



RESPONDING TO UNCERTAIN TIMES

Position statement from
St Andrew's First Aid



St Andrew's First Aid

Uncertain times

Scotland, along with the rest of the UK, is bracing itself for an uncertain future, with geo-political, health and climate related issues threatening to bring significant disruption and instability to daily living. In very different ways, they have the potential to destabilise us, putting untold pressure on existing systems that are already at breaking point. **There are many pressures, but key things we know we need to confront include the following.**

Healthcare demands

Domestically, our health and social care services are under unprecedented pressure despite efforts to support improvement. The impact of the strain in the system is significant and adversely affects both patients and healthcare staff, as quality-of-life deteriorates.

Challenges within the delivery of community and social care capacity can delay discharge for patients who are medically ready to leave hospital, reducing bed availability and contributing to wider system pressures, including ambulance handover delays.

Tight budgets and escalating operational costs have led to growing NHS Board fiscal pressures and maintenance backlogs for aging facilities and equipment. In addition, thousands of patients across the country still experience lengthy waits for routine surgery and diagnostics following post-pandemic disruptions, forcing the NHS to divert resources.

And, post Covid-19, planning is now well underway to cope with the next pandemic which many predict may land within the next eight to ten years. There is a clear drive now to make sure the nation is better prepared this time around, which is vitally important.

As we try to get ready, harnessing the power of volunteers and local communities to support the delivery of vital services is now under serious consideration.

International conflict

Regretfully, we have to prepare for the future possibility of being involved in armed conflict. Something that was quite unthinkable only a decade ago.

The UK's National Risk Register highlights increasing geopolitical instability and the potential for international crises to have far-reaching impacts on everyday life, critical infrastructure, supply chains and public services. While the nature and timing of future events cannot be predicted, there is growing recognition of the need to strengthen societal preparedness and resilience.

Civilians would be advised to stockpile essentials (food, water, medicine, radios), while the armed forces and reserves would immediately mobilise for deployment. There would be an obvious knock-on impact to public services that may struggle to cope if the employees of our key agencies of government were drawn to support front line activities.

It is questionable whether we have the local systems and infrastructure to mount a credible community response if the need arose.

Climate change

Our climate is changing. Scotland faces severe physical and systemic climate challenges, primarily driven by extreme weather, infrastructure vulnerabilities, and deep-seated ecological degradation.

Across the country, climate-induced hazards, notably extreme heat and ongoing urban air pollution, are directly linked to many premature deaths annually. Rising sea levels and intense winter storms have led to record-breaking flooding, threatening hundreds of thousands of properties and vital transport networks. And wildfires are now commonplace and decimate farmland, buildings and infrastructure. The cost to families, communities and national agencies is exponential.

Our climate adaptation strategy will need to shift from a reactive, haphazard approach to a more coordinated, proactive framework that treats resilience as a fundamental pillar of all policymaking. Positively, the signs are that this is starting to happen.

Scotland and resilience

Scotland has a history of facing moments of crisis with steely determination, ably demonstrated during two world wars and in times of economic hardship. Throughout the twentieth century, people and communities found common cause and came together for the greater good.

As we know, resilience is built through relationships, trust and local capability. While many rural, island and urban communities across Scotland demonstrate remarkable resilience, recent evidence indicates declining community connectedness and preparedness in some areas. Strengthening local capability and confidence will be increasingly important as Scotland navigates a more complex risk landscape.

Along with global issues, we need to consider local risks and challenges. Issues of economy, migration and housing regularly feature in the media, creating anxiety. Indeed, the Scottish Household Survey (2024) showed a decline in people's perception of neighbourhood support and trust. Our sense of belonging and community cohesion is also slipping.

Many people are living more insulated, less connected lives, with the impact of the pandemic and increasing cost of living adding to feelings of social isolation, loneliness and despair.

Many crises do not begin as emergencies – for example a fall at home, a delayed intervention, or mental distress. These are small incidents, but without preparedness, confidence to act, and connections in the community, they can quickly escalate.

The need to be ready

In the face of the challenges that threaten stability, there is broad recognition that Scotland must strengthen its resilience capacity and capability. Voluntary aid societies have been neglected and do not have the volunteer numbers, resources and infrastructure to mount a national response.

In essence, we are going to need more people who are ready to respond. Ready before the moment of need. Ready with the skills, confidence and awareness to prepare, respond and support others. Ready to strengthen their own communities while working alongside public agencies and the structures already in place.

