

THE UK'S AIR AMBULANCE CHARITIES' NATIONAL POLICY POSITION STATEMENT 2026



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Supported by Air Ambulances UK and the APPG for Air Ambulances

Introduction

This national policy position statement sets out the collective priorities of the UK's air ambulance charities for 2026, highlighting national policy challenges and opportunities for coordinated action between the UK Government at Westminster, Air Ambulances UK (AAUK), and the air ambulance charities to advance shared objectives. The national policy challenges outlined in this position statement align closely with the Government's and NHS's published strategies and priorities for health and transport. Air ambulance charities are a vital part of the UK's urgent and emergency care system, delivering advanced pre-hospital care to anyone, anywhere of serious injury or illness. This document therefore provides a clear framework for constructive partnership, enabling policymakers and the sector to work together to strengthen patient outcomes and reinforce system resilience.

Sector Context

There are 21 independent air ambulance charities across the UK. In 2024, they collectively responded to an average of 134 missions per day, reaching patients in an average of 15 minutes. Each mission is almost entirely funded by public generosity.

AAUK is the national charity supporting the lifesaving work of the 21 air ambulance charities — helping them save even more lives every day.

Air ambulance crews — including pilots, doctors, paramedics, nurses, clinical support staff, and ground support teams — undertake over 48,000 missions annually. With the average helicopter mission cost rising to £4,165 in 2024, pressures on air ambulance services across the UK are significant.

Collectively, the UK's air ambulance charities face 4 national policy challenges which, if not addressed appropriately, could hinder patient outcomes. Addressing these challenges with Government support is critical to ensuring lifesaving care remains optimal and accessible. Solving these national policy issues lies beyond the direct control of air ambulance charities and, without effective action, patient treatment, care, and outcomes — as well as the delivery of the Government's own health and transport strategies — could be placed at risk.

National Position and Policy Priorities

AAUK, in alignment with the UK's air ambulance charities and supported by the APPG for Air Ambulances, calls for coordinated Government action across 4 key priority areas:

1. **Safeguard and Improve Hospital Helipad Access:** Commit to ensuring 24/7 operational, on-site helipads at all new and existing UK Major Trauma Centres (MTCs) and specialist hospitals. Prioritise upgrades at sites where most needed, recognising helipads as essential

NHS infrastructure and embedding them in NHS policy frameworks. A strategic national approach is crucial for a coordinated emergency response to major incidents and helps address health inequalities by providing rapid access to specialist acute services, regardless of patient location.

2. **Unlock Access to Patient Data – Supportive of the Pre-Hospital Research Audit Network (PRANA):** Enable secure access to linked patient data, allowing air ambulance charities to track patient outcomes, improve care quality, and strengthen integration with NHS systems.
3. **Temporarily Restore European Geostationary Navigation Overlay Service (EGNOS) for Safer Air Ambulance Missions:** Temporarily re-join EGNOS to mitigate weather and visibility challenges, reducing delays or cancellations and ensuring air ambulances can continue flying safely while the UK develops its own Satellite-Based Augmentation System (SBAS).
4. **Strengthen Public Understanding of Air Ambulance Funding:** Address widespread misconceptions by improving national messaging on the independent, charitable nature of the UK's 21 air ambulance charities, supporting transparency and public confidence.

Key Note of Assurance: Respective Government departments can be assured that the policy priorities outlined have the full support and active collaboration of Air Ambulances UK, the UK's air ambulance charities, and the APPG for Air Ambulances, ensuring that sector-wide proposed solutions and recommendations are practical, evidence-based, and informed by expert knowledge.

Policy Alignment and Government Strategy

AAUK and the UK's air ambulance charities alike recognise the significant pressures facing Government across health and transport policy. The sector is committed to a constructive partnership with Government and NHS stakeholders and aims to support and enhance Government strategies and ambitions that directly intersect with the sector's priorities, including:

- NHS 10-Year Health Plan via Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC)
- NHS Urgent & Emergency Care Plan 2025/26 via DHSC
- NHS New Hospital Programme Strategy via DHSC
- Data Saves Lives Strategy via DHSC
- 10-Year National Infrastructure Strategy via HM Treasury
- 10-Year Integrated National Transport Strategy via Department for Transport (DfT)
- Civil Society Covenant Framework via Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS)

Successful delivery of these strategies depends, in part, on close collaboration with the sector to address the 4 noted policy challenges, which currently undermine Government and NHS targets due to gaps in policy.

Through closer sector-to-Government collaboration in 2026, the sector seeks to ensure that its national challenges are heard, acted upon, and addressed through a clear pathway to solutions. This will enable air ambulance services — which reach the most critically ill patients at negligible cost to the taxpayer — to operate as effectively and efficiently as possible, all while supporting corresponding Government health and transport strategic objectives.

Devolved Considerations and Emerging Challenges

While this position statement is directed primarily at the UK Government at Westminster, it supports the UK's air ambulance sector as a whole. The sector recognises that health policy is largely devolved across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and that some priorities may therefore differ.

Collaboration with devolved administrations is welcome to ensure that, where appropriate, services across all nations are supported and aligned.

While AAUK maintains a clear focus on its defined manifesto priorities, the sector actively monitors emerging operational challenges, ensuring that downstream issues are understood, prioritised, and addressed in a timely and coordinated manner. The sector remains alert to developing challenges across the UK's air ambulance network, and the 4 policy priorities outlined may be expanded as necessary to respond to new issues or opportunities.

Conclusion

By working collaboratively with the Government, NHS, AAUK and the APPG for Air Ambulances, the UK's air ambulance charities aim to ensure that lifesaving pre-hospital care remains timely, effective, and accessible for all. Addressing the 4 national policy priorities outlined in this position statement will strengthen patient outcomes, support Government and NHS health and transport strategies, and safeguard the continued lifesaving work of the UK's independent air ambulance network. Sector-to-Government collaboration in 2026 is essential to translate these priorities into practical, evidence-based solutions that meet the evolving needs of patients across the UK.