



essential connections

SCOTTISH COMMUNITY LINK WORKER NETWORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024



A lightning bolt can be used to represent strength, courage and inspiration

Scottish Community Link Worker Network Conference - Voluntary Health Scotland Key Messages Report - Summary

29 May 2024



Angiolina Foster, Chair of Public Health Scotland:

- Opened the 2024 Scottish Community Link Worker Network Conference;
- And extended a warm welcome to the 200 community link workers, programme leads, speakers and exhibitors in attendance.

Tejesh Mistry, Chief Executive of Voluntary Health Scotland:

- Emphasised the potential of social prescribing;
- Acknowledged the current challenging environment, with unprecedented pressure on the voluntary sector;
- Stressed the important role that community link working has to play in a much-needed shift towards prevention;
- Shared plans for community link worker awards, which will form a part of next year's conference;
- And announced a new partnership with [Turadh](#), who have expressed a desire to work with people in the third sector to provide opportunities for rest and rejuvenation in nature.

Neil Gray MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care:

- Acknowledged the enormous challenges faced by the health and social care system due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the cost of living crisis;
- Noted the impact of health inequalities on quality of life and life expectancy in Scotland;
- Emphasised the need for reform and innovation in the health system and outlined the Scottish Government's plans for immediate and longer-term reform to our NHS;
- Highlighted the new First Minister, John Swinney MSP's recently announced priorities;
- Shared his firm belief that community link workers are key to the Scottish Government's efforts to address health inequalities;

- Discussed the development of wider policy on social prescribing and the importance of non-clinical options in a person-centred approach to care;
- Committed to draw on the findings and recommendations of Voluntary Health Scotland's [Essential Connections report](#) during the Scottish Government's review of community link worker services in General Practice;
- And thanked the community link workers in attendance for their tireless support to individuals and families coping with an array of challenging life circumstances.

Dr Catherine Labinjoh, National Clinical Lead, Realistic Medicine, Scottish Government:

Explained that value based health and care focuses on the outcomes that matter to people, looking beyond health outcomes to take a holistic look at people's needs;

- Promoted an online module, available to community link workers through [TURAS](#), which guides people through value based health and care and how it relates to their practice;
- Shared her own 'What Matters to You?' story, encouraging everyone to celebrate '[What Matters to You?](#)' every day and especially on 6 June;
- Discussed the issue of waste in healthcare, making reference to [Tackling Wasteful Spending on Health](#), a 2017 OECD report which found that one fifth of healthcare spend has no impact;
- Addressed the issue of inequality, citing the Chief Medical Officer who has included the widening healthy years gap amongst the major challenges facing the health and care system in Scotland;
- And discussed the need for a culture change in health and care, acknowledging that such a change may take a generation.

Roisin Hurst, Project Manager of the Scottish Community Link Worker Network:

- Stressed the need to demonstrate impact and evaluate our work, a theme that has been discussed since the Scottish Community Link Worker Network began;
- Shared the findings of Voluntary Health Scotland's [Essential Connections report](#), emphasising the need for greater standardisation to ensure that we can demonstrate the impact of community link workers' hard work and avoid evaluation being done for evaluation's sake;
- And introduced the University of Manchester's UK-wide, three-year evaluation of community link working, which Voluntary Health Scotland has supported as the third sector partner.

Dr Hillary Collins, Research Associate, General Practice and Primary Care, University of Glasgow:

- Provided an overview of the background to the University of Manchester's UK-wide, three-year evaluation of community link working;
- Discussed the social determinants of health, highlighting that life expectancy is reducing, a trend not observed in surrounding countries;

- Noted the growing demand within primary care and the impact of cuts to services, suggesting that the NHS could make better use of community support structures which have been proven to improve quality of life and reduce the cost of care;
- Stated that they want to take a multi-agency approach to map service provision, investigating how services operate, how well they work, how much they benefit people, and whether they are a good use of resources;
- And emphasised the need to ensure services are accessible to everyone, regardless of where they live or who they are.

Dr Eddie Donaghy, Health Services Researcher, Usher Institute, University of Edinburgh:

- Shared preliminary findings from their mapping exercise which included policy analysis of social prescribing and community link workers in primary care;
- Highlighted that, while community link workers have been around for many years, this is the first time they have been introduced at scale into primary care and into GP surgeries;
- Cited the rising demand for support due to a significant increase in social isolation, loneliness, anxiety, depression, food and fuel poverty, and housing issues;
- And announced some of the research project's key learnings to date:
 - Community link workers' training and previous work experience has introduced additional skills into NHS primary care to meet 21st century health and social care needs.
 - Different models of delivering community link worker services exist. However, there is significant variation in terms of the recording of data around referrals, outcomes measured and evaluation.
 - It should be recognised that we are still at the early stages of embedding community link workers at scale into NHS primary care.
 - And developing an evidence base and shared experiences, taking into account what works well and why, will be vital. Shaping the next stages of the community link worker footprint is now crucial and requires a national conversation.

