**NHS Lothian**

**British Sign Language Plan**

**2024 - 2030**

Improving the health of BSL users in Lothian.

**“All we want is the same access as everyone else has.”
“We don’t want to be a nuisance – we just want our rights.”**

 BSL users, Lothian Engagement Events 2023-24

# Introduction

In 2011 there were around 13,000 people in Scotland and 2,000 people in Lothian using British Sigh Language (BSL) at home ([Census, 2011](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/2011-census-table-data-scotland/)). BSL users are more likely to be ‘permanently sick or disabled,’ less likely to be economically active, and much more likely to have never worked and work fewer hours per week ([Scottish Government, 2015](https://www.gov.scot/publications/analysis-equality-results-2011-census-part-2/pages/6/)). Deaf BSL users have poorer health, some of which is caused by problems accessing health care and communicating with healthcare professionals.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 provides that NHS Lothian must prepare and publish plans about the action that will be taken about the use of BSL. NHS Lothian’s plan should be consistent with the [Scottish Government’s National BSL Plan](http://bslscotlandact2015.scot/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/BSL-National-Plan_2023_P3.pdf).

This is NHS Lothian’s BSL Plan for the period 2024 to 2030. As well as being consistent with the National BSL Plan it contributes to the delivery of [NHS Lothian’s Equality and Human Rights Strategy](https://org.nhslothian.scot/equality-human-rights/) and the [Lothian Strategic Development Framework](https://org.nhslothian.scot/strategies/strategic-development-framework/), which aims to improve the health of everyone in Lothian.

To inform our plan, NHS Lothian, with the support of East Lothian, City of Edinburgh, Midlothian and West Lothian Councils and BDA Scotland, met with Deaf people and their families to listen to their experiences of using NHS Lothian services and understand what could be done better to ensure that BSL users, Deaf and Deafblind people have equal access to NHS Lothian services. Information about what people told us is published in the BSL Plan Engagement Report.

Throughout the Plan, we refer to ‘BSL users.’ This covers all people whose first or preferred language is BSL, including Deafblind BSL users who may communicate in Tactile BSL.

## How we will deliver this plan

This plan sets out what NHS Lothian will do over the next 6 years to improve the health of BSL users in Lothian. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound (SMART) actions will be included in relevant corporate annual plans, including the Equality and Human Rights Action Plan and the Advancing Equalities Action Plan.

We will work with BDA Scotland and other organisations representing BSL users to have conversations with BSL users and their families about what we have done each year and the difference this is making. This will be included in the Equality and Human Rights Annual Report, which is published on [NHS Lothian website](https://org.nhslothian.scot/equality-human-rights/) and be used to decide whether this plan needs to be reviewed and updated.

## Actions taken as part of our last BSL plan

* NHS Lothian Interpretation and Translation Service (ITS) now has two full-time registered BSL interpreters.
* There is a robust system in place within ITS team to cover all BSL appointments requested, either with our full-time staff or agency interpreters.
* The ITS team have added Non-Clinical Alerts to the majority of Deaf patient’s health records on Trak. This work is ongoing. However, we have made significant progress in making sure staff arranging hospital appointments are aware of BSL communication needs.
* People can now contact a new BSL email address to confirm they have an appointment booked and ask other questions about interpreter support.
* BSL interpreters have provided support to Deaf members of staff during work meetings.
* We worked with Deaf people and their organisations to provide accessible information about COVID-19 and winter vaccinations. We provide information in BSL, a checklist for vaccination centres to ensure support for BSL users and have improved information on patient invitation letters and the vaccination helpline.
* We have supported the development of NHS Scotland National Interpretation and Translation Policy, including details on BSL provision.
* We have included the NHS Scotland Deaf Awareness module for staff on our LearnPro staff e-learning platform.
* We have created an accessible website about health screening.

# BSL Accessibility

**For many BSL users, BSL is their first language. NHS Lothian recognises that for our services to be truly accessible for BSL users, there should be awareness around the culture of BSL, providing vital information in BSL, and enabling people to access services using their own language.**

1. **We will improve accessibility of the NHS Lothian website for BSL users by:**
* Working with NHS Scotland Boards to provide essential information about health and health services in BSL. Timescales: starting in 2024 and continuing annually.
* Reviewing NHS Lothian website and including relevant NHS Inform BSL videos about health and health services on our webpages. Timescales: starting 2024 and continuing annually.
1. **We will improve accessibility of signs in NHS Lothian properties by:**
* Considering the needs of BSL users within the NHS Lothian Charity Wayfinding and Signage Project, which will provide NHS Lothian sign design guidelines. Timelines: 2024 – 2025.
1. **We will improve awareness of BSL culture by:**
* Reviewing and updating BSL awareness education and training for staff in 2024 – 2025 and monitoring participation rates annually.
* Supporting individual service areas to improve awareness of BSL culture, starting in 2024 – 2025 with Children’s Services and Audiology.
1. **We will support the training of student BSL interpreters by:**
* Continuing to support student BSL interpreters by including this within NHS Lothian BSL interpreters Continued Professional Development (CPD).
* Working with Herriot Watt University and Queen Margaret University to support healthcare training for student BSL interpreters. Timescales: Starting 2024.

