Background
Research shows deaf people find it difficult to access support in the health service. This can lead to missing potentially life-threatening health conditions, incorrect diagnoses or poor treatment decisions. Deaf people therefore experience inequitable access to health services that affects quality of experiences, introduces risk and widens health inequalities. This is unfair and unjust.

To address this challenge the Chief Executive of NHSScotland asked NHS Health Scotland to coordinate the development of an NHS Scotland BSL improvement plan to help ensure all NHS Boards meet their duties under the Equality Act 2010 and BSL (Scotland) Act 2015, as well as improve the experience and quality of services for BSL users.

The British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2017–2023 sets out ten long-term goals as ambitions for BSL in Scotland. These ambitions refer to education, employment, arts and culture, and transport as well as health and mental wellbeing.

Methodology
NHS HS liaised with a range of stakeholders including local and national NHS Boards, Equality & Diversity Leads Network, National Screening Programme, Heriot-Watt University and the Equality Unit in the Scottish Government to get their views and priority issues to inform the scope of the improvement plan.

NHS HS then developed a set of evidence-informed objectives reflecting good practice and improvement approaches. The improvement plan was endorsed by NHS Chief Executives in March 2017.

Aims and objectives
The NHS Scotland BSL improvement plan aims to create more equitable access to services for BSL users in Scotland.

The improvement plan will:
• strengthen leadership and governance for BSL provision across NHSScotland
• strengthen the infrastructure to reduce variation in service provision
• increase staff awareness and engagement to provide a person-centred, safe and effective service that provides a better experience for BSL service users.

Results/Outcomes
Outcomes agreed through the collaboration of key stakeholders and the deaf community include:

Learning module
Increased staff awareness of BSL users’ health and social care needs, through provision of an e-learning module.

National policy and guidance
Consistent provision of interpretation and translation services across NHSScotland, through development of a national policy and guidance.

Shared learning
Shared understanding of best practice and requirements for NHS Boards for BSL through hosting a national shared learning event on BSL practice.

Bowel screening pilot
BSL translation of bowel screening resources to support new test of other health topics, launched in 2018.

Access support card
Increased visibility and awareness of BSL users’ access needs, through provision of access support cards.

Additional service needs
NHS HS is testing a referral system between primary care and outpatient hospital appointments to support people with additional communication needs including BSL users.

Sustaining the BSL workforce
NHS HS, Scottish Government and partners have supported the funding of a training course in BSL interpretation to ensure we have a sustainable workforce in place.

Access to health information
Increased access to health information for those with additional communication needs including BSL users.

NHS Health Scotland accessible information policy
NHS HS have updated their accessible publications policy, meaning this is in line with national translation and interpretation policy.

References
You can request the NHS Scotland BSL improvement plan by contacting Lorna Renwick, NHS Health Scotland, at: lornarenwick@nhs.net

You can access the British Sign Language (BSL) National Plan 2017–2023 (which includes national actions beyond health) on the Scottish Government website at: www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/10/3540

You can access ‘Sick of it. How the health service is failing deaf people’ from deaf health charity SignHealth at: www.signhealth.org.uk/health-information/sick-of-it-report/