

A PETITION FOR CHANGE IMPROVING ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOR PEOPLE FACING ADDICTION

Fulfilling Lives is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, and is a programme that supports people across England, who are facing a combination of homelessness, substance misuse, offending and mental ill health.

Substance misuse and mental ill health are the most commonly experienced needs for beneficiaries (service users) on the programme, and there is a high degree of overlap between the two, with **90 per cent of beneficiaries experiencing both.**

Fulfilling Lives partnerships report that the vast majority of clinical responses require an individual to address their substance misuse, before mental health treatment can be provided or even a needs assessment carried out. This leaves many beneficiaries in a 'catch 22' situation where they are unable to get support for their mental health needs, because they are using substances to self-medicate symptoms of poor mental health. The true stories of Marcus and Alan, available at www.multipledisadvantageday.org show just how difficult this 'catch 22' situation can be.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidelines are clear.¹ Ensure secondary care mental health services:

- Do not exclude people with severe mental illness because of their substance misuse.
- Do not exclude people from physical health, social care, housing or other support services because of their coexisting severe mental illness and substance misuse.
- Adopt a person-centred approach to reduce stigma and address any inequity to access to services people may face.
- Undertake a comprehensive assessment of a person's mental health and substance misuse needs.

Guidance from Public Health England (PHE) on commissioning services for people with co-occurring conditions,² is based on the principles that mental health and substance misuse services have a joint responsibility to meet the needs of individuals, and providers should have an open door policy and make every contact count. Latest Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) guidance³ also states that drug and alcohol misuse are not automatic exclusion criteria for the service, and highlights the need for drug, alcohol and mental health services to work together to ensure access to more specialist services if required. This reinforces

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- ¹ NICE (2016) *Coexisting severe mental illness and substance misuse: community health and social care services NICE guideline NG58* www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng58/chapter/Recommendations
- ² Public Health England (2017) *Better care for people with co-occurring mental health and alcohol/drug use conditions: A guide for commissioners and service providers* https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/625809/Co-occurring_mental_health_and_alcohol_drug_use_conditions.pdf
- ³ National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (2019) *The Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Manual* NHS www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/iapt-manual-v3.pdf

and complements the NICE guidance on people with coexisting severe mental illness and substance misuse. NICE does not recommend the creation of specialist dual diagnosis teams. **PHE guidance⁴ suggests that the prevalence of co-existing conditions is such that it is vital that all services are equipped to respond to these needs.**

Therefore we have a clear recommendation for change:

MPs SHOULD ENSURE THAT NATIONAL GUIDANCE ON CO-OCCURRING MENTAL ILL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE MISUSE IS FOLLOWED LOCALLY.

Staff working within the mental health system, including those making decisions about assessment and treatment options, should be supported and challenged to ensure assessment and the provision of services for people with co-occurring issues, is in line with the national guidance from NICE and Public Health England.

The Care Quality Commission should investigate when guidance is not being followed. The good practice across the Fulfilling Lives Programme and other areas has demonstrated that **mental health support can be provided to individuals facing co-occurring issues and that it can be effective.**

Evidence from the Fulfilling Lives Programme suggests that the key is providing treatment in a way that is **flexible and person-centred**, taking time to build trust between therapist and service user, delivering services where people are comfortable, and acknowledging and allowing for the other factors (such as homelessness, poor physical health, addiction, poverty) that affect people's ability to engage with treatment.

Approaches that are **psychologically- and trauma-informed**,⁵ and which take into account past experiences, provide useful frameworks for working with this group. Help with mental health also needs to be provided alongside support to address other issues, such as accessing correct benefit entitlements and securing appropriate accommodation.

⁴ Public Health England (2017) p. 24

⁵ Psychologically informed environments are "services that are designed and delivered in a way that takes into account the emotional and psychological needs of the individuals using them." (Homeless Link (2017) *An introduction to Psychologically Informed Environments and Trauma Informed Care* www.homeless.org.uk/sites/default/files/site-attachments/TIC%20PIE%20briefing%20March%202017_0.pdf)

Trauma-informed approaches can be defined as "a system development model that is grounded in and directed by a complete understanding of how trauma exposure affects service user's neurological, biological, psychological and social development" (Paterson, 2014 cited in Sweeney, A. Clement, C. Filson, B. and Kennedy, A (2016) *Trauma-informed mental healthcare in the UK: what is it and how can we further its development?* *Mental Health Review Journal* vol. 21, 3, pp. 174–192 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/MHRJ-01-2015-0006>)

This paper draws on evidence from a larger Fulfilling Lives Programme report titled *Improving Access to Mental Health Support for People Facing Multiple Disadvantage*. The report was written in collaboration with MEAM (Making Every Adult Matter) and CFE Research. It can be viewed at www.fulfillinglivesevaluation.org/evaluation-reports (select National Evaluation).

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SHOULD BE AVAILABLE FOR EVERYONE, WHEN THEY NEED IT, AND IN A WAY THAT WORKS FOR THEM. YOU CAN HELP MAKE THIS HAPPEN.

SIGN OUR PETITION FOR CHANGE. VISIT WWW.MULTIPLEDISADVANTAGEDAY.ORG



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