Sarah Boath, Head of Programme, Scottish Community Development Centre:

- Stated that community-led health organisations and community link worker services are interlinked, and that they rely upon one another;
- Suggested taking a step back to think about what community link workers are seeking to achieve and how we will know if they have succeeded;
- Stressed that knowing what we are aiming to achieve will then drive the data that we need to collect;
- And proposed that any data that we gather is shared on a more routine basis to inform the practice of both community link workers and community-led health organisations.

Chris Walsh, National Stakeholder Engagement Senior Manager, Social Security Scotland:

- Provided an overview of the remit of Social Security Scotland, a relatively new organisation responsible for providing social security in Scotland, replacing the Department for Work and Pensions for some entitlements;
- Emphasised the importance of understanding the aspirations, concerns, and views of people in Scotland and said he welcomed feedback from community link workers;
- Underscored Social Security Scotland's belief that social security is a human right, before discussing the importance of supporting information in a rights-based approach;
- Noted that community link workers may be asked to provide supporting information due to their close relationships with the people they support;
- And explained the supporting information fee payment, in which £33.50 is payable following the completion of a form. Further information on this fee payment is available on [the Social Security Scotland website](#).

Robert West, Community Link Worker, We Are With You (Renfrewshire):

- Emphasised the commonality amongst all members of the Scottish Community Link Worker Network, regardless of their geographical location;
- Highlighted the funding challenges facing community link worker services, which could lead to a loss of key figures and potentially hinder information sharing across organisations due to commercial considerations;
- Proposed a more coherent combination of efforts to strengthen the network and ensure all voices are heard, particularly those in rural areas, who are often asked to do more with limited resources;
- Advocated for the work of community link workers across Scotland to be brought under one banner;
- And expressed his support for the development of a framework to improve outcomes for community link workers and their patients.

Erika Copland - Community Link Practitioner, Voluntary Action Orkney:

- Discussed the unique aspects of living and working in a small community in Orkney, highlighting the close-knit nature of such communities, where residents tend to know each other very well;
- And shared her firm belief that a one size fits all approach does not work, as what works well in a large city like Glasgow may not necessarily work well in Orkney.

Alison Leitch - Community Link Worker Assistant Service Manager, Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations' Council:

- Discussed the need to embed link workers into healthcare policy;
- Acknowledged that a one size fits all approach does not work but said that the freedom given by the Scottish Government has led to a lack of consistency across the country, which could be community link worker services' downfall;
- Advocated for commonality across programmes and areas, but with flexibility to reflect unique needs;

- Noted that Scotland is the only UK nation that doesn't have a framework for community link workers;
- And stressed the need to professionalise the role, which she said can only be achieved with research and evaluation.

Abelomai Luncheon - Community Links Practitioner, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland

- Referenced the recent [Voluntary Health Scotland briefing](#), which summarised community link workers' most common reasons for referral as well as the key challenges they face in their role, stressing the need to relay this information to the Scottish Government, as well as the Health and Social Care Partnerships in which members work;
- Drew attention to the lack of housing stock in Glasgow, the current state of mental health services and the lack of staff within the services they refer people onto;
- Discussed the difficulties patients face when applying for benefits and attending tribunals, a process that can take up to a year to resolve;
- Emphasised the importance of asking patients what matters to them, bringing that information to policymakers;
- And touched upon the issue of job security, which he said has an inevitable impact on the quality of support that community link worker services can offer.

Leeanne Killen - Community Link Worker and Primary Care Development Manager, North Ayrshire Health and Social Care Partnership

- Stated that she strongly believes in the importance of a framework to help community link workers fulfil their role;
- Highlighted the significant gaps in services and the lack of necessary funding for third sector services;
- And stressed the need to feed information into Health and Social Care Partnerships to help them understand the true needs of the community.

About Voluntary Health Scotland

We're passionate about what the voluntary health sector can achieve for people's health and wellbeing throughout Scotland.

We are the national voice, intermediary and network for voluntary health organisations in Scotland. We're passionate about what the voluntary health sector can achieve for people's health and wellbeing. We work with our members and others to address health inequalities, to improve health related policy, systems and partnership working, and to help people and communities to live healthier and fairer lives. [Join us now.](#)



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Thank you to our amazing exhibitors



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