



Healthcare  
Improvement  
Scotland

**SIGN**  
Makes sense  
of evidence

# A guide for SIGN volunteers

September 2023

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## Who is this guide for?

Our volunteer guide will help you get off to the best start on your volunteering journey. It will help support you throughout your time at SIGN. Volunteers include public partners and lived experience representatives (patients, carers and third sector organisation representatives). It explains how we can support you.

Our guide aims to:

- explain who we are what we do
- highlight the volunteering opportunities available to you and
- help you to understand how we support people with lived experience and the public
- signpost to SIGN training courses that are open to all volunteers.

If you have joined SIGN as part of your public partner role within Healthcare Improvement Scotland, this guide complements the public partner handbook.

## Who are we?

SIGN's aim is to improve the quality of healthcare for patients in Scotland. We do this by developing and disseminating trusted evidence-based guidance to support decision making.

We work with health and social care professionals, third sector organisations and individuals. We base our guidelines on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. Our guidelines are intended to:

- help professionals and patients understand medical evidence
- help professionals and patients use evidence to make decisions about healthcare
- reduce unwarranted variations in clinical practice
- make sure patients get the best care available, no matter where they live
- improve healthcare across Scotland by focusing on the outcomes that are important to patients.

We produce plain language versions of our guidelines. These explain the recommendations in the clinical guideline. They help make people aware of the treatment they should expect to receive. They are intended to:

- help patients and carers understand the latest evidence about diagnosis, treatment and self care
- empower patients to take part in decisions about management of their condition
- highlight where there are areas of uncertainty in the management of their condition.

Further information about SIGN can be found on our [website](#).

## SIGN Council

Members of SIGN Council are nominated by Royal Colleges or other professional organisations or committees. They also represent their specialty or discipline in a wider sense and connect with other specialists in their field. Public partners are identified from an open call for interested individuals.

SIGN Council members participate in decisions about SIGN's methodology and work programme. Members have an input into the composition of guideline development groups. They may also be actively involved in aspects of the guideline development process.

## SIGN Executive

The SIGN Executive is the name for the team of staff we employ to run the organisation. They are responsible for putting SIGN Council's decisions into practice. They carry out the guideline programme on time and in line with our budget. These members of staff are employees of the public body Healthcare Improvement Scotland. Our staff work closely with other parts of Healthcare Improvement Scotland and keep to their policies and procedures.

## Who to contact

We are here to help and answer your questions when you need us to.

Ross Conway, Administrative Assistant

Mobile: 07773 127861

Email: [ross.conway@nhs.scot](mailto:ross.conway@nhs.scot)

Karen Graham, Public Involvement Advisor

Mobile: 07929027159

Email: [karen.graham2@nhs.scot](mailto:karen.graham2@nhs.scot)

## What volunteer roles are available at SIGN?

We have two volunteer roles:

- public partner
- lived-experience representative on a guideline development group. Includes patients, service users, unpaid carers and third sector representatives.

### Public partner roles

#### SIGN Council

The role of the public partner on SIGN Council is to make sure SIGN is considering the patient and public perspective at all times. Most of the time public partner input will be small. Members will be asked for a public perspective during discussions.

Public partners on SIGN Council sit on a Public Involvement Advisory Group. This is a forum to enable patient and public partner members of SIGN Council to engage constructively and productively with us to shape all aspects of our patient and public involvement work.

#### SIGN Public Literature Panel

The public partner role on the SIGN Public Literature Panel is to make sure that plain language versions of guidelines are accessible to the target audience. Members are asked to contribute to the development of plain language products by:

- becoming familiar with the clinical guideline, and
- providing feedback during development and revision processes.

More about the SIGN Council public partner role can be found in the role descriptions.

### Lived-experience representative role

This role is to make sure the views of people with lived experience of conditions influence the guideline development group's work. People with lived experience help guideline development groups understand what it is like to live with a condition and how different treatments can affect their lives. Lived-experience representatives can also raise a wide range of other issues to make sure that the guideline development group considers the needs of everyone who is affected by a condition.

More about the lived experience role can be found in the role description.

## Declaration of interests and confidentiality

You will be asked to make a full declaration of interests on joining SIGN and every year afterwards. We can offer you support on this process.

Please treat all information shared with you in the strictest confidence. If you have questions about confidentiality issues, you should discuss them with a member of the Public Involvement Team, or the Programme Manager for the guideline you are involved with.

## What support can you expect from SIGN?

We will provide:

- an induction to SIGN and an opportunity to ask questions
- named contacts for public involvement staff who can support you during your time with us
- informal meeting with the Chair of the group you have joined
- information about training opportunities
- reimbursement of travel and other out-of-pocket expenses.

### Training

We will provide you with a general introduction to the work of SIGN when you join us. The following opportunities are available to all volunteers involved in SIGN's work.

- **Introduction to SIGN training.** This is a half-day course that covers how volunteers can contribute to the guideline development process. It focuses on the skills you need to take part in a guideline development group, for example communication skills.
- **Working with Evidence training.** This is a three-hour session that explains the following:
  - searching for evidence and summarising data
  - types of medical study designs
  - the process of making recommendations and advice from the evidence
- **Developing plain language versions of guidelines and plain language summary training.** This is a three-hour session that explains how we develop information in plain language.

### [Cochrane Evidence Essentials](#)

This online training is provided by [Cochrane](#). It offers an introduction to health evidence, and how to use it to make informed health choices. It covers:

- evidence-based medicine
- randomised controlled trials
- an introduction to systematic reviews
- understanding and using systematic reviews
- consumer involvement in Cochrane.

We would encourage you to complete this training to get an understanding of evidence-based medicine and types of research.



## Expenses

We will reimburse reasonable out-of-pocket expenses as a result of your volunteering. We try to limit out-of-pocket expenses by booking travel and overnight accommodation for you, where necessary. For those who are entitled to concessionary train travel, and prefer to buy their own ticket, expenses can be claimed. Any expenses claims should be submitted no more than three months after an event.

An editable copy of our non-staff expenses claim form can be found below and in Appendix 1:



Non staff expenses  
claim form FINAL 2.0

## Support with information technology (IT) to join virtual meetings

If needed we can offer support and training on how to join meetings from your computer. If you have any IT issues, please contact Ross Conway in the first instance (details above).

## How we use your personal data

As a volunteer with us, we hold personal information about you. Please visit the [Respecting Your Privacy](#) page on our website for information about:

- the personal information we use
- our purposes for using personal information
- our legal basis for using personal information
- who provides the personal information
- when information is shared with others
- when personal information is transferred abroad
- retention periods of the information we hold
- how we protect personal information
- your rights.

## Photographs and quotes

From time to time, we ask people involved in our work if they agree to having their photo or quotes used in our publications. In these cases, we will ask you to sign a consent form granting us permission to use these.

## Equality and diversity

We are committed to making sure that volunteering opportunities are available to people across all equality characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

## Health and safety

Any activities carried out on a voluntary basis are covered by the same health and safety legislative requirements as those carried out by our staff. It is important that you understand and accept your personal responsibility towards promoting and maintaining health and safety standards to provide a safe working environment for all.

Our health and safety at work policy can be accessed below or by request.



HIS Occupational  
Health and Safety at