

**NHS 24 sets an example to the rest of the Scottish Government****Embargoed until 06:00 on Tuesday 29 April 2014**

The Scottish Government announces today that NHS 24 has finally abandoned use of its expensive 0845 telephone number. This is in line with UK government policy for public services, announced on Boxing Day 2013.

Many NHS Services in Scotland continue to use 084 numbers, including **many GPs**, **NHS Grampian** and **Aberdeen Royal Infirmary**. This practice was prohibited for the NHS in England and Wales in 2009/10, although many hundred GPs and several hospitals and other NHS providers still fail to follow the Directions and changes to the terms of their contracts, due to lack of enforcement action. No such enforceable provisions have even been applied in Scotland, or Northern Ireland.

Throughout Scotland, many public bodies and government funded institutions, including offices of Government Ministers, continue to use expensive 08 numbers. The **Scottish Government** has failed to follow the UK Government; it has not issued guidance equivalent to that recently followed by the **Department for Work and Pensions**, which has now abandoned 084 numbers.

From 13 June 2014, **traders in all of the UK** will be prohibited from using 08 numbers (all of which are expensive) for contact from customers. The Financial Services sector is exempted from this regulation, but we hope that it will take responsibility for itself, before its own regulator (the FCA) catches up in about 12 months time.

David Hickson, of the fair telecoms campaign, comments,

“It is a disgrace that all citizens are not entitled to the same protection from high telephone charges when contacting the providers of all services funded by their taxes, as they will be when contacting traders.”

“No part of the NHS, which belongs to the people of the UK, should be blighted by charges to the benefit of service providers, such as those invariably imposed when 084, 087 and 09 telephone numbers are used. The people of Scotland, through their parliament and its government, may make their own decisions on how they pay for public services.”

- New Ofcom regulations requiring the declaration of the Service Charge imposed when calling 084, 087 and 09 numbers will come into force in June 2015.
- The change of number by **NHS 24** comes four weeks after termination of **NHS Direct England** - one of the most notable misusers of a 0845 number. That same 0845 number however continues to be used by **NHS Direct Wales**. (The 111 service in England operates quite differently, dealing only with urgent, but non-emergency, enquiries.)

David Hickson comments further,

“The switch by NHS 24 is welcome, but very long overdue. It takes an additional step by moving to a special number, which is easily remembered and, at extra public expense, free to all callers.”

“All public service providers should normally use “geographic rate” (01/02/03) numbers. These are free of charge for most callers and incur no additional expense for the provider.”

