

Key Messages



Impact of COVID-19 on voluntary health organisations

23rd April 2020

Introduction

VHS held this online Zoom discussion with its members to share the findings of our research into the immediate impact COVID-19 on the voluntary health sector. VHS had gathered intelligence from 143 organisations via a survey early on in the lockdown period and we subsequently published a [Research Briefing](#) setting out the top-line results of the survey. Kiren Zubairi, VHS Policy Engagement Officer, gave a short presentation to highlight key findings, and Claire Stevens, VHS Chief Executive, explained how VHS has been using the survey to try to influence Scottish Government and Public Health Scotland. After this the meeting opened up for discussion. These Key Messages summarise key points of interest raised by participants and attempt to convey a sense of the breadth of issues and areas of interest discussion ranged over.

Summary:

Voluntary health organisations have moved beyond the immediate crisis of the pandemic and associated lockdown and are adapting to the 'new normal'. Some organisations are now able to shift their focus to the longer-term questions and planning in relation to their service users, services and their organisations. But funding remains a very mixed picture, with evidence of swift, pro-active responses from some funders keen to offer support but also delays or rejection by other funders. Some disappointment and confusion still around the allocation of Scottish Government additional funding and a real fear that some/many organisations will not survive longer term. Partnership working and coordination is bedding down in some areas, but still has some way to go in others if duplication and/or failure to plug gaps is to be avoided.

1. **Edinburgh Community Health Forum:** In Edinburgh collaborative working between the third sector and the Council is now working well, with cooperation and coordination around food distribution particularly strong, and with local churches mobilised and involved too. "Think local, be and act neighbourly".
2. **Scottish Huntington's Association:** a survey of their members has highlighted mental health and social isolation issues. The initial lack of communication or support available from the NHS has been overcome and the COVID-19 hubs mean Scottish Huntington's is seeing fantastic levels of cooperation all over Scotland.

3. **Faith in Older People:** a chaplaincy listening service for the community has been set up. Coordination to avoid duplication of efforts is still an issue.
4. **MS Society:** a number of organisations in the Neurological Alliance applied to the Third Sector Resilience Fund but were rejected because they had at least three months' reserves. Enormous concerns about many organisations' longer term viability. NHS and local authorities need to understand that the ongoing/longer term needs of people with MS and other neurological conditions make them dependent on charities like MS Society to meet their needs. We all need to move beyond a crisis response and focus on future proofing. People with MS are generally very social isolated, so to a degree they feel less isolated now that everyone is in the same boat and with lots of new resources available online/by phone. Lessons for sustaining this kind of inclusiveness in future.
5. **Terrence Higgins Trust:** have adjusted to the new normal/business as unusual. A mixed message from the Scottish Government about the level of financial support available for the third sector; it is available to apply for but are the funds actually accessible to everyone who needs them? THT did have a positive response to its application to the National Lottery Community Fund to do emergency COVID-19 related work. THT talks to its clients daily if at all possible. The stigma of HIV means that their clients' mental health is under even greater strain than usual, especially if they are shielding/self isolating, as they are protective about their privacy in relation to their health status/needs. THT are working with health boards across Scotland to deliver medication to clients and now providing free condoms and HIV test kits.
6. **Bipolar Scotland:** have adjusted well to the new normal, delivering self-help groups online across Scotland, an afternoon tea by Zoom, and regularly phoning clients too. Isolation is a big issue as many clients live alone, but generally people's health has been stable. Corra Foundation, an existing funder, pro-actively contacted them to ask if they needed additional resources.
7. **Breastfeeding Network:** have been able to shift resources and are constantly reviewing plans. All of which takes time and communication with teams and the Board. Some staff are thriving and prefer remote working. We need good business information on public sector partners' budgets longer term.
8. **Carr Gomm:** their link workers at the River Centre are finding some people are unable to sustain strategies they'd put in place for keeping well and are falling back into previous unhelpful behaviours, e.g. excessive drinking etc. In other words, whilst their stability was fragile it could be maintained with support before the pandemic, but the pandemic has meant coping strategies have unravelled.
9. **Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland:** the Scottish Parliament Health and Sport Committee is considering the impact of the pandemic and the lock down on the third sector, and there is a new Parliamentary committee specifically on COVID-19.

Participants:

Jimmy	Hunter	Terrence Higgins Trust
Shereen	Fisher	Breastfeeding Network
Stephanie-Anne	Harris	Edinburgh Community Health Forum

Rebecca	Duff	MS Society
Karen	Sutherland	Scottish Huntington's Association
Alison	Cairns	Bipolar Scotland
Katherine	Byrne	Chest Heart and Stroke Scotland
Maureen	O'Neill	Faith in Older People
Helena	Richards	Carr Gomm
Ijeoma	Azodo	NHS NES Digital Service

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