

CRITICAL MOMENTS

LIFESAVING DECISIONS

A Manifesto for the UK's Air Ambulances



September 2025

All air ambulance charities are independent, with differing operational models, so the data on pages 2 and 9 of this manifesto represent UK sector averages from 2024. The cost of a mission varies depending on geography, patient need, and the clinical and operational model of the local air ambulance charity. Literature references are available on request.



AIR AMBULANCES UK
SUPPORTING AIR AMBULANCE CHARITIES

INTRODUCTION

Anyone, anywhere can become a patient at any time. When serious injury or illness occurs, air ambulance charities are there in these critical moments, delivering advanced pre-hospital care at the scene and effectively bringing the hospital to the patient. But to enhance these moments, lifesaving decisions from the Government are also essential to keep these services at the forefront of care.

There are 21 independent air ambulance charities across the UK; collectively, they respond to an average of 134 missions daily – reaching patients in an average of 15 minutes. Each of these lifesaving missions is almost entirely funded by the generosity of local communities.

Air Ambulances UK (AAUK) is the national charity supporting the lifesaving work of these air ambulance charities – helping them save even more lives every day.

Working closely with the wider UK medical community, air ambulance crews combine world-leading medical and aviation expertise. Crews made up of pilots, doctors, paramedics, nurses, clinical support staff, and ground support teams complete over 48,000 missions each year.

With the average mission cost rising year on year – standing at £4,165 in 2024 – the pressure on air ambulance services has never been greater. Addressing these challenges and securing Government support is critical to ensuring lifesaving care remains accessible. Many of these issues lie beyond the control of air ambulance charities, and without timely, effective policy action, treatment, care, and lives could be put at risk.

While this manifesto is primarily directed at the UK Westminster Government, it supports the UK's air ambulance sector as a whole. We recognise that health policy is devolved across Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, and some priorities may differ. We welcome collaboration to ensure that, where needed, services across all nations are supported.



OUR POLICY PRIORITIES

“This manifesto highlights four key national policy issues that affect the lifesaving work of the UK’s air ambulance charities – and presents clear opportunities for Government action. These priorities are informed by frontline operational experience and are on behalf of the urgent needs of the communities air ambulance charities serve.”

*Jamie Ward, Policy and Public Affairs Manager,
Air Ambulances UK*

Together, we can:

1. Safeguard and Improve Hospital Helipad Access

Commit to ensuring 24/7-ready on-site helipads at all UK Major Trauma Centres (MTCs) and specialist hospitals, prioritising upgrades at sites rated as high or medium concern as essential NHS infrastructure.

2. Unlock Access to Patient Data (PRANA)

Enable secure access to linked patient data so air ambulance charities can track outcomes, improve care, and support NHS integration.

3. Restore EGNOS Temporarily for Safer Air Ambulance Missions

Temporarily re-join EGNOS to overcome weather and visibility issues, reducing delays or cancellations to keep air ambulances flying safely while the UK develops its own Satellite-Based Augmentation System.

4. Strengthen Public Understanding of Air Ambulance Funding

Tackle widespread misinformation by improving national messaging on the independent, charitable nature of the UK’s 21 air ambulances.



POLICY PRIORITY ONE

HOSPITAL HELIPAD ACCESS AND SAFEGUARDING REFORM

'Helipads' or 'sites' refer to 24/7 on-site helipads at UK Major Trauma Centres and specialist hospitals.

The Challenge

Hospital helipads save crucial time by allowing air ambulances to deliver critically ill patients directly to specialist care. Yet many UK MTCs and specialist hospitals lack 24/7-capable, safeguarded on-site helipads. This forces air ambulances to land off-site or divert, delaying urgent treatment and risking lives. 24/7 on-site helipads must be recognised, protected within the planning system, and funded as core NHS infrastructure – not an afterthought.

Key Facts from our Sector UK-wide MTC and Specialist Hospital Helipads Audit:

- 31% have serious access issues (29% Red, 2% Red/Amber)
- 21% have limited access and provision, requiring improvement (Amber)
- 48% meet 24/7 on-site access and Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) CAP 1264: Standards for Helicopter Landing Areas at Hospitals – considered low concern (Green)

Bridging Gaps in Government and NHS Priorities

This infrastructure shortfall highlights challenges in fully aligning with contemporary Government and NHS ambitions to improve trauma readiness, modernise facilities, reduce delayed care, and address health inequalities. Gaps in 24/7 on-site helipad access and provision point to a need for greater alignment and investment to support these objectives:

- NHS 10-Year Health Plan: Commits to capital investment and equitable service access.
- NHS Urgent & Emergency Care Plan 2025/26: Aims to reduce response and handover times, especially for major trauma patients.
- NHS New Hospital Programme & UK 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy: Focus on resilience and modernisation, and the need for NHS estates that can support urgent and emergency care.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE – OUR POLICY ASK TO GOVERNMENT

