

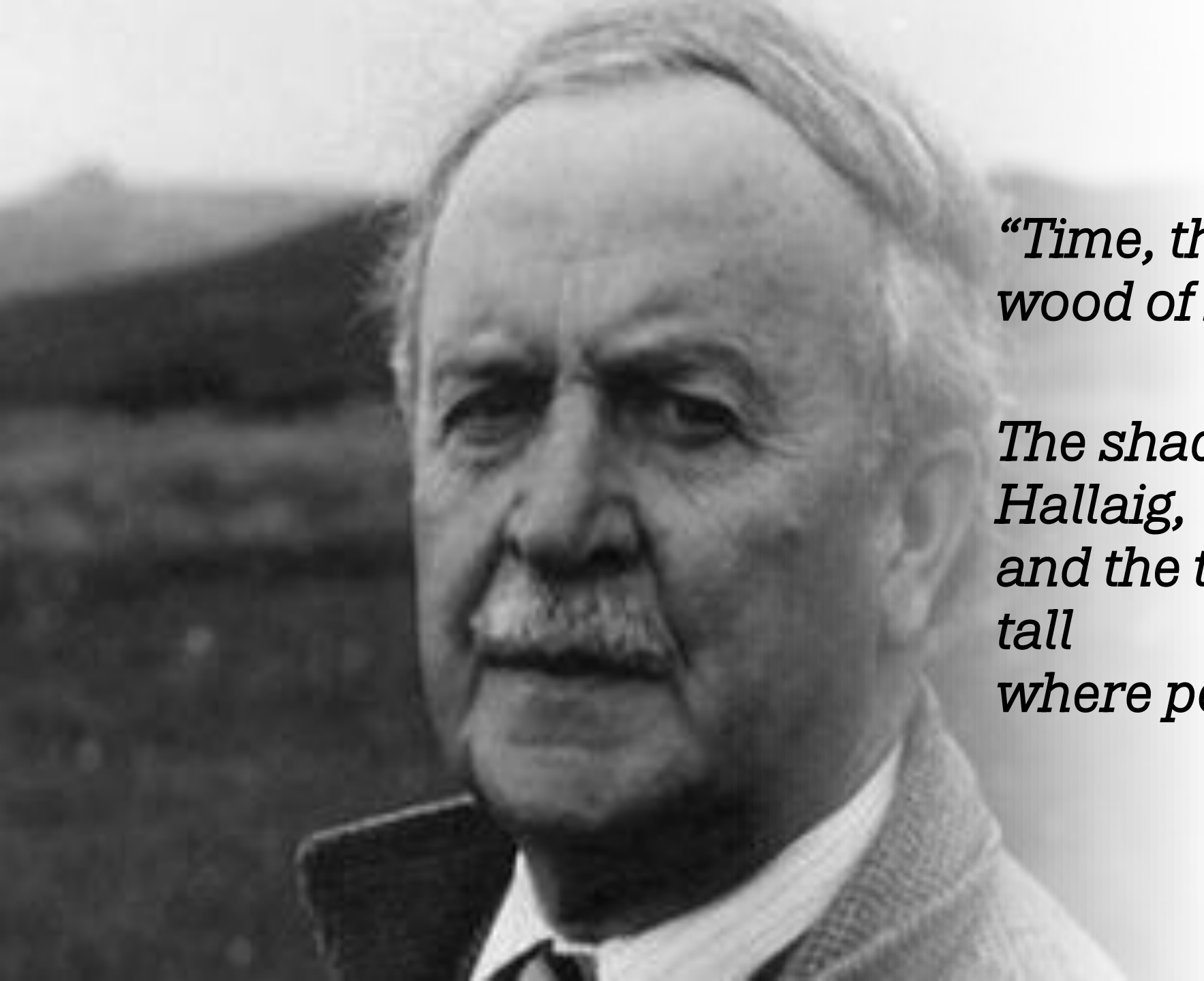
The Trees of Hallaig: Roots of Care, Leaves of Memory

