



national rural mental health forum

Impact and update
report: 2024-25



Impact Review

The National Rural Mental Health Forum (NRMHF) began as a Scottish Government-funded initiative in 2017, convened and managed by Change Mental Health. The original quarterly in-person Forum events morphed to become nine online Forums and a Royal Highland Show event per year, in response to Covid.

This online format has increased the membership, attendance, scope and impact of the NRMHF to 287 organisations, comprising over 500 individuals. This results in outreach to 500,000 rural and island-dwelling individuals through organisational and community connections.

To share the Forum's Impact, this Review has been constructed from the following data sources:

- Overview & statistics
- NRMHF attendee feedback: 1-2-1 interviews and surveys
- Presenter feedback: 1-2-1 interviews and surveys
- Royal Highland Show connection feedback: comments and follow up actions
- Case studies

Through in-meeting chat functions plus Mentimeter, Microsoft Forms and Eventbrite feedback from attendees, each Forum online meeting has been comprehensively reviewed to ensure that it is meeting its core aims and the needs of attendees and presenters.



“The Forum is a golden opportunity to learn from others and share best practice.”

Professor Hestor Parr
The University of Glasgow



Agreed Aims of the NRMHF

Rural communities face unique challenges both in early intervention and prevention for mental ill health and in accessing recovery support.

Challenges are often rooted in the geographic, social and economic realities of remote and rural life.

The NRMHF provides a peerless route to mitigate against these challenges for the benefit of people living in rural Scotland.

**Reduce
Stigma**

**Improve
mental
wellbeing**

**Share
innovative
practice
& positive
impacts**

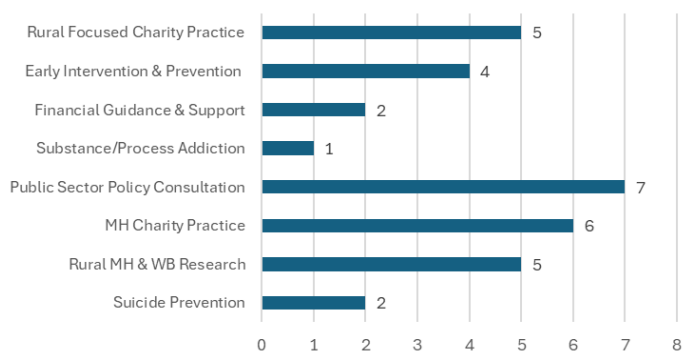
**Increase reach
& rural focus
of policy
connections**

**Support Scottish
Government
Strategies
& Delivery Plans**



Statistics from April 2024 to date

Presentation Categories 2024/25



- Average Registered Attendees: **95**
- Highest Registered Attendance: **138**
- Number of presenting organisations: **32**
- Number of Views of Presentations on YouTube: **465**
- Total number of attendee registrations: **876**

Follow up meetings with the presenters after each forum is adding further value to the presentations by maximising the connections and follow-through of learning and actions, and increasing the impact of the Forum for presenters.

Insights into Mental Health training facilitated via the Forum in 2024-2025:

Training was provided to **166 participants** across **30 businesses** and within **14 training sessions**.

Participants included employees from Moredun, Lothian Buses, Whale Arts, UKRI and The University of Edinburgh.

Mental health training was also provided to **50 attendees** at an Architectural Design PopUp event.

Agreement was reached for confirmed training with two significant employers in rural Scotland in 2025/26:

- Drax, the power and energy employer, has signed up for Insights into Mental Health training to support circa **200 people** in each quarter of 2025/26.
- Keela's manufacturing base in Glenrothes has committed to Insights into Mental Health training for all **60 members** of their team.



"The Forum has been instrumental in connecting our researchers to the farming community. It is a trusted space."

Lesley Jessiman
SRUC

Who attends?

