

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1989: Increase defibrillators in public spaces and workplaces](#), lodged by Mary Montague

Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

[PE1989](#) calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to support the provision of defibrillators in public spaces and workplaces. The petitioner requested the installation of an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) in their local large supermarket following the death of a close family member from cardiac arrest in the supermarket, and the request was refused.

AEDs are referred to throughout this briefing as Public Access Defibrillators, or PADs, a commonly-used term for AEDs placed in public spaces.

Prevalence of out-of-hospital cardiac arrests and AEDs in Scotland

According to the Scottish Ambulance Service's [out-of-hospital cardiac arrests \(OHCAs\) report 2019-22](#), an average of 3,140 OHCAs occur in Scotland every year. The survival rate of OHCAs in the UK is around 8%; however, [a systematic review of studies exploring the use of defibrillators](#) found that when Public Access Defibrillators (PADs) are attached by bystanders during OHCAs, the median survival rate increased to 32%. People living in Scotland's most deprived areas are [twice as likely to experience an OHCA](#). However, public spaces in deprived areas are [significantly less likely to have PADs installed](#).

The number of Public Access Defibrillators (PADs) in Scotland [doubled between 2019 and 2022](#), with almost 5,000 PADs currently available in communities. The average rate of PAD deployment by the public during OHCAs during this period was 8%.

[Grant funding is available towards the cost of PADs](#) and most are purchased by community groups and organisations. Private businesses, such as supermarkets would purchase their own.

Scottish Government strategies

Scotland's initial [OHCA Strategy 2015-20](#) aimed to equip more members of the public with the skills to respond to OHCAs. Prior to the introduction of Scotland's first OHCA strategy in 2015, 1 in 20 people who experienced an OHCA survived to be discharged from hospital. By 2020, the survival rate had [doubled to 1 in 10 people](#).

Scotland's current [Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy 2021-26](#) includes two key aims related to PADs:

- Public Access Defibrillators (PADs) will be placed optimally and be as accessible as possible.
- 20% of all OHCA's will have a defibrillator applied before the arrival of ambulance service.

Installation of PADs in supermarkets and other public spaces

Supermarkets and other public spaces are not legally required to install PADs, though some of the UK's large supermarket chains, including [Asda](#) and [Tesco](#), have committed to installing PADs in stores, and registering all defibrillators on [The Circuit network](#) to assist ambulance services in identifying nearby PADs.

The Scottish Government's [guidance for organisations considering purchasing and installing a PAD](#) identifies five key factors to consider, advising organisations to think SHOCK:

- S – Sourcing: Purchasing a PAD, and obtaining funding
- H – Health and Safety: Identifying a safe location for installing a PAD
- O – Operability: Considering the storage, maintenance, training, and legal requirements associated with installing PADs
- C – CPR Learning: Highlighting that PADs are most effective when used in conjunction with cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). The [Save a Life for Scotland](#) programme aims to increase CPR awareness and skills across all ages.
- K – Knowledge and Awareness: Ensuring clear signage so that PADs can easily be found, and [registering PADs with the Scottish Ambulance Service](#) to enable them to direct members of the public to use them during 999 calls.

The [cost to organisations](#) of obtaining PADs, and [lack of public knowledge or confidence in using them](#), have been identified as barriers to increasing the usage of defibrillators in public spaces. In a [UK Parliament debate on 22 June 2022](#), Members called for the introduction of a zero rate of VAT to all defibrillators to improve their affordability.

The UK Parliament is currently considering the [Automated External Defibrillators \(Public Access\) Bill](#), which would require the installation of AEDs in public spaces. However, this would not necessarily cover private premises such as supermarkets.

Scottish Government action

As noted above, the Scottish Government's [Out-of-Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy 2021-26](#) aims to increase the number of PADs available, and their rate of use during OHCA. This strategy builds on the Scottish Government's [OHCA Strategy 2015-20](#), the implementation of which coincided with a doubling in Scotland's OHCA survival rate.

Scottish Parliament action

A previous petition, [PE1707](#), called on the Scottish Parliament to “urge the Scottish Government to introduce a requirement for all new build or newly renovated or re-purposed buildings with a floorspace of over 7500m² to have a public access defibrillator (PAD) fitted to the exterior of the building, for public use, and for the PADs to be officially registered.” [The SPICe briefing accompanying the petition](#) detailed the actions taken in Parliament regarding this issue to date. The Public Petitions Committee closed the petition during [its meeting on 10 February 2021](#), concluding that the majority of the evidence heard by the Committee was not in favour of the proposal, and that significant progress had been made by the Scottish Government in other areas pertaining to the installation of PADs.

On 8 February 2022, Paul O’Kane MSP lodged question [S6W-06291](#), asking the Scottish Government what consideration it had given to installing defibrillators in schools. Maree Todd MSP replied that the decision to install defibrillators in schools is a matter for Local Authority consideration. She further responded that the Scottish Government’s OHCA strategy 2021-26 aims to increase the accessibility and registration of PADs, and that the [Resuscitation Research Group](#) at the University of Edinburgh is developing [a tool to show where PADs are most likely to be required](#), in order to guide optimal placement. This project is funded by the Scottish Government.

On 9 December 2022, Foysol Choudhury MSP lodged written question [S6W-13035](#), to ask the Scottish Government for its response to reports that Scotland’s richest areas have almost 10 times as many PADs as its most deprived areas. This question is currently awaiting a response.

Key Organisations and relevant links

[Scottish Government OHCA Strategy 2021-26](#)

[Scottish Ambulance Service](#)

[British Heart Foundation](#)

[St John Scotland Community Defibrillator Scheme](#)

[Save a Life for Scotland](#)

Sarah Swift
Researcher

14/12/2022

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at spice@parliament.scot

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Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP