



Scotland's National Summit on Young People's Sexual Health & Wellbeing

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND ROADMAP FOR ACTION



“Adults – you just are so far
behind.”

- Young Person at one of our Engagement Events

2026



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Advanced Research Centre,
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The National Summit on Young People's Sexual Health and Wellbeing brought people together to start a national conversation about how we can better meet young people's sexual wellbeing needs, both now and in the future, by addressing the gap between what they need and what is currently in place.

Young people in Scotland are growing up in a rapidly changing world. Digital technologies, changing relationships, online harms, widening inequalities and increasing complexity in accessing services mean that sexual health and wellbeing exist in a shifting landscape and young people's needs are evolving rapidly.

Scotland has many strengths in existing provision. High-quality national RSHP resources, committed professionals, strong partnerships and examples of innovative practice provide solid foundations. However, young people's experiences remain inconsistent. Access to education, trusted information, and sexual health services continues to depend on where young people live, who delivers education and support and the local capacity of healthcare, education, and third sector organisations to respond to their needs.

Rather than focusing on individual services, the summit sought to identify practical, system-wide actions that could strengthen support through collaboration across health, education, government, academia and young people's organisations.

A National Collaborative approach

Scotland's National Summit on Young People's Sexual Health and Wellbeing was delivered as part of a wider partnership programme between the Scottish Government, University of Glasgow, NHS colleagues, NSPCC Scotland, The Young Women's Movement and was facilitated by Firefly Innovation. The initiative was guided by a steering group bringing together expertise from research, public health, education, policy and the third sector and was funded by the Scottish Government.

The National Summit on Young People's Sexual Health and Wellbeing held in February 2026 brought together 61 experts and practitioners from health, education, government, academia, policing and the third sector to translate the evidence and insights into practical action.

The summit represented the culmination of a 10 month programme of engagement designed to ensure that the recommendations presented in this report were informed by research evidence, the lived experiences of young people, and cross-sector expertise.

The three stages of this programme included:



Together, these activities created a shared understanding of current challenges and opportunities and provided the foundation for the recommendations that follow.

Stage 1 - Listening to Young People

Young people were at the centre of this process and its design. Over several months the steering group engaged schools, youth, and community organisations across Scotland to explore young people's needs around sexual health and wellbeing. This included work with The Young Women's Movement, LGBT Youth Scotland, Barnardo's Works West of Scotland, the Scottish Island Schools Network, Graeme High School and Inverclyde Academy.

A facilitated focus group was held by the steering group at the Melting Pot Edinburgh on the 5th of December 2025 bringing together young people from a mix of organisations to synthesise and sense check insights from wider engagement activities. Outputs from these sessions, together with written postcards and reflections shaped the agenda and priorities for the summit and in turn, have informed the recommendations detailed in this document.

Young people consistently highlighted the need for:

- **Honest, inclusive relationships and sexual health education**
- **Trusted and confidential support**
- **Better online information**
- **Improved access to services**
- **Stronger education around healthy relationships and online harms**
- **Greater inclusion and representation.**

Stage 2 - Building the evidence base

A national webinar held on 22 January 2026 provided the research-led evidence base for this initiative. This 60 min webinar was open to summit attendees and extended to a wider audience working in young people's sexual health. The webinar explored current evidence, emerging trends, and insights from young people's engagement across five themes:

- **Young people's perspectives on sexual health and wellbeing**
- **The digital landscape**
- **Relationships and sexual experiences**
- **Sexual health outcomes**
- **Cultural influences on sexual health.**

The webinar presented current evidence on the changing context of young people's sexual health and relationships. Research highlighted that young people are navigating increasingly complex social and digital environments shaped by COVID-19, online culture, evolving gender norms and wider societal change.

The evidence identified ongoing challenges around consent, communication, sexual wellbeing and exposure to harm, alongside growing concerns about misinformation, online exploitation, AI-generated content and declining engagement with contraception. These trends are reflected in rising rates of sexually transmitted infections and unintended pregnancies.