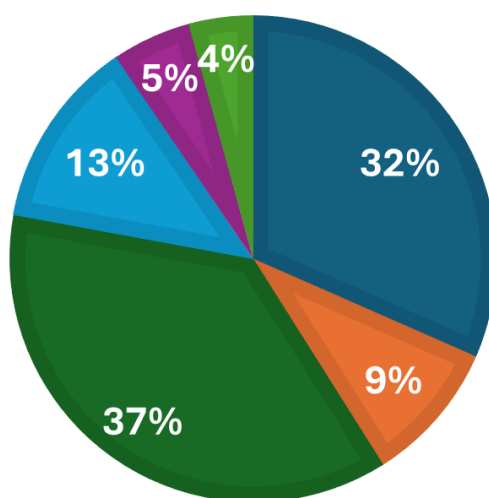
Multiple Scottish Government policy departments described the NRMHF as being **“invaluable”** and **“necessary”**.

The range of attendees is what makes the Forum helpful to attendees and presenters.



ATTENDANCE BY SECTOR

■ Public Sector ■ Academic ■ Third Sector
■ Community ■ Private Sector ■ Misc



“Great space to share awareness on changes to policy outwith the central belt.”

David Wilson
Policy Officer, Equality Unit
Scottish Government



Royal Highland Show 2024



As The Scottish Farmer confirms: “The RHS isn’t just important, it’s imperative to agriculture and farming communities, both in Scotland and beyond. You’ll never see a more diverse mix of people, sectors, products and services all coming together to celebrate food, farming and the countryside. The importance of that and also the re-connections made with rural charities, such as RHET and RSABI are vital to maintaining the caring side of agriculture that can sometimes be too easily forgotten.”

It is for these reasons that the NRMHF’s presence is so important at the Royal Highland Show, which had **220,000 attendees** in 2024.

A regular and active presence at this key event meets several of the aims agreed between the Forum and Scottish Government:

- **Reducing stigma, including self-stigmatisation:** With a central presence among the event’s stands, the NRMHF shows by its presence and activities that mental health is important, relevant to everyone in one way or another and something to consider along with other aspects of rural life.
- **Improving mental wellbeing:** The Forum provides signposting, connections, rural mental health information and links to money advice, mental health and suicide support services.
- **Increases reach and rural focus of policy connections:** Ministerial visits to the NRMHF stand, including the First Minister and the Minister for Agriculture, and links to other organisations provide the opportunities to meet and connect with, and positively influence, both political and social sectors.
- **Share innovative practice and positive impacts:** In 2024 the Forum was joined on its stand by delivery partners including: Breathing Space, Generation Scotland, SRITC, Police Scotland and Mental Health Futures.
- **Engagement included:** surveys on rural mental health, school visits, and information sharing with a wide range of interested groups and individuals.



Connecting RSABI to Thrive Mental Wellbeing



Creating meaningful partnerships which tackle stigma, including self-stigmatisation, and offer early intervention, prevention and routes to recovery within a rural setting can sound like a tall order.

Fortunately, just such a broad-ranging benefit has been made possible through the connections and partnerships formed through the NRMHF.

An initial successful trial of an online app by young farmers has resulted in the Thrive Mental Wellbeing App being made freely available to anyone involved in Scottish agriculture who is over the age of 18.

The Thrive App, available to almost four million users worldwide and NHS Digitally Compliant, includes access to a live in-app chat feature with qualified therapists available at the touch of a button. It also offers a range of supportive content, including resources on mindfulness, relaxation techniques and CBT. For those needing to speak 1-2-1 talking therapy sessions are available on request.

The evidenced-based supports and tools available on the app are designed to help people to sleep better, improve their resilience to stress, prevent mental illness, and reduce the risk of suicide.

Lizzie Lerpiniere, who works for Thrive said: **“Very proud of the work I am doing with RSABI to support the mental health of Scottish farmers. Special shout out to Jim Hume who gave me the platform to speak about Thrive at the National Rural Mental Health Forum.”**



The National Rural Mental Health Forum is an extremely informative, beneficial and connecting resource, to enable a wide range of organisations that work with rural communities to come together and review the needs of the communities. It is a great resource for RSABI to have, to find ways to support those in rural island communities.”



