

Improving Scotland's collective response to child victims

First step in developing national Barnahus standards for Scotland.



Earlier this year, the Scottish Government commissioned Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) and the Care Inspectorate to develop a set of standards to introduce the Barnahus concept to Scotland as part of our commitment to improving how the criminal justice system serves children, young people and their families.

The original Icelandic Barnahus – or ‘Children’s House’ – is a child-friendly, interdisciplinary and multiagency centre that allows different professionals to work under one roof in investigating suspected child sexual abuse cases and providing appropriate support for child victims.

The concept was later adopted by more than 10 European countries and takes a variety of forms, depending on each country’s unique legal and healthcare systems. Despite their differences, all are united by a shared aim of improving recovery and reducing re-traumatisation by the justice process.

Scoping recommendations

Following an initial workshop with 50 participants from across health, social work, justice, police and child-protection in June 2019, HIS and the Care Inspectorate have published their [scoping report](#), providing a roadmap for the development of national Barnahus standards for Scotland.

Informed by the workshop discussions, the report recommends that the

standards should cover:

- Inter-agency working and collaboration
- Child and family-centred design
- Information and supported decision-making
- Evidence collection
- Staff training, role and responsibilities, and
- Follow-up treatment, support and advocacy
- Leadership and governance

The report also includes testimony from victims, including eight-year-old Rowan who said her abuser's conviction "was on Facebook before I heard about it. I found out at school. It was confusing and weird not to be told properly. It was scary too because I didn't know what had happened... It would have helped if there had just been one person I could have talked to the whole time and who could support me before, during and after court."

Introducing Scotland-specific standards provides an opportunity to tackle such experiences head-on and design a genuinely child-centred approach to delivering justice, care and recovery for children who have experienced abuse.

They will help Scotland to balance a child's right to recovery from the point at which they disclose abuse with their right to access justice in a child-centred way, in line with the principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and GIRFEC.

Based on the European PROMISE quality standards which outline best practice for countries who wish to develop the model, these standards will form a framework for health, justice and local authorities to understand what is required to improve our collective response to child victims.

Next steps

Work to develop standards is currently at the scoping stage. A standards development group will be recruited this summer, co-chaired by leads from health and social care respectively.

The working group will include clinical expertise, representatives from health boards, children's services, the third sector, statutory justice partners and will be informed by children and young people's lived experience.

The post [Improving Scotland's collective response to child victims](#) appeared first on [Justice and Safety](#).