



scottish universities insight institute

mobilising knowledge for a better Scotland

Final Report: An international and intersectional dialogue on how to reduce harm and promote wellbeing amongst people who have housing, health and substance use challenges

Main objectives and context

People who experience homelessness often have intersecting health problems including poor mental and physical health and problem substance use (Hewett & Halligan 2010). While harm reduction approaches are recommended for those unlikely to achieve abstinence (Raistrick et al. 2006), there is little guidance on how harms from problem substance use can be reduced for people affected by homelessness. To address this gap we created a dialogue on international, national and local best practices in this area and, most critically, on how we could work better together across sectors and disciplines to develop Scottish solutions. Our three events brought together a diverse group with substantial knowledge of the issues in order to develop a nuanced understanding of the current position and how this can better inform policy and practice developments going forward. Importantly, we involved people with lived/living experience and affected family members in all our events. Our key objectives were to:

- *deliver a seminar series that brings people together across sectors and disciplines to discuss the challenges and solutions in terms of harm reduction and health;*
- *provide opportunities for creative activity to mobilise and build community and further cohesion between our participants;*
- *use the dialogue and activities to create a film to raise awareness and take forward wider public discussion on our themes*
- *foster a cross-sectoral network for academics, practitioners and policy makers involved in devising and implementing responses for this population.*

We hosted three knowledge exchange events in November 2017, March and May 2018, each focusing on a particular area of concern and involving presentations from national and international speakers as well as a creative arts performance and group discussions. We also created a photo sharing activity as the main creative aspect of the programme and a selection of these photographs will be used in our dissemination activities.



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Event 1: Drugs, harm reduction, health and homelessness

Speakers: Professor Nicholas Pleace (University of York); Dr John Budd (NHS Lothian); Jason Wallace and Louise Aitken (Scottish Drugs Forum)

Creative arts performance: 'A bad year for Toni' drama performance by Phoenix Futures



Programme Leads: Dr Tessa Parkes (University of Stirling) and Dr Fiona Cuthill (University of Edinburgh)



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Event 2: Alcohol, health and homelessness: Evidence into action

Speakers: Dr Bernie Pauly (University of Victoria, Canada); Helen Carlin (Rowan Alba); Dr Adam Burley (NHS Lothian); Dr Ligia Teixeira (Centre for Homelessness Impact)

Creative arts performance: Mission Voices choir performance



Event 3: Bringing the outside inside: Creating a safe environment for all

Speakers: Dr Evelyn Dyb (Oslo Metropolitan University); Renzo Cardosi (YPeople); Dr Neil Hamlet (NHS Fife)

Creative arts performance: Photo exhibition by Patrick Keast



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Programme outcomes

A key benefit of this programme was developing rich networks and positive dialogue across the homelessness, substance use and health sectors and between people in policy, practice, statutory and non-statutory, academic and non-academic sectors. Our aim was that attendees worked together to support new thinking in this complex area of health and social care. We gathered a great momentum across the three events for the changes we believe need to take place in order to meet the needs of those people impacted by both problem substance use and physical and mental health challenges. Our team members have developed new excellent relationships with a range of organisations who are already involved in new research activities. For example, several members who attended the events are involved in a successful National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) grant (PI – Tessa Parkes) as part of the intervention development and Study Steering groups.

We have also greatly benefitted from the learning gained from international perspectives. The funding of our programme allowed us to learn from good practice beyond Scotland and to take these ideas forward in a Scottish context. Issues of homelessness have been gaining traction in Scotland in recent months and our events are, therefore, very timely. We have been able to bring together two different silos of 'homelessness' and 'problem substance use' in a new and innovative way in Scotland.

Our programme committed to having people affected by problem substance use and homelessness at its heart. For example, at our first event we commissioned a group from Phoenix Futures in Glasgow to perform a short play based on the theme of the day, which participants were very moved by. In June 2018, the drama group were invited to the Highland Alcohol and Drug Partnership annual conference, where they put on another performance on similar issues. This performance was very well received and resulted in a number of further invites for them to perform. We will support



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the group to continue to perform and use our own networks to try to help achieve a wider audience for their contribution.

Key recommendations

As a result of our three events the following early recommendations can be made at this stage. We will be developing these points further, and adding to them, in our final dissemination document produced later this summer.

1. Services should be commissioned in a 'psychologically informed' way, ensuring that they are supportive and welcoming for staff and service users and, crucially, are not punitive;
2. Relationships between services, staff and service users are crucial;
3. Staff need to be well supported to enable them to provide psychologically informed, relationship-based care;
4. People with lived and living experience, and affected family members, need to be involved in the development of services, provided with paid employment opportunities, and involved in research.

Planned follow up activities

The outputs from our programme will be a short key recommendations document for policy, practice and research, plus an accompanying 10 minute film which captures the programme as a whole. We will also make available the filmed presentations. We will share our film and report with a range of audiences, including policy makers, practitioners, researchers and people with lived experience. We will actively engage with decision makers in Scottish Government and Scottish Parliament to share our key recommendations. We had invited a number of Scottish Government colleagues from both Substance Misuse and Homelessness Teams to our events, both as participants and as speakers, but unfortunately attendance was not ideal due to time pressures on their side. We will identify key people in policy roles to share our recommendations with including the Partnership for Action on Drugs in Scotland, the Homelessness Prevention Strategy Group, the Scottish Faculty for Homeless and Inclusion Health and the Drug and Alcohol Cross Party Group. Members of our team are linked in with these groups, and others, and are well placed to share the recommendations.