EXPLORING THE UNDERVALUED ROLE OF
SOCIAL CARE IN PALLIATIVE CARE

Donald Macaskill

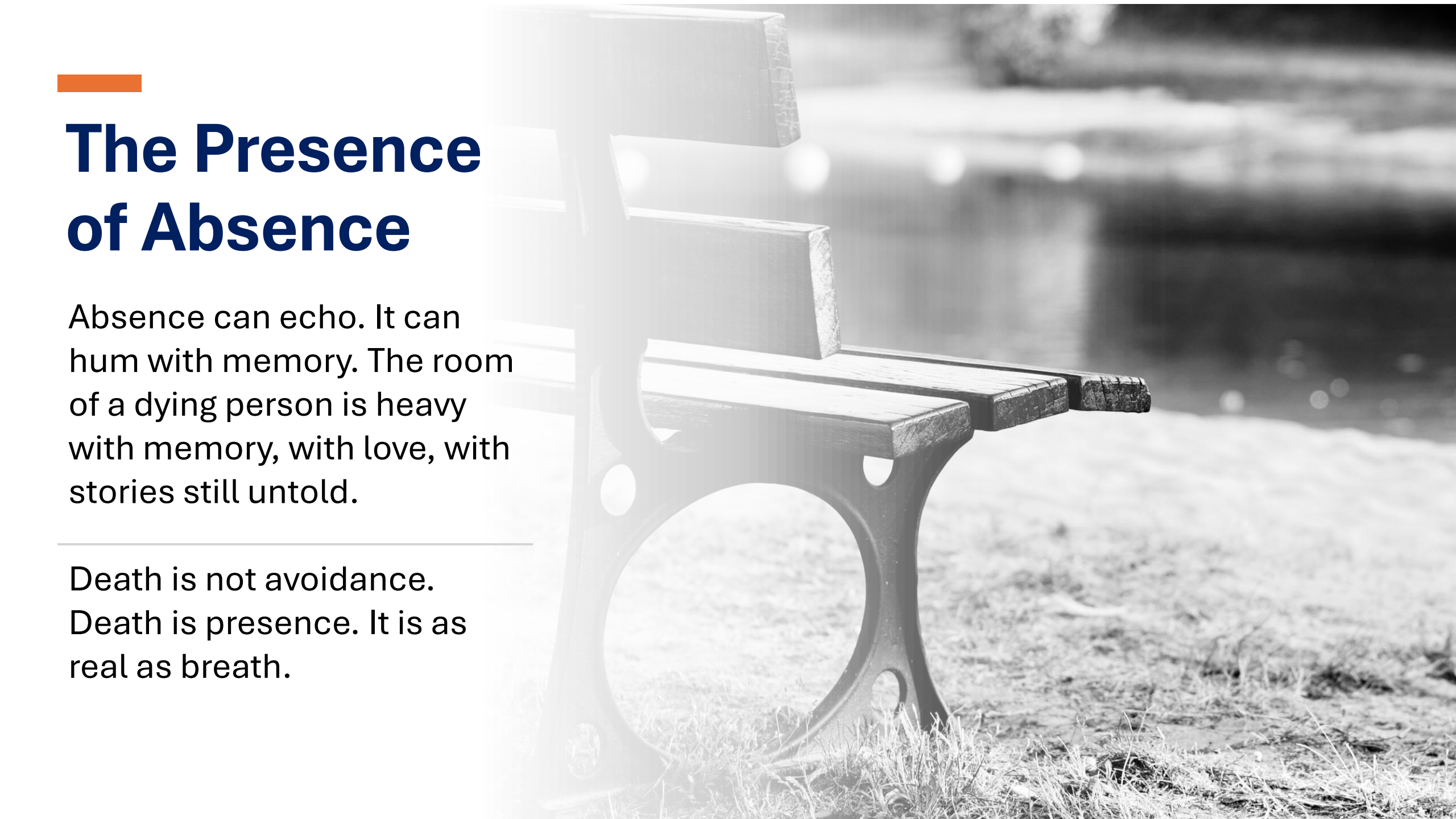
SPPC Conference
12th November 2025





*“Time, the deer, is in the
wood of Hallaig.*

*The shadow of the birch is in
Hallaig,
and the trees are standing
tall
where people once stood.”*



The Presence of Absence

Absence can echo. It can hum with memory. The room of a dying person is heavy with memory, with love, with stories still untold.

Death is not avoidance.
Death is presence. It is as real as breath.

Even as
memory
slipped,
presence
remained.

In that
moment,
social care
was a
sanctuary. The
birch trees,
living memory.





“The only choice we have as we mature is how we inhabit our vulnerability, how we become larger and more courageous and more compassionate through our intimacy with disappearance.”

David Whyte

Care, in all its forms, is an intimacy with disappearance. It is the daily act of standing beside someone as they change, decline, recover, or die. It is the art of presence in the face of absence. And it is in this space – this vulnerable, sacred space – that palliative care is being created.





