Where Health Concentrates: Scotland’s Councils in Focus

Census 2022 counts of self-reported health and related conditions by local authority

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> ***Remember: things can be bad, and getting better.***
>
> *Hans Rosling, Factfulness*

Health isn't evenly distributed across Scotland. This StoryMap uses Census 2022 categories to show where larger numbers of people report very good health – and where poorer health and disability are more concentrated across local authorities.

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Where "Very good" health is most concentrated

The map shows where the largest numbers of residents report "Very good" health. Unsurprisingly, the biggest concentrations appear in the most populated council areas – but some patterns still stand out when you compare regions.

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Where "Very bad" health concentrates

In terms of the "Very bad" category, the pattern shifts, highlighting councils where poorer self-reported health is more concentrated in absolute numbers.

Comparing councils: health "mix"

The chart below shows how the mix of health categories changes between councils – even when population size differs.

Source: Scotland’s Census 2022 (self-reported general health categories), aggregated by local authority.

Each bar shows the share of responses from "Very good" to "Very bad" making it easier to compare places with different population sizes. Even among large councils, the share reporting "Bad/Very bad" can differ noticeably – that's the contrast worth investigating.

Regional reading

In the Central Belt, high population density naturally produces the biggest counts. However, the mix of health categories can still shift sharply between neighbouring

councils – making this region the easiest place to compare patterns side by side.

In the North East, the balance looks different. Counts reflect population size, but the distribution across categories changes in its own way. Comparing this view with the Central Belt helps show how "concentration" isn’t only about big cities – it also depends on local context.

In the Highlands & Islands, councils cover vast areas with smaller populations. That can make counts look lower even when needs are significant. Distance, rurality, and access to services may shape lived experience beyond what counts alone can show.

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Long-term illness: where numbers are highest

Beyond general health, Census 2022 also reports specific long-term conditions. This map highlights where long-term illness, disease or condition is most concentrated in absolute numbers – useful for thinking about ongoing demand for support and care.

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Physical disability: where needs may concentrate

Physical disability is where health becomes practical: mobility, access, and independence. This map points to where support needs may concentrate, helping identify councils where accessibility planning and local services may matter most.

Conclusion

Think of these maps as a spotlight on pressure points: places where many people say they're living with poorer health or long-term conditions – exactly the kind of pattern that matters when you’re planning clinics, support services, and budgets.

Still, a map of counts is a map of people, not probability. Big places produce big numbers. In order to understand risk more precisely, the next step is to normalise: compare against population totals and age profiles, so we can separate "where the crowd is" from "where the burden is heaviest."

Behind every shaded council is a real mix of lives and needs. The value of mapping is to see patterns early – and plan responses that fit local reality. Adding population and age structure next would likely reshuffle rankings and spotlight councils that look quiet in counts, but carry a heavier burden per person.

A practical next step is to layer in age structure and deprivation to separate population size from health burden.

Credits & Data Sources

Data: Scotland's Census 2022 – self-reported general health and long-term conditions, aggregated by local authority.

Boundaries: Scottish local authority boundaries (open data).

Mapping: ArcGIS Online Web Maps and ArcGIS StoryMaps (Esri).

Chart: Power BI (author's visualisation of selected councils).

Basemap: Esri (plus data providers shown on map).

Cover image: "Peninsula on a Lake"	photo by Clément Proust (Pexels) https://www.pexels.com/photo/peninsula-on-a-lake-18661467/