Overall, the evidence shared underscored the need for consistent RSHP school education, trusted information, stronger digital literacy and accessible services that support informed decision making and better reflect the realities of young people's lives.

The webinar attracted 195 participants and received 200+ views on YouTube after the live event[1]. Interactive polling at the webinar also helped shape summit discussions by reconciling the evidence with what those working in Young Peoples Sexual Health and Wellbeing in Scotland were seeing in practice and wanted to explore further at the summit.

[1] The webinar was shared on Sandyford NHSGGC Sexual Health Youtube Channel and can be accessed here <https://youtu.be/I9N1aiwpeg8?si=cO8SCFhkctC773i->

Stage 3 – From Evidence to Action - Shaping the Future



Held on 23rd February 2026 at the Advanced Research Centre, University of Glasgow, The National Summit on Young People's Sexual Health and Wellbeing brought together representatives from NHS Boards, Scottish Government, local authorities, education, universities, Police Scotland, youth organisations, third sector organisations and specialist sexual health services from Scotland and elsewhere in the UK.

Following opening remarks and an address from the Minister for Public Health and Women's Health, participants heard a recap of reflections from the young people's engagement programme alongside evidence on the work being undertaken on Sexual Wellbeing by Kirstin Mitchell of University of Glasgow. These insights provided a foundation from which participants were invited to consider how we could meet young people's needs in terms of Sexual Health and Wellbeing provision both now and in the future.

Facilitated discussions explored the strengths of Scotland's current system, the challenges facing young people's sexual health and wellbeing, and opportunities for improvement. In the afternoon, delegates worked in thematic groups to examine priority issues in greater depth, before sharing and refining proposed actions through plenary discussion.

Across the discussions there was broad agreement that Scotland has many strong foundations, including nationally recognised Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) resources, committed practitioners, innovative local practice and strong partnership working.

However, participants also identified significant challenges affecting the consistency and impact of current provision. These included variation in RSHP delivery, fragmented digital information and support, inequalities in access to services, workforce confidence and capacity, the growing influence of online harms and misinformation, and limited national coordination and accountability.

The recommendations presented in this report emerged from this collective process. They reflect the convergence of current evidence, the priorities identified by young people and the expertise of professionals working across Scotland's sexual health, education and youth sectors. Collectively, they provide a practical roadmap for strengthening young people's sexual health and wellbeing through coordinated, evidence-informed action.

A ROADMAP FOR ACTION

1. Strengthen RSHP through consistent national standards, teacher development and accountability

All parties engaged agreed that every young person should have access to consistently high quality, evidence based RSHP regardless of where they live or attend school. Discussion focused less on creating additional teaching materials and more on improving teacher confidence, strengthening accountability and embedding RSHP within professional development.

Short term priorities

- Strengthen inspection and self-evaluation of RSHP .
- Increase investment in teacher training to grow teacher confidence.
- Support and encourage NHS and education partnerships.
- Expand professional learning opportunities.

Long term priorities

- Embed RSHP within initial teacher education.
- Develop national accreditation and competency standards.
- Create greater national consistency and accountability.

2. Create a single trusted online space for young people's sexual health information

Young people described the current online landscape as fragmented, confusing and difficult to navigate. Many are turning to social media, where misinformation is common. Rather than multiple disconnected websites or short-term initiatives, they wanted a trusted, engaging and clearly branded digital 'one stop shop' that feels accessible, up to date and designed for young people.

Discussions suggested building on existing platforms and raising visibility and signposting between resources such as NHS Inform rather than creating an entirely new service immediately. The ambition should be a phased approach that gradually adds functionality. It was felt to be important that any resource in this space is built for sustainability, codesigned with young people and has committed long term resource to ensure usefulness and longevity.

Short term priorities

- Increased promotion of NHS Inform Sexual Health Hub and existing resources.
- Improve local service signposting.
- Coordinate communications across partners.

