost-effective, and may reduce hospital readmissions. Currently, there is no minimum level of follow-up applied equally across the country. Meaning that many patients are missing out on vital services helping them to a full recovery. Please read this briefing to find out why cardiac arrest recovery must not end when the survivor leaves the hospital.

### Key Recommendations:

- All cardiac arrest survivors to be assessed prior to hospital discharge using current guidelines, and to receive an individualised post cardiac arrest rehabilitation plan.
- NHS Scotland Boards to adopt Resuscitation Council UK's cardiac quality standard for cardiac arrest survivors, so everyone affected by a cardiac arrest gets the support they need.

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### Background

Surviving a cardiac arrests may result in a range of physical, neurological, cognitive, emotional, and social issues. These may not become apparent until after discharge from the hospital.

At present, too many Survivors aren't being assessed for their health and social care needs beyond hospital. And yet, unlike rehabilitation services for Strokes or a Heart Attack, there is currently no formal care pathway for Cardiac Arrest Survivors across the United Kingdom.

"Survivors of Cardiac Arrest require a system of care which is multi-disciplinary and does not end when the patient leaves the hospital. Everyone affected by Cardiac Arrest has a right to recovery and rehabilitation, which we know is a key element of improving quality of life after cardiac arrest."

James Cant, CEO, Resuscitation Council

### Who else is affected?

A cardiac arrest has wide-reaching impact, causing stress and potential health challenges to



everyone involved - patients, families, caregivers, healthcare and pre-hospital providers, and lay rescuers. [Qualitative research](#) suggests that many 'co-survivors' are dissatisfied with the lack of post-discharge information and poor continuity in healthcare services, and often express feelings of neglect.

## Scotland leading the way with OHCA Strategy

Since the introduction of the Scottish Government's OHCA Strategy in 2015, the survival rate has [doubled](#) within 5 years. A key factor in this increase has been the establishment of the [Save a Life for Scotland \(SALFS\) partnership](#), which brings together Scottish Government, emergency services, third sector organisations, and academic researchers. SALFS has played a pivotal role in realising the objectives of the OHCA Strategy, and has so far trained [11% \(640,000\) of people](#) in Scotland with CPR skills.

Beyond improving survival rates, Scotland is providing support and advice to people affected by out of hospital cardiac arrest through the '[Life After Cardiac Arrest](#)' website. This site aims to increase the awareness of OHCA and helps others who have experienced, or been involved in, a cardiac arrest. It provides support, advice, and information through a one-stop directory of real stories told by real people.

The SALFS joint initiative has also resulted in the establishment of a [bystander support helpline](#), led by Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland (CHSS). This helpline offers advice and assistance to any bystander who has been involved in a cardiac arrest.

## Resuscitation Council UK to publish Cardiac Arrest Survivor Quality Standard

While considerable progress has been made in Scotland, post cardiac arrest care remains complex and demands ongoing coordination beyond hospital discharge. It's crucial to assess patients before discharge, ensuring tailored care plans and access to necessary support. Scotland's healthcare system must collaborate to identify and bridge gaps in access to cardiac arrest rehabilitation services.

At RCUK, we are committed to ensuring optimal recovery for all cardiac arrest survivors and are publishing a national quality standard later this year. By advocating for its implementation across all the Health Boards, we aim for equitable care, granting every cardiac arrest survivor timely access to all the elements of aftercare they need for their recovery.

## Become a parliamentary advocate for cardiac arrest survivors

Resuscitation Council UK would like Members of the Scottish Parliament to step forward and become an advocate for cardiac arrest survivors. We want to see MSPs commit to meaningfully engaging with survivors and co-survivors in their constituency, and represent their voices in parliament. We would be most grateful if you could express your interest in becoming an advocate by contacting [publicaffairs@resus.org.uk](mailto:publicaffairs@resus.org.uk).

## About us

Resuscitation Council UK is saving lives by developing guidelines, influencing policy, delivering courses and supporting cutting-edge research. Through education, training and research, we're working towards the day when everyone in the country has the skills they need to save a life.