

BRIEFING PAPER



Scottish Community Link Worker Survey – Voluntary Health Scotland Briefing

May 2025

Background

Ahead of [Health, Hope and Healing](#), the 2025 Scottish Community Link Worker Network Annual Conference, Voluntary Health Scotland asked network members to complete a short survey.

Community Link Workers (CLWs) were asked for:

- Their top three reasons for referral.
- And the main challenge in their role.

158 members of the Scottish Community Link Worker Network responded to this survey, representing nearly 50% of the total membership, an increase on 27% who responded last year.

The responses to these questions have been summarised below and will be shared with attendees in advance of the conference on 7 May. Discussion of the results will also help to inform the morning's community link worker and GP panel discussion.

Reasons for Referral

The 4 main reasons for referral remain the same as last year, although, this year social isolation and loneliness was the third most referenced reason for referral and housing the fourth, which represents a switch from last year's survey.

Mental health was the most reported reason for referral into community link worker services, with nearly 80% of respondents citing it as one of their top three reasons for referral. Respondents often provided further context around this, referring to the added anxiety and stress caused to their clients by financial hardship, poor housing and caring responsibilities. There were several references to specific mental health conditions including those presenting with neurodiversity including ADHD, as well as depression and work-related stress.

The second most common reason for referral was **financial advice and support**, with 57% of respondents citing this in their response to this question. Community Link Workers reported seeing people concerned about the rising costs of food and fuel and that many of their clients had sought advice relating to accessing benefits.

This was followed by **social isolation and loneliness** which was reported by 43% of respondents and then **housing advice**, which was reported by 37% of respondents.

Other reasons for referral cited by Community Link Workers included:

- Advice and information about services and groups in their local area
- Support for a long-term condition or disability
- Stillbirth and miscarriage support
- Chronic pain management
- Mobility
- Carer support
- Counselling
- Trauma
- Bereavement.

Challenges

Community Link workers reported facing a variety of challenges in their roles. Similar to last year's responses, the most common of these was a **lack of local services** to refer people onto. Respondents cited a lack of referral options for people who required advice relating to several issues including social housing, support for their mental health, counselling, therapy and befriending. As one CLW stated, *'there is not much help I can give people with regards to housing issues, as there is not enough social housing.'*

Where relevant services are available, several barriers can often prevent people from accessing the support they require. A lack of **transport** can often be the key barrier in rural areas, and this can also impact on *how* services are offered. As one respondent commented, *'there are often connectivity barriers that affect patients such as travel issues. There is also no access to face-to-face befriending in the area where I am based.'*

Furthermore, respondents stated that both third sector and statutory services continue to be under incredible pressure, with many third sector organisations struggling to survive. This directly impacts the availability of community services and in turn leads to very long **waiting lists** for some services and groups.

As well as reflecting on the challenges faced by the people they support, respondents also outlined some of the challenges they themselves face. Some Community Link Workers, particularly those in rural areas, shared the challenge of **covering a wide geographical area** to be able to support people appropriately. One respondent based in a rural location commented, *'co-ordinating support across such a huge geographical area and trying to deal with the disparity in service provision'* has been particularly difficult. Other CLWs reported the pressures of managing peoples' expectations, especially when informing them that a service they need might not be available to them for several months.

As well as the time allowed for appointments, **demand for appointments** was also cited as a key challenge for community link workers, with caseload management being highlighted by several managers as an ongoing issue.

The lack of clarity around the **long-term funding of Community Link Worker services** was also cited as a challenge, with respondents commenting on their own lack of **job security** due to temporary or short-term funding for their posts.

Other challenges that respondents cited including a **lack of understanding of the role** by some medical practitioners leading to CLWs being underused by some practices. This can be exacerbated by a lack of space in the practice for the CLW, which makes embedding the CLW into the wider multidisciplinary team more challenging.

Some respondents also referenced the lack of structured support for the collection of data across the community link worker programme, with one respondent emphasising that a **social prescribing framework** should be launched for Scotland to help support this.

Lastly, some respondents shared the challenge of often working in isolation and the impact that this has on **their own health and wellbeing**. To ensure that this is given the attention it deserves, the Scottish Community Link Worker Network will continue to advocate on behalf of its members, raising awareness of community link workers' experiences and needs.

About the Scottish Community Link Worker Network

The [Scottish Community Link Worker Network](#) is the national network for primary care community link working in Scotland.

The aim of the Network is to create a space for community link workers in primary care settings in Scotland to come together to share learning and to develop, network and support each other in order to improve outcomes for their patients and communities.

About Voluntary Health Scotland

We are the national voice, intermediary and network for voluntary health organisations in Scotland. 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](#).

Contact

Roisin Hurst, Project Manager, Scottish Community Link Worker Network
roisin.hurst@vhscotland.org.uk



18 York Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EP
0131 474 6189 mail@vhscotland.org.uk www.vhscotland.org.uk @VHSComms

Registered Scottish Charity SC035482. A company limited by guarantee SC267315