

On 7th July, award winning Lochaber charity Urram, received the official announcement that NHS Highland are to officially withdraw from the Dail Mhor Care facility, which has been closed since November 2022, via the attached press release.

James Hilder commented “Whilst this official announcement that the NHS Highland is to close the registered respite service is disappointing, it comes as no surprise to us and local Community Councils, who have continually pushed for a reprieve for many years. What is more concerning is that it has taken two years for the wheels of bureaucracy to turn and for officials to formalise the decision and this has effectively put a complete halt on any discussions for alternative solutions to providing respite care locally. Despite the best efforts of local MSPs, the Community councils locally and Urram to force NHS Highland to re-run a proper recruitment process locally, NHS Highland concluded in early 2025 that they couldn’t run a service due to insufficient applicants, but have failed to make any formal announcement”

Over the last couple of years, Urram has therefore been trying to work with NHS Highland to examine alternative ways to deliver support services from Dail Mhor to no avail. As there was still a ‘registered service’ in the building (albeit mothballed) Highland Council would not progress talks on any unused parts of the building so there has been a stalemate with each party citing the other, whenever Urram pushed for more innovative discussions.

Urram remains hopeful that by NHS Highland de-registering the respite service in Dail Mhor, it will free up this log jam and we might be able to persuade both parties to re-assess the uses for the building ideally with eventually reopening short term respite services for which there is high demand.

We remain convinced that Dail Mhor should not be left to rot and that it could be reopened (if proper repairs and upgrading could take place) offering a range of care and wellbeing services and will continue to push for this asset to be put to good use.

In the meantime Urram continues to work hard to help people in need of care locally to access that care in other ways. Ultimately “care” is not just about being put in an institution, and we know that most local people in need of extra support would much rather stay in their own home where-ever possible. Through our Support in the Right Direction service we are helping older residents access:

- benefit payments,
- assessments,
- home adaptations (although the bureaucracy is challenging),
- private care through the use of “personal assistants”,
- befriending,
- access to a wide range of medical appointments,
- and of course we are also running a programme of social events backed up with the Hospital Transport Service which now has 6 vehicles.

Updates and news are available at www.urram.scot and via Facebook.

Background Notes

1. The Dail Mhor Care Home in Strontian was operated for many years by Highland Council, and latterly by NHS Highland.
2. The residential service was closed in 2017 when the plumbing failed and following concerns about its potential long-term closure, the Dail Mhor Working Group was formed in 2018 to work with NHS Highland to re-open the home.
3. With Community council representatives on this group NHSH were successfully persuaded to reopen the building, but it was re-registered as a **Respite Facility**, and then during the Covid pandemic it was also used as a “step up/step down” facility.
4. The charity Urram SCIO was formed in May 2020 when it became clear that there were many other care needs that were not being met locally and has been attempting to work in partnership with NHS Highland since then.
5. Urram secured funding from NHSH, HIE, the Council and local community councils to undertake a detailed assessment of the viability of running a new care home on the site which was published in early 2022. This concluded a ‘like for like’ service was not viable given staffing challenges and the current model of delivery of statutory care services, but other options were worth exploring.
6. In November 2022 following staff shortages, NHSH ‘temporarily’ closed the respite service and moved remaining staff to work in Invernevis House in Fort William.

7. Following a poorly publicised attempt by NHSH to recruit more staff for Dail Mhor in 2023, Urram secured the support of the then local MSP Kate Forbes and local Community Councils to run a more thorough recruitment drive over the winter of 2024/2025. This still resulted in NHSH declaring there were insufficient applicants to re-open the respite centre.
8. In late 2024 the Highland Council and NHSH surveyed the building and also cited a potential repair and upgrade bill of approx. £1million to bring the building up to a standard where a registered service could be operated from it. This remains unresolved.
9. The building has remained closed since then, although the NHSH has continued to operate a GP surgery from part of the building.