

KEY MESSAGES



GIVING A VOICE TO SCOTLAND'S COMMUNITY LINK WORKERS

Voluntary Health Scotland Scottish Community Link Worker Network and Audit Scotland: Audit of General Medical Services Contract Workshops

The Scottish Community Link Worker Network and Audit Scotland recently ran two workshops on 22 August 2024 with over 30 Community Link Workers and Programme Leads. The discussions from these workshops, which were led by Audit Scotland's Senior Auditor, Naomi Ness, will support Audit Scotland's performance audit of General Practice. The audit will be focusing on how General Practice is performing since the introduction of the 2018 General Medical Services Contract. You can find out more about the scope of the audit [here](#).

Given CLWs' crucial role within general practice multidisciplinary teams, Audit Scotland was keen to hear their views as part of their evidence gathering. The workshops provided opportunities for both link workers and programme leads to share their experiences of the link worker programme in primary care and the impact of the 2018 contract (and the subsequent update to the MOU in 2021) on the CLW programme.

Some key messages that emerged from the workshops and from follow up comments from members of the Network included:

- CLWs are working with patients presenting with more complex needs. CLWs talked about having to regularly 'plug the gaps' and there being 'very few quick wins.' However, what came across was how much they love their role, the sense of fulfilment it gives them and the difference they can make in their communities.
- Waiting times for services to refer their patients to have increased and some services have closed, which creates issues with patients being 'stuck' in the system.
- Experiences of working within general practice can vary. Some CLWs feel really integrated within their team while others have found it more challenging. 'Practice readiness' for the CLW service and space within the practice are both important in terms of successful integration.

- The number of practices that a CLW works across can also make a difference to how well integrated a CLW feels within the team.
- The 2018 GMS contract directly led to a number of CLW programmes being established. The change to the MOU in 2021 has meant that CLWs are no longer classed as one of the priority areas within the MOU which can make the service more vulnerable to difficult funding decisions.
- Being able to evidence the quality and value of the CLW service is crucial. Some programme leads fed back that they have good robust systems in place for internal evaluation of their programmes which enables them for example to adjust CLW allocations across practices. but this needs to be done on a national level. The challenge around sustainability of funding for CLWs can also make recruitment and retention of staff more difficult.
- Some programme leads highlighted the importance of the Scottish Government's National CLW programme review, particularly in relation to the programme's long-term sustainability.
- Community link workers should be recognised and valued as professionals. The diverse backgrounds of the community link workers are an important and valued aspect of the programme. Individual programmes have their own core training for CLWs and some do run CPD sessions for their CLWs. However, there is enthusiasm for some kind of national skills and competency framework for the CLW programme.
- The crucial role of community link workers in early intervention and prevention was acknowledged by all participants as something that needs to be highlighted more widely.

Audit Scotland's final audit report into General Practice will be published in spring 2025.