“The development of the mental health leaflet encourages open and honest conversations about mental health challenges.”

Firearms and Mental Health Literature Across the UK

The National Rural Mental Health Forum through its work, creates mental health support leaflet for individuals with firearms, shotgun and air weapon certificates in Scotland. This work has been seen as best practice and was nominated for a Chief Constable Partnership award by the Police, and since February 2025 also been rolled out in England and Wales.

It was a recognised risk that those with certificates were concerned about seeking help with their mental health, this leaflet gives them the information they need to seek help and reduce the risk of poorer mental health and suicidal ideation.

In Scotland, **101,902 certificates** are issued and each one receives the mental health support leaflet designed by the National Rural Mental Health Forum team.

In England and Wales, **643,162 certificates** are issued and each one receives the mental health support leaflet designed by the National Rural Mental Health Forum, launched in February 2025.

This means that **745,073 mental health support leaflets** go out with applications and renewals in Scotland, England and Wales because of the work of the National Rural Mental Health Forum.

The Forum regularly reviews and promotes the leaflet with the Police. Police forces and relative stakeholders with the Forum promote the leaflet.

More information, along with the England and Wales version of the leaflet, can be viewed here: [**New guide promotes firearms safety and mental health awareness - BASC**](#)



“While the police will always have a focus on public safety, it is important to dispel the myth that a disclosure of mental health issues will automatically result in certificate holders not being able to use firearms. There are a range of supportive options that the police, the medical profession and charities can consider in partnership to ensure individuals get the help and support they need, while still permitting access to firearms. The earlier these conversations take place, the better and safer for everyone concerned.”



What's changed because of the NRMHF?



“The National Rural Mental Health Forum has helped us connect with partners outwith the agricultural community, which we weren't previously aware of.”

Following our presentation at NRMHF, we were contacted by a number of different health boards. On the back of this, we held a webinar for NHS staff to learn more about Farmstrong Scotland and for our team to learn about the different NHS services available.

It was very successful with connections made for future opportunities and cross-sector signposting.

The NRMHF has allowed us to connect with the wider rural sector and appreciate some of the wider challenges that exist outwith agriculture. We have highlighted how Farmstrong Scotland can help people, and we are aware of more services that we can signpost people to as a result of attending the Forum.

The National Rural Mental Health Forum has helped us connect with partners outwith the agricultural community, which we weren't previously aware of.

The NRMHF has created a platform for sharing best practice, highlighting success stories and shining a light on some of the unique challenges that

exist within the agricultural and wider rural societies. I have learned about the challenges faced by a wide range of communities: in particular, connectivity, transport, access to services and availability of services.

The NRMHF has been a great place to meet with those invested in wellbeing within the rural environment of Scotland, and I have learned so much from both the Forum and connections I have made through the Forum. The Forum has opened doors and widened my network which has benefited me personally and Farmstrong Scotland more widely.”

**Alix Ritchie, Programme Director,
Farmstrong Scotland**





What else has changed because of the NRMHF?



The National Rural Mental Health Forum gave us an opportunity to share our organisation's work and raise our profile with potential partners in rural Scotland.

Our role is to ensure that everybody can access and benefit from the health and care they need to live well, by ensuring that services are designed and delivered through equal partnership with patients. Our aim is to bring patient partnership into the design and delivery of health and care services.

I know a significant number of people who attended the forum signed up as members of the Patients Association after we presented. This means they will be kept informed of our work and opportunities to collaborate in the future.

Presenting at the NRMHF has provided us with the opportunity to engage with other charities / organisations in rural Scotland and to increase our connections and our understanding of remote and rural issues in relation to mental health.

By collaborating, through the NRMHF we have a greater understanding of the issues people face in rural Scotland and we are building this into our campaigning and advocacy work.

The issues discussed raised important questions for us about how we respond to the needs of Scotland's rural communities, patients and carers.

Isolation, particularly when caused by lack of access to transport will be an increased area of focus for the Patients Association moving forward.