I think it is
relationship, it is
ordinariness, it is
continuity.



There is, in social care,
an intimacy, an
ordinariness, that is
profoundly palliative.

It is in the cup of tea.
It is in the blanket
tucked round legs.
It is in the song sung
softly, the prayer
whispered, the silence
held.



Even when swallowing grew difficult, they still brought the chips. They placed them near his bed, so he could smell the vinegar and salt, the comfort of familiarity. George died one Friday evening, with that scent in the air.

A national 24/7 advice line for professionals and families.

Integration of specialist palliative care into community services, so that expertise is available wherever people are.

Early identification of palliative care needs, so that support is available whenever and wherever it is needed.

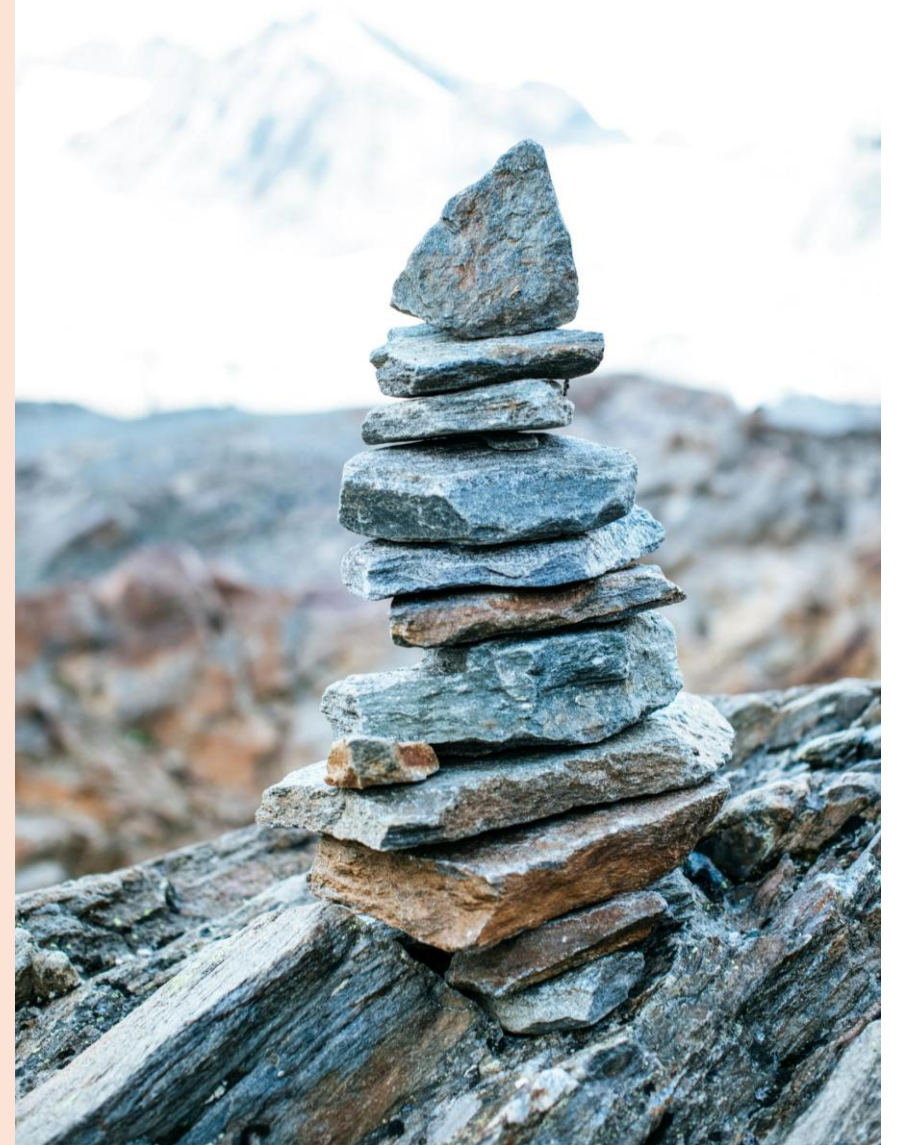
Palliative care strategy (2025-30)



The right to dignity does not end when disease progresses.

