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5 Dec 2017



More than half a million bed days were occupied by patients who were fit to leave hospital last year, new figures have revealed.

ISD Scotland said there were 532,423 bed blocking patients in 2016/17, the vast majority of whom were elderly.

And while that's a slight decrease from the previous year, it still means one in 12 hospital beds are taken up by a delayed discharge patient at any one time.

In the Western Isles, nearly 30 per cent of hospital beds are used in this way.

Delayed discharge costs the NHS £132 million a year, and places immense strain on other areas of the health service.

Today's report cited patients awaiting care packages and care home places as by far the most common reason for a delay.

The SNP has repeatedly pledged to sort the issue of bed-blocking out, for the sake of both patients and hospitals.

However, despite repeated initiatives, little improvement has been made in recent years.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

"Delayed discharge has caused huge problems in hospitals for several years now, yet the SNP government has made next to no improvement in this area.

"On a human level, it creates sheer misery for thousands upon thousands of patients who are fit to leave but have nowhere to go.

"It's time for ministers to come up with a meaningful plan to address this.

"We keep hearing of funding announcements and system overhauls, but nothing seems to change.

"More than half a million bed days were lost to this issue last year – that's

not something our NHS or vulnerable patients can afford.

“Increasingly our acute hospitals are not able to function properly as vital acute beds are being used by delayed discharge patients.

“In some cases patients are being delayed by hundreds of days.”