Sarah Tilsed & Tom O'Connor,
The Patients Association



A case study from NHS 24 Breathing Space



The Co-ordination Team at Breathing Space is a small team of three, with responsibility to reach out to the whole of Scotland and all potential delivery partners and stakeholders. The National Rural Mental Health Forum has helped us connect with providers across remote and rural areas, and which are in the heart of communities.

This has allowed us to target particular geographical areas and make connections in Dumfries & Galloway, the Borders, Argyll & Bute and on to the Highland areas. Our Operational Managers and Supervisors also attend the Forum and cascade the learning throughout Breathing Space's teams on the particular issues of stigma, remoteness, transport and rural financial challenges faced by callers and chat contacts to Breathing Space.

Targeted connections with communities

The Forum has given us the platform to share Breathing Space's activities, aims and aspirations, and to connect and bring people along with us. This led to the formation of the Highland Breathing Space

Steering group created through Forum connections. We've been able to target those working in Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) and in Suicide Bereavement Support (SBS) to improve the wraparound assistance for people dealing with mental ill health, personally or as a carer or support worker.

Outcomes

Sharing our campaigns and messages at the Forum, we have built strong connections with Farmstrong and RSABI, providing both with information sessions and awareness raising to combat mental ill health in the agricultural community and reduce the risks of rural suicide.

The Forum have given us a route to attend the Royal Highland Show and the Highlands and Islands Parliament.

**Lisa-Jane Dock and Tony McLaren,
Breathing Space**



A case study...

Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD)



A pilot project to tackle SAD involving art, journaling, sky pictures, letters to winter and a range of other self-help tools and strategies were devised and trialled with communities in Scotland.

This 'Living with SAD' pilot programme worked closely with people who self-identify as experiencing depression on a SAD spectrum. Developing narrative, creative, therapeutic and educational resources to understand how SAD experience affects everyday life and lifecourses, the project developed a series of 'Wintering Well' resources to support people who experience SAD to build happier winter lives.

A partnership for raising awareness and making change happen

The NRMHF was an obvious choice for consultation and awareness raising. Professor Hester Parr of The University of Glasgow described the Forum as "the golden opportunity" for the two universities to share their research outcomes and some of the public resources that we really want people on the ground to be using. "Our research resources are really relevant for people with mental health issues and the people who support them, in rural Scotland particularly.

"The Forum was perfect in helping us communicate that message to a really wide range of people and to share our public resources, in a way that we would absolutely have struggled to do otherwise."

"Over 80 people were registered for the Forum we presented to. We had had a lot of communication as a result with people who are supporting others in rural areas. Hugely valuable relationship for creating a research-involved response. No point in us sitting in our ivory towers thinking up lots of great ways to address mental health if we haven't got partnerships, and that's what the Forum provides."

Outcomes

This Forum presentation has gone on to lead to Paths for All running campaign on SAD in the New Year, until the clocks change. Staff and volunteers are receiving training on how to recognise the signs of SAD, as 1 in 10 people are likely to experience SAD. The training includes what people can do if they experience the signs and symptoms of SAD, with the research and resources included.

Change Mental Health has also shared the 'Wintering Well' resources with the charity's 40 Community Link Workers supporting individuals, to improve awareness of and support for people affected by SAD.

The Forum as a Wheel of Engagement



One of the most precious things about the NRMHF is the way in which it brings people together who would otherwise struggle to connect or might potentially never hear about one another.

A fruitful example of this aspect of the Forum have been the connections made between Bryony Mole of See Me's Workplace Mental Health initiatives, Sarah Robertson, Young Person Engagement & Recruitment Co-ordinator, of The University of Edinburgh, Josie Barclay, Suicide Prevention Lead of RSABI and Izzy Witteveen, Suicide Bereavement Support Service Lead, with Penumbra.

Having initially connected and recognised themes of common interest at the March 2025 NRMHF, this small group met with support from the Forum's officers. It was an opportunity to pool knowledge, contacts, guidance and experience.

Within an hour of this Forum follow-up meeting, this mini-network had rapidly proven its worth.

Outcomes

- RSABI resolved a challenge to connect with NHS Primary Care. Forum Officers advised on crucial routes into GP practices through the Community Link Workers Network which can open referral routes to RSABI's services
- Sarah provided helpful linking information on the youth communities of Gypsy, Roma and Traveler People (GRT)
- Bryony and Josie began exploring collaboration routes for RSABI and See Me
- Lizzy provided routes to connect into the Suicide Bereavement Support Service
- Sarah provided links to Sea Fit, and Josie to All Taken Care Off, in response to the Forum officers' interest in establishing connection with fishing and coastal-focused organisations and extending invitations to them to the NRMHF events
- All considered the RSABI Health Huts and blood pressure checks at Health Marts as being an inspiring way of connecting with and supporting mental health among the farming community. All considered ways this model could be expanded to other communities and settings.



Supporting Scottish Government's Strategies and Delivery Plans

The NRMHF supports the Scottish Government's activities and aims directly through the delivery of the agreed aims of the Forum and also by the provision of a trusted, valued and cost-effective consultation arena. Indirectly, the Forum provides the glue that bonds the key players in mental health, and rural mental health in particular, from across Scotland.

- Reducing the risk of consultation fatigue, by increasing the opportunities for collective engagement and consultation on initiatives such as the Rural Development Plan.
- Embed and reflect the voice of those living in Scotland's rural areas (Minutes of Ministerial Working Group on Rural Development Plan).
- The NRMHF offers a trusted and well-subscribed engagement route for sharing the role and methods of the Rural Delivery Plan and Rural Lens Toolkit, National Islands Plan (2025), Implementation Route Plan (2020-2025) and Island Community Impact Assessments (ICIAs).
- Bridging delivery by supporting cross-government initiatives by connecting them directly to influential and active community and organisational representatives.
- Strategic Objective 7 of the National Island Plan recognises the central role the NRMHF has, stating: "undertaking to address the unique challenges faced by those living in rural and island communities, we will work with the National Rural Mental Health Forum to gather and share evidence around the barriers faced by rural and island communities, with a view to building their resilience further and supporting wellbeing."
- Francesco Bertoldi, National Islands Plan Team Leader, presented at the February 2025 Forum, seeking input on mental health initiatives for island communities. Forum attendees learned about proposed priorities and shared feedback to help shape the new Plan.
- Bryony Mole of See Me presented at the March 2025 Forum on the progress being made to tackle stigma around mental health concerns in the workplace. This presentation was warmly received and acted as the starting point for the proposed awareness-raising campaign focused on rural Scotland.

Sample of Forum Voices

"If the NRMHF didn't exist, we would have to create it just to be able to effectively consult with people in rural parts of Scotland."

Presenter feedback

"The Forum makes a difference, as it gives us a lens to look out beyond the city-scape and properly consider the different populations, that are hardly reached in other ways, and to find out how we can work alongside people there."

Presenter feedback

"The people of rural Scotland need ways to connect on mental health. The Forum helps me to do that and share what I learn."

Attendee feedback

"Any time I miss a Forum, I check to see what the presentations have been. I can catchup on what I've missed on YouTube."

Attendee feedback

"The Forum is a wheel of engagement that we can tap into and that helps join up organisations and agencies that previously wouldn't have spent the time of day with us."

Attendee feedback

"Disparate groups who wouldn't normally connect come together at the Forum and we learn so much from what is shared. It makes a difference."

Attendee feedback

"People in remote and rural areas have the answers for what will work in their area. We can journey along beside them, but we need ways like the Forum to help us connect and understand what they need."

Presenter feedback

"The Forum destigmatises mental health issues and problems. The Forum is an essential space for collaboration."

Attendee feedback

"Great to see plans for supporting island communities and the themes that came out as priorities."

Attendee feedback

"Found the presentations very informative and made connections to follow up with to work together with sharing of information about each other's organisation."