Lead Department: Department of Health and Social Care

1. Mandate 24/7 on-site helipads at all MTCs, specialist hospitals (CAP 1264 compliant).
2. Embed 24/7 on-site helipads in national NHS commissioning, standards and specifications.
3. Classify helipads as critical infrastructure in the National Planning Policy Framework.
4. Support the CAA with the development of regulatory changes to safeguard helipads.
5. Create a helipad infrastructure fund, using NHS capital and Levelling Up resources, building on the vital work of the HELP Appeal, but ensuring it is not the sole long-term funding source.

POLICY PRIORITY TWO

SAFE PATIENT DATA ACCESS: SUPPORT PRANA REGISTRY

The Challenge

Air ambulance charities are excluded from the NHS patient data ecosystem, with clinical information siloed across emergency, acute, and rehabilitation services. This fragmentation limits their ability to track outcomes, improve care, and collaborate effectively with NHS and wider emergency services, preventing them from closing the audit loop and driving innovation.

The Pre-Hospital Research and Audit Network (PRANA) Registry, hosted by the Wessex Secure Data Environment (SDE), demonstrates the potential to link data across multiple agencies. However, commitment to helping this become a national registry spanning the entire patient care pathway – including third-sector providers – is needed. While the data exists, what's missing is a shared approach to the legal, technical, and funding mechanisms required to unlock it for public benefit.

Bridging Gaps in Government and NHS Priorities

Excluding air ambulance charities from NHS data access undermines Government and NHS goals for integrated, data-driven care. Closing this gap would support trauma outcomes, safe air operations, and reduce pressure on emergency departments, and long-term services – enabling better planning, commissioning, and system-wide learning. Coordinated action is essential to unlock PRANA's full potential, in line with:

- NHS 10-Year Health Plan: Priorities joined-up care and digital transformation.
- NHS Urgent & Emergency Care Plan 2025/26 and Data Saves Lives Strategy: Calls for integrated pathways and data-led commissioning.
- The Department for Transport's (upcoming) 10-Year Strategy: An opportunity to advance data-driven trauma care, including Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) via evidence-based approaches.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE – OUR POLICY ASK TO GOVERNMENT

Lead Departments: Department of Health and Social Care, and Department for Transport

1. Support PRANA to create a secure national framework linking patient data across all care pathways.
2. Enable timely data access for air ambulance charities to improve local trauma and RTC care.
3. Ensure air ambulance representation in SDE data and research, and national advisory groups.
4. Support funding bids for a national trauma registry spanning pre-hospital, acute, and recovery care.
5. Promote interoperable third-sector research access to NHS data under Data Saves Lives strategy.

POLICY PRIORITY THREE

TEMPORARY EGNOS ACCESS: SAFER UK AVIATION & HEMS

The Challenge

Most UK air ambulance operations are conducted under Visual Flight Rules (VFR), meaning poor visibility often causes delays or cancellations – particularly in rural and remote areas. While some weather alleviations apply, the risk to patient outcomes remains high.

The CAA and multiple Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) recommendations support the use of Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) precision approaches – satellite-guided procedures enabled by Satellite-Based Augmentation Systems (SBAS), such as the European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) Safety-of-Life (SoL) service – to improve flight safety through enhanced GPS accuracy and operational resilience.

However, since the UK left the European Union (EU), it no longer has access to EGNOS. A UK alternative SBAS is in early development but remains years from operational readiness, leaving air ambulance services and their patients vulnerable to weather-related disruption.

Bridging Gaps in Government and NHS Priorities

The loss of EGNOS access weakens aviation safety, NHS trauma care goals, and wider Government infrastructure priorities. Without reinstatement, increasing air ambulance mission cancellations put these strategies – and patient outcomes – at risk:

- Department for Transport 10-Year Strategy (upcoming): Temporary EGNOS re-access would unlock wider cross-sector benefits across transport, health, and infrastructure.
- NHS Urgent & Emergency Care Plan 2025/26: Aims to speed up trauma care and improve coordination across emergency pathways.
- UK 10-Year Infrastructure Strategy: Emphasises transport resilience and emergency preparedness.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE - OUR POLICY ASK TO GOVERNMENT

Lead Department: Department for Transport

The UK is the only G20 country without access to SBAS, yet UK-based infrastructure continues to support the operation of EGNOS, hosting two ranging and integrity monitoring stations in Glasgow and Swanwick.

1. Temporarily re-join EGNOS SoL with EU engagement until the UK develops its own SBAS.
2. Develop a UK-operated SBAS with clear timelines as a long-term solution, securing CAA-approved adoption in collaboration with HEMS operators.