# Children, Young People and their Families

**Getting it right for every child (GIRFEC) is Scotland’s commitment to provide all children, young people and their families with the right support at the right time. This is so that every child and young person in Scotland can reach their full potential.**

1. **We will strengthen relationships between Children’s Services teams and BSL users by:**
* Supporting [Children’s Services](https://services.nhslothian.scot/children/) to establish systems for public engagement and experienced based co-design with the BSL community and to increase understanding of the importance of BSL provision on child and family wellbeing. Timescales: 2024 – 2026.

# Access to Employment

**Support is available to all who need it, though it is aimed at supporting those further from the labour market.**

1. **We will improve access to employment and volunteering opportunities by:**
* Publishing guidance and case studies about employing and supporting staff whose first language is BSL. Timescales: 2024 – 2025.
* Working with BDA Scotland, Skills Development Scotland, and the Scottish Government to explore ways to support BSL users access employment, including modern apprenticeship opportunities for Deaf young people and BSL videos about NHS Scotland jobs and careers. Timescales: starting in 2024.
* Working with BDA Scotland and others to develop and promote volunteering opportunities for BSL users, including in our Youth Volunteering Programme. Starting 2024.

# Health and Wellbeing

**Under the law, people who are BSL users are entitled to the same health and social care access as hearing people, in their first or preferred language**

1. **We will improve BSL users access to services using their own language by:**
* Continuing to provide face-to-face registered BSL interpreters that can be booked in advance by services through [NHS Lothian Interpretation and Translation Service](https://www.nhslothian.scot/yourrights/tics/) (ITS) and regularly promoting the use of ITS services across the organisation.
* Continuing, when possible, to provide separate-sex registered BSL interpretation services when the BSL user may reasonably object to the presence of an interpreter of the opposite sex.
* In addition to Contact Scotland BSL video relay service, we will provide the [Sign Video](https://signvideo.co.uk/) video relay service and promote its use across individual service areas with a particular focus on Lothian Unscheduled Care Services and Emergency Departments (A&E). Timescales: starting in 2024.
* Continuing to host and promote the [Scottish Mental Health Service for Deaf People](https://services.nhslothian.scot/mhdeafservice/).
* Providing guidance and support for staff who book outpatient appointments to use the information recorded on the TrakCare healthcare patient information and medical records system to meet the needs of BSL users. Timescales: starting in 2024.
* Exploring how to provide QR codes in NHS Lothian correspondence that link to BSL videos about relevant health information and health services. Timescales: 2024 – 2026.
* Providing guidance for staff about how to work with registered BSL interpreters. Timescales: 2024 – 2025.
1. **We will take steps to reduce isolation and loneliness by:**
* Listening to Deaf people to produce guidance for staff about how to reduce Deaf people’s isolation and loneliness when staying in NHS Lothian hospitals. Timescales: 2024 – 2025.
1. **We will improve engagement between NHS teams and BSL users by**:
* Identifying and working with NHS Lothian services to establish systems for public engagement and experienced based co-design with the BSL community. Timescales: 2026 – 2028.
* Supporting opportunities for staff to learn BSL. Timescales: starting 2024.

# Celebrating BSL Culture

**Culture can improve the life chances of all people at every stage in their life. In Scotland, culture can be an important element to help reduce poverty and mitigate its impacts.**

1. **We will support BSL organisations to celebrate BSL culture and heritage by:**
* Working with the Deaf community to promote and celebrate the anniversary of the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 and the Edinburgh Deaf Festival. Timescales: starting 2024.
* Working with NHS Scotland Boards and other organisations in Lothian to share information about events and best practice. Timescales: starting 2024.

# BSL Data

**Evidence and data around BSL users, Deaf and Deafblind people, is essential for informing public policy and shaping services to meet people’s needs.**

1. **We will improve the collection and use of evidence and data about BSL users, Deaf and Deafblind people by:**
* Collecting information on our equality monitoring forms. Timescales: starting in 2024.
* Improving how we analyse and share evidence and data about BSL users, Deaf and Deafblind people using NHS Lothian services, and ensuring this is used as part of our equality and children’s rights impact assessment process. Timescales: 2024 – 2025.
* Continuing to collect and use information about the use of NHS Lothian BSL interpretation services.
1. Emond, Ridd, Sutherland, Allsop, Alexander and Kyle (2015) [Access to primary care affects the health of Deaf people](https://bjgp.org/content/65/631/95#ref-2), British Journal of General Practice 2015: 65 (631): 05-96 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)