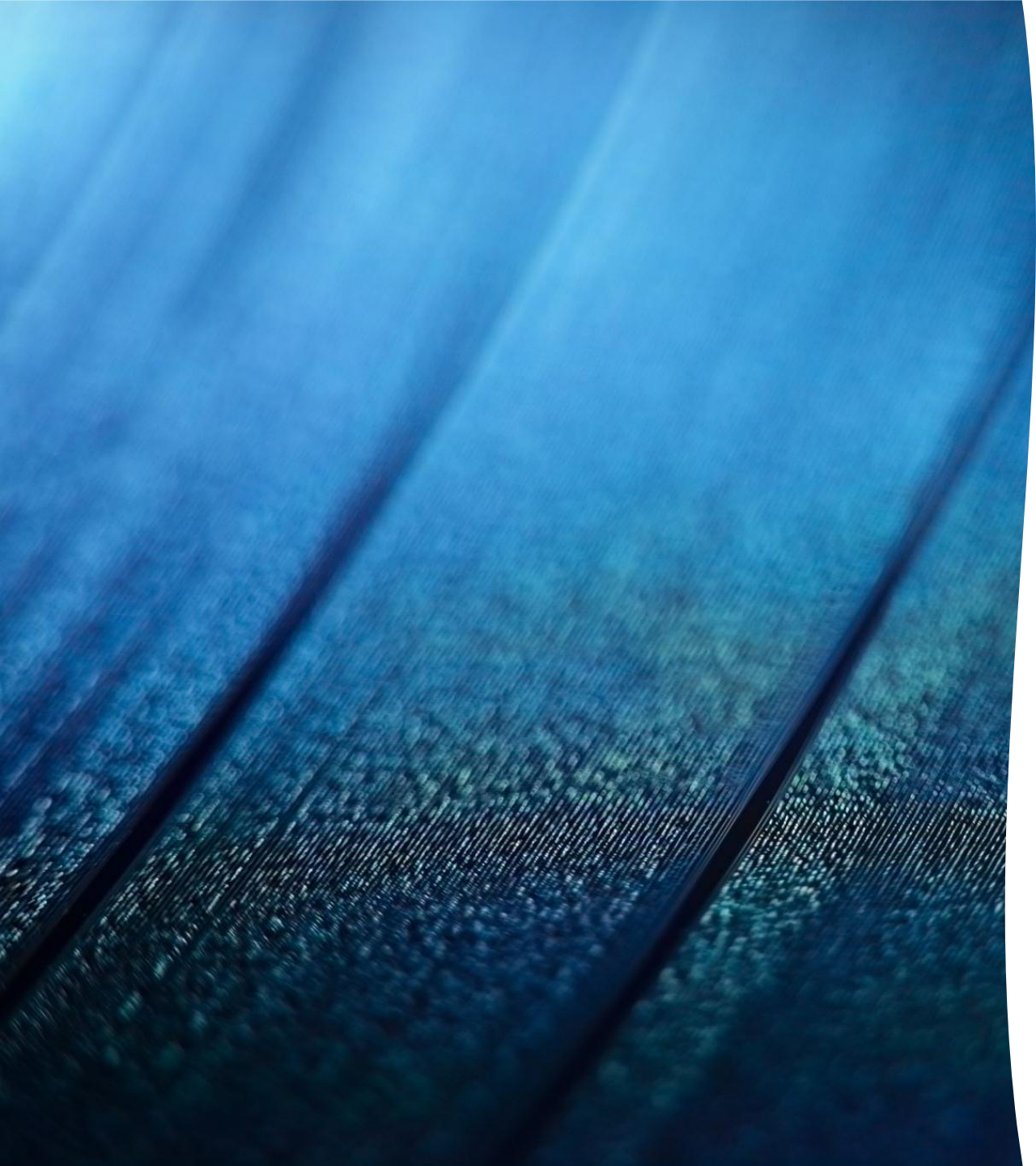
The right to autonomy does not vanish when memory falters.

The right to participation does not fade when speech is lost.



**Most
palliative
care in
Scotland is
delivered
through
social care.**

- 89% of people in Scotland will need palliative care.
- Over 30,000 frail older people receive care at home each week.
- Most people in care homes are in their last 18 months of life.



The 2025 Carers Update estimates:

- **694,000 unpaid carers** in Scotland, including **27,000 young carers**.
- 65% provide up to 19 hours of care per week; 16% provide 50+ hours weekly.
- 25% of women aged 45–64 are unpaid carers.



That is what social care does.

We make the dead present in memory.

We accompany the living into death with dignity.

We stand as trees in the glen of absence, rooted, ordinary, beautiful, enduring.