Enhancing the nation's resilience capability will strengthen our preparedness, improve national outcomes and reduce the long-term impact and cost of the challenges that we all know lie ahead. Every £1 invested in societal resilience to disruption generates £35.00 in public value.

We will play our part. We will scale up.

St Andrew's First Aid will draw on our heritage, expertise, trusted reputation and volunteer capacity to create a movement of Responders across Scotland, replicating the role we played as leaders, in times of need, over a century ago.

We will support people and communities to develop prevention, preparedness, response and recovery know how, in line with national guidelines and expectations.

Our plans include:

Training the nation's workforce

As Scotland's largest workplace first aid training provider, in the next decade, we expect to train around 250,000 people in life saving skills. We will use this platform to engage with employers, and their staff teams, to give them the skills they need to be active responders in their local communities. We will raise awareness and set out the value of using hard learned skills for ongoing community benefit.

Recruiting volunteers

Our established network of volunteers provides community response capability, connections and trusted first aid support. Throughout our history, they have also been first on the scene to provide support during emergencies.

Our ambition is to grow our volunteering capacity, building a national movement of thousands of trained Responders. Equipped with our training, support and trusted expertise, they will be ready to step forward when emergencies occur, or when healthcare needs demand. Connected to Scotland's wider resilience system, St Andrew's First Aid can anchor local resilience, coordinate community action when required, and provide proactive support to strengthen public health capacity.

Community engagement

We will engage with schools, community groups, grassroots organisations and local networks, and we will enhance our youth engagement programmes. By providing preparedness education, resilience awareness, first aid training and practical resources, we will help people develop the confidence, skills and knowledge needed to support themselves and others during times of disruption and emergency.

Within a decade, we will:

-  train **250,000+** people
-  build a network of over **5,000** active and highly trained volunteers
-  recruit over **50,000** community responders
-  engage with **50,000** young people
-  be rooted in **every community** across Scotland, with a trusted and active presence

Delivering a change in pace

To assist our ambitions, we will use our national training reach by forming the National First Aid Academy, which will become Scotland's home for first aid training, skills and readiness.

The Academy will bring workplace first aid training, volunteer training, and community first aid learning together under one national system, with consistent and trusted standards. Through the Academy, we will ramp up our provision, training people at scale via workplaces and partner networks.

The National First Aid Academy will support statutory agencies by building the skills, confidence and preparedness of everyday citizens, enabling more people across Scotland to step forward when they are needed most.

This is a bold ambition but one which we feel we have to take forward.

Our place in the wider resilience system

Building community and societal resilience is a shared responsibility – we do not seek to tackle this alone. We know that many organisations across Scotland already play essential roles in preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies.

We recognise the leadership and contribution of the Scottish Government, Scottish Ambulance Service, local authorities, public health agencies, regional and local resilience partnerships, and emergency services – as well as the role of voluntary sector networks, community organisations, faith groups, employers and anchor institutions. Their expertise, capability, and local knowledge are central to creating a more resilient Scotland. So, we do not seek to replace existing structures but strengthen the space around them.

Scotland already has strong resilience structures. The challenge ahead is about expanding community capability around those structures, and St Andrew's First Aid can help achieve that. Using our trusted relationships, national reach and community presence, we can connect people and communities to the wider resilience system.

We will work through trusted local networks so skills, confidence and readiness can be built and shared at scale. We will enable collaboration, support partnership working, and help communities to develop the skills and readiness to contribute – from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery.

Strategic push

The Board of charity Trustees has already committed St Andrew's First Aid to this important and ambitious purpose. Planning is well underway and we will deliver our campaign and new approach to Scotland's needs in 2027. Additionally, we will call on philanthropy to match our own investment so that we have the resources necessary to ensure the gear shift that we know the country needs.

St Andrew's First Aid

St Andrew's First Aid was founded in 1882, with the specific purpose of providing medical transport and first aid support to communities across Scotland. Before too long, we established a structure of voluntary groups, first aid trainers and medics throughout the country, going on to become a systemically important public service organisation, playing our part in times of great uncertainty.

For over a century we have adapted to the changing needs of the country, providing responsive services, very often in partnership with public agencies. Our place in history is secure as a respected and highly skilled organisation, trusted by the public and established in the fabric of our local communities.

**For nearly 150 years, we have been ready.
Ready to respond. Ready to step up,
Ready to make a difference.**

Let's talk

Head Office: Floor One, The Culzean Building,
Renfield Street, Glasgow G2 1LU

0141 332 4031
info@firstaid.org.uk

firstaid.org.uk



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