Long term priorities

- Develop a national online 'one stop shop' for young people's sexual health.
- Introduce functionalities such as live chat, appointment booking, online ordering, addressing mis/disinformation and personalised signposting.
- Create a sustainable, recognisable national brand designed by and for young people.

3. Improve accessibility, visibility and responsiveness of young people's sexual health services

Young people wanted services that are easy to find, timely and free from stigma. Barriers were particularly evident for rural and island communities and where services relied heavily on GP access. Summit Participants discussed examples of good practice, including community-based models and initiatives such as 'The Corner' in Dundee, greater visibility of school nurses and services located where young people already spend time.

There was also support for strengthening workforce confidence so all NHS staff working with young people can provide appropriate support and signposting.

Short term priorities

- Increase promotion and awareness of existing sexual health services.
- Share examples of good practice across Scotland.
- Redefine the potential role of school nurses in sexual health.
- Develop competency frameworks on young people's sexual wellbeing for NHS staff working with young people.

Long term priorities

- Expand community-based models of sexual health support.
- Introduce wider access to condoms by post and online testing.
- Build workforce capability across NHS, community services and young people's organisations .

4. Improve digital literacy and education on online harms

Young people identified online harms, misinformation and unhealthy online content as major influences on relationships and sexual wellbeing. Summit participants emphasised that education should go beyond online safety to include critical thinking, digital literacy and recognising misinformation. Further discussion recognised the opportunity presented by the Scottish Government's work on online harms being undertaken in the first 100 days of the new administration and the importance of aligning future actions with this programme.

Short term priorities

- Strengthen education on digital literacy and online harms.
- Improve guidance and signposting for young people and parents.
- Build critical thinking into education programmes.
- Align these recommendations with current Scottish Government work on online harm.

Long term priorities

- Embed online literacy across education.
- Develop cross sector approaches linking education, health and digital policy.
- Continue to review emerging online risks and adapt guidance accordingly.

5. Take a public health approach to agency, consent and power in young people's relationships

Young people voiced growing concerns about harmful online content, coercive behaviours and unhealthy relationship norms. Discussions at both the webinar and summit explored the available evidence alongside the experiences of young people and professionals working in this area. There was strong support for shifting the focus from responding to harm towards preventing it through education, public awareness and wider cultural change. Given the scale and complexity of the challenge, participants agreed that a public health approach, bringing together education, health, justice and wider partners, offers the greatest opportunity to achieve sustained, population level impact.

Short term priorities

- Update Scottish government Consent and healthy relationships guidance.
- Develop a coordinated public awareness campaign. Link activity with Equally Safe.
- Improve partnership messaging across sectors.

Long term priorities

- Deliver sustained national campaigns promoting healthy relationships.
- Support wider cultural change around consent and respectful relationships.
- Strengthen and review the use of legislative and justice responses.
- Regularly review emerging evidence and guidance.

6. Strengthen national system leadership, accountability and measurement

Participants agreed that improving young people's sexual health and wellbeing requires coordinated national leadership rather than isolated initiatives. A whole system approach was recommended, with clear governance, accountability, monitoring and long-term commitment.

Discussion also highlighted the need for shared indicators, regular evidence reviews, workforce development and a national knowledge network to support continuous improvement.

Short term priorities

- Establish national governance arrangements for young people's sexual health and wellbeing.
- Develop a shared implementation and monitoring framework.
- Agree common indicators and outcome measures.
- Create a national knowledge network.
- Begin regular evidence briefings across sectors.

Long term priorities

- Introduce a national outcomes framework.
- Develop a workforce knowledge and skills framework with ongoing CPD.
- Embed monitoring and evaluation into national planning.
- Maintain cross government leadership and accountability.
- Use data and evidence to drive continuous improvement.

The recommendations emerging from this work will also be considered by the Scottish Government as part of the development of the next Sexual Health and Blood Borne Virus Action Plan, due to be published in 2027.