POLICY PRIORITY FOUR

AIR AMBULANCE FUNDING – PUBLIC MISCONCEPTIONS

The Challenge

Air ambulance charities are frequently mistaken as part of the NHS or funded by the Government. In reality, they are independent charities that rely almost entirely on public donations to deliver lifesaving, advanced pre-hospital critical care as part of the UK's emergency services network.

This widespread misconception undermines charitable giving, distorts media reporting, and limits their visibility in health and emergency care policy. Despite their vital role in the emergency response system, air ambulance charities are routinely asked – by patients, donors, and even policymakers – how they are funded.

Bridging Gaps in Government and NHS Priorities

Ongoing confusion about how air ambulance charities are funded risks working against Government ambitions to strengthen civil society, improve public understanding of healthcare, and promote clear communication. Clarifying the charitable nature of these lifesaving services would help align messaging across sectors and support shared goals around transparency, trust, and public engagement.

If unaddressed, this issue could hinder the impact of a key Government policy framework:

- The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's Civil Society Covenant Framework: Commits to strengthening collaboration between Government and civil society. It promotes transparency, open communication, and joint working with organisations, including charities. Air ambulance charities – as essential, independent providers within the emergency services network – exemplify the kind of partnership this framework supports. Our policy ask demonstrates alignment with these commitments by ensuring air ambulance charities' role is clearly recognised and consistently communicated across Government and NHS channels, supporting the Civil Society Covenant's aims and strengthening civil society resilience in emergency care.

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE - OUR POLICY ASK TO GOVERNMENT

**Lead Departments: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and
Department of Health and Social Care**

1. Commission and co-deliver a national campaign with the sector to raise awareness, build public trust, and counter misinformation, aligned with the Civil Society Covenant.
2. Publicly confirm air ambulance services are independent charities in all Government and NHS communications.
3. Lead a cross-Government review to ensure accurate, consistent messaging by NHS bodies, Integrated Care Systems, and public health partners, as well as appropriate media coverage.



STAND WITH US

MPs & Peers: How to Help

Hospital Helipad Access and Safeguarding Reform

- Raise noted helipad issues via Parliamentary Questions (PQs), debates, and Early Day Motions (EDM). And write to cross-departmental Secretaries of State urging coordinated action.
- Support national and local planning policies that protect and futureproof helipads.
- Call for an internal Government review of helipad accessibility and related trauma infrastructure gaps.

Safe Patient Data Access: Support PRANA Registry

- Raise PQs or EDMs to support PRANA and enable patient data access and linkage.
- Urge Health and Transport Ministers to prioritise PRANA's development to address key challenges.
- Champion integrated data to improve trauma care outcomes UK-wide, and support cross-departmental collaboration to remove barriers delaying PRANA.

Temporary EGNOS Access: Safer UK Aviation & HEMS

- Raise PQs on the impact of the UK's exclusion from EGNOS, highlighting local air ambulance and their patient impacts, especially in poor weather and rural areas.
- Call for temporary EGNOS reinstatement until a UK equivalent is operational, referencing Oxera's 2022 EGNOS report.

Air Ambulance Funding – Public Misconceptions

- Call for, and support, a public campaign to raise awareness, building trust, and combating misinformation.
- Consistently highlight air ambulances' charitable status in speeches, media, and newsletters.
- Raise PQs to DCMS and DHSC on improving public understanding of funding.

THE NUMBERS

The UK's air ambulance charities bring hospital-level care directly to people wherever they are – but they rely almost entirely on public support to keep flying.

Whether it's on the roadside, in remote countryside, or in busy urban areas, air ambulance charities are there when the unthinkable happens.

Together, we can save even more lives.

On average

134 

Missions are attended each day

On average

£4,165 

Daily helicopter mission cost

On average

23,000 

Helicopter missions take place each year

On average

25,000 

CCC/RRV missions take place each year

On Average

9,571 

Cardiac-related incidents are attended each year

On Average

8,449 

RTC incidents are attended each year.

On Average

2,408 

Sharp-object assaults are attended each year

On Average

22,776 

Trauma missions are attended each year.

