

## Press release

For Immediate Release: 21 November 2016

### Headline: Loneliness, a threat to Scotland's health

Sub heading: Scottish health charities take the lead in demanding a collaborative approach to tackling the health implications of loneliness

On 24<sup>th</sup> November at the Roxburghe Hotel in Edinburgh Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) will bring together a range of experts from across Scotland to discuss the negative impact of loneliness and social isolation on health in Scotland.

The one day conference, '*Loneliness – a threat to Scotland's health: Working together to combat isolation*', will host a series of expert presentations from across different sectors and provide a space for discussion on how to address an issue that is increasingly recognised as causing real damage to people's health.

Conference Chair **Carolyn Sawers Big Lottery Fund Scotland Head of Policy and Learning** said: "*Understanding and tackling loneliness and social isolation in Scotland will lead to better physical health and wellbeing for people of all ages in all communities across Scotland. Today's conference seeks to explore and share best practice across the third sector tackling this issue and highlighting how we can all make a difference, some small some big, leading to a better future for everyone.*"

Recent research shows that loneliness and social isolation are harmful to our health. **A lack of social connections is a comparable risk factor for early death as smoking 15 cigarettes a day**, and is worse for us than well-known risk factors such as obesity and physical inactivity.

**Dr Andrew Fraser, Director of Public Health Science**, NHS Health Scotland said: "*This Voluntary Health Scotland event is both timely and powerful. We cannot isolate isolation. Coming together to address it is crucial. If we are to improve the public's health, equitably, addressing social isolation and loneliness must be close to the heart of broader public health policy in Scotland. This is everyone's business. Collaborating across sectors and services and generations to promote social cohesion and connectedness has the potential to improve health for many. We at NHS Health Scotland will do all we can to work with others, shaping plans and thinking that tackles social isolation and loneliness. We need a joined up and human rights based response to social isolation and loneliness to create the fairer, healthier Scotland we all want.*"

The conference will gather academics, local government, health and third sector representatives from across Scotland to engage in discussion and debate to examine the

damage that protracted loneliness and social isolation causes to both physical and mental health. The event will also explore the difference a national strategy can make, and a range of third sector interventions making a difference on the ground. The views, ideas and proposals gathered will then be fed into the development of the Scottish Government strategy on tackling loneliness and social isolation.

**Note to Editors:**

List of speakers include:

Dr Catherine Calderwood, Chief Medical Officer for Scotland

Dr Andrew Fraser, Director of Public Health, NHS Health Scotland

James Jopling, Executive Director for Scotland, Samaritans

Carolyn Sawers, Head of Policy and Learning, Big Lottery Fund

Marie Hayes, Director Scotland Independent Living & Crisis, British Red Cross

Professor Tom Scharf, Newcastle University

Pete White, Chief Executive, Positive Prison? Positive Futures

Paul Okroj, Head of Volunteering, Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland

Liz May, National Co-ordinator, Action for Sick Children Scotland

Mark Hazelwood, Chief Executive, Scottish Partnership on Palliative Care

Claire Stevens, Chief Officer, Voluntary Health Scotland

Press Invite to Conference:

**The conference will take place on Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> November 2016, [Roxburghe Hotel](#), 38 Charlotte Square, EH2 4HQ, Edinburgh between 9:00 and 4:15. If you intend on coming or would like an interview with any of the speakers please contact Kiren Zubairi in advance.**

Contact:

Kiren Zubairi, Policy Engagement Officer [Kiren.Zubairi@vhscotland.org.uk](mailto:Kiren.Zubairi@vhscotland.org.uk) 0131 474 6189

Claire Stevens, Chief Officer [Claire.Stevens@vhscotland.org.uk](mailto:Claire.Stevens@vhscotland.org.uk) 07917674926



Logo for event: We can provide high resolution version of the event logo as well as VHS logo if required.

**Voluntary Health Scotland is the national intermediary and network for voluntary health organisations in Scotland.**