Average of

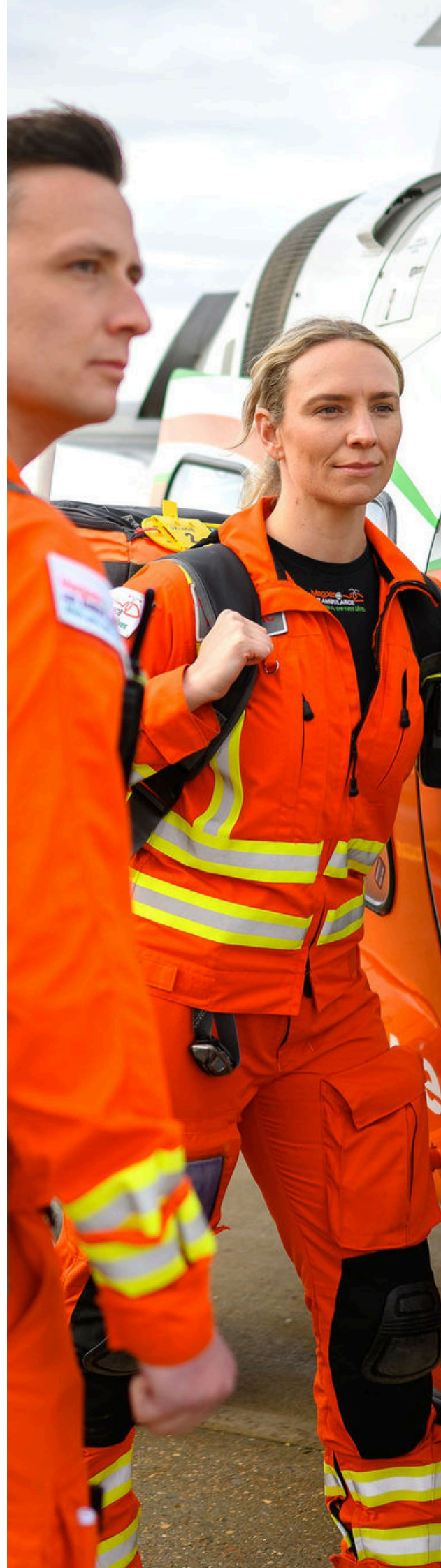
15,780 

Medical missions are attended each year

On average

15 

Minutes to arrive on scene by helicopter





CLAIRE'S STORY

In October 2014, Claire Clark was walking home with her husband, daughters Bonnie and Amelie, and Amelie's best friend after a school assembly. As they made their way along a wide pavement near their home in Basingstoke, a motorcyclist lost control. The rider fell, but the bike continued, mounted the kerb, and hit Claire – throwing her backwards and causing a severe skull fracture.

“I WAS ON THE FLOOR WITH BLOOD FLOWING FROM MY HEAD. THEY FEARED THE WORST: I WOULD DIE LYING ON THE PATH.”

Unconscious at the scene, Claire was treated by a land ambulance crew, who quickly called for the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance Critical Care Team. The team provided vital on-scene treatment before flying her to University Hospital Southampton, where surgeons performed an emergency craniotomy to relieve the pressure on her brain.

Claire spent two weeks in intensive care, nine days in a coma, and months recovering. She was unable to speak clearly, walk, or manage everyday tasks, and continues to live with lasting cognitive challenges.

Claire now shares her story to raise awareness of life-saving critical care services.

“WITHOUT THEM I WOULD NOT BE TELLING MY STORY TODAY.”

To read Claire's full story visit:
www.hiowaa.org/claures-story



VOICES OF SUPPORT

For the UK's Air Ambulances Manifesto

The Air Ambulance Charities:

- Air Ambulance Charity Kent Surrey Sussex
- Air Ambulance Northern Ireland
- Cornwall Air Ambulance Trust
- Devon Air Ambulance Trust
- Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance
- East Anglian Air Ambulance
- Essex and Herts Air Ambulance Trust
- Great North Air Ambulance Service
- Great Western Air Ambulance Charity
- Hampshire and Isle of Wight Air Ambulance
- Lincs and Notts Air Ambulance
- London's Air Ambulance
- Magpas Air Ambulance
- Midlands Air Ambulance Charity
- North West Air Ambulance
- Scotland's Charity Air Ambulance
- Thames Valley Air Ambulance
- The Air Ambulance Service
- Wales Air Ambulance
- Yorkshire Air Ambulance

Key Stakeholders:

- Airbus
- APPG for Air Ambulances
- APPG for Aviation
- Babcock International Group
- Bee Ethical
- Blandy & Blandy Solicitors
- British Helicopter Association
- CitiMedical
- HCC Solicitors
- HELP Appeal (County Air Ambulance Trust)
- Lottery Fundraising Services
- Mountain Rescue England and Wales
- Peninsula Group Global
- Slater and Gordon Lawyers UK
- The Faculty of Pre-Hospital Care
- The Pre-Hospital Research and Audit Network
- University of Liverpool, Flight Science & Technology
- Vet Partners



JOIN OUR APPG

Have you heard about the APPG for Air Ambulances?
Visit our website: www.airambulancesuk.org/all-party-parliamentary-group
or email: appg@airambulancesuk.org to find out how you can get involved
and stay connected with the group.



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