

This briefing relates to the English health system only

## Prescribing advice – a pathway to health and saving money

February 2015

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### Executive summary

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**Through the provision of timely, effective advice, there are real possibilities to deliver important health improvements whilst also making significant savings.**

With responsibility for public health having moved to local government, budget pressures provide an additional spur for greater cooperation between councils and Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), coordinated through the Health and Wellbeing Boards (HWBs).

Timely provision of effective advice can have a positive impact upon health and this can mean savings for CCGs and local authorities. This is especially so in relation to mental health issues, which are the **largest single cause of disability in the UK**, contributing almost a quarter (23 per cent) of the overall burden of disease.<sup>1</sup>

Many CCGs and charities such as Macmillan already recognise the public health value of prescribing advice. Across the country, Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) provide advice in 712 different health settings: 605 GP surgeries, 78 hospitals or hospices and 29 mental health day centres or groups. By prescribing advice, GPs are better able to meet the Department of Health's outcomes frameworks that set out a clear expectation for improvement in the quality of life for people with long-term conditions.

**With the transfer of public health responsibilities to local councils, we call for councils to work more closely with their CCG partners on their HWBs to commission advice services to better tackle their communities' health challenges and to deliver significant savings across their local public sector.**

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## Commission advice, save on health

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The cost of treating common mental health issues is by no means cheap. According to the King's Fund, the average cost to the NHS of service provision for adults suffering from depression and/or anxiety disorders, per person, per year, in 2012/13 was £880.<sup>2,3</sup> Compare this to the cost of advice per client - £123.<sup>4</sup> **This means that each time an advice intervention mitigates the need for a primary care mental health treatment, there's a saving of over £750.**

Naledi Segosebe, who came to us for help with her ESA claim, has a long term health condition, mobility problems and a diagnosis of depression and anxiety.

Naledi says,

"There's been a lot of improvement in my health thanks to the CAB.

"The moment I went to the CAB and got the advice, it helped to relieve the pressure because the people at CAB said you can ring any time you need to. It made me feel like somebody cared.

"When the money stopped I was getting counselling and was on medication for my mental health issues. I was worrying so much about the money. The people at the CAB helped me not to worry so much. One of the people there explained to me that my depression was not permanent and said it's only something you're going through right now, but that it would pass. I thought of that every time I experienced panic attacks. It really helped me to sort things out. They gave me a feeling of security and I don't think I could have coped without them.

"I was very relieved when my ESA was awarded and the quality of my life has changed. Also, now that ESA is sorted, so is Housing Benefit, which means I can now move to more suitable accommodation. A lot was held up by the ESA. The CAB were a godsend. I couldn't have coped without them."

But the provision of advice doesn't only make savings to the health budget. The Department for Communities and Local Government estimates that the cost of homelessness per person is £24,000 to £30,000 - a cost borne by local councils, CCGs, the Department for Work and Pensions and the criminal justice system.<sup>5</sup>

**CAB advice prevents homelessness.** According to the National Homelessness Advice Service (NHAS) CAB advice can help clients to avoid homelessness, solve a housing-related dispute or secure accommodation:<sup>6</sup>

- 1 in 3 housing enquiries achieved a positive outcome.
- 2 in 5 cases of threatened homelessness achieved a positive outcome.
- Almost all (93 per cent) felt that a CAB was 'important' or 'crucial' to resolving their housing issue.

And that positive impact of people's housing has a health benefit too:

- Over half (57 per cent) of people who had received housing advice from CAB felt that receiving advice had improved their health

To make the most of the health budget savings that the provision of advice can deliver across CCG and local authority budgets, advice on prescription must be routinely integrated into the health care system. Such integration does happen already – but the potential for further gain is huge.

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## Social problems cause health problems

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**There is clear evidence linking a range of problems such as legal and debt problems to poor or declining health.** For example:

- Legal Action Group research found that half of respondents who had experienced a legal problem suffered an adverse consequence, including physical health and stress-related illness.<sup>7</sup>
- Of these, over 80 per cent had visited their GP or other health service as a result.<sup>8</sup>

As UCL Professor of Epidemiology and Public Health, Sir Michael Marmot says:

“Advice and information services ... help tackle the social inequalities in society that lead to the health inequalities we all experience.”<sup>9</sup>

Mental health in particular is affected for those experiencing the problems the CAB commonly deals with. Citizens Advice research from 2014 found that two thirds of clients (66 per cent) say their problem made them stressed, depressed or anxious.<sup>10</sup>

**Mental health is a big issue in relation to debt.** Almost three million people in Britain - the equivalent of the population of Wales - are in problem debt.<sup>11</sup> Problem debt is where there are two or more consecutive payments outstanding with a bill or repayment. And according to Mind almost nine out of ten of those in problem debt felt that their debt had made their mental health problem(s) worse.<sup>12</sup> This is a big deal, given that the economic and social costs of mental health problems in England are estimated at around **£105 billion each year**.<sup>13</sup>

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## Advice makes a difference

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The World Health Organisation says that poverty, discrimination and violence or abuse pose risks to mental wellbeing. Conversely, economic security and empowerment help to maintain good mental wellbeing.<sup>14</sup>

Effective, timely advice can have a significant impact on improving health and wellbeing. Citizens Advice research has found that:

- More than four out of five clients (81 per cent) say CAB advice made them less stressed, depressed or anxious.<sup>15</sup>

Using a wellbeing self-assessment tool, based on the NHS approved [WEMWBS](#), clients' wellbeing was assessed before they received advice. At this point they scored below the UK wellbeing average. After receiving CAB advice clients reported a significant increase in mental wellbeing, bringing them almost in line with the UK average.<sup>16</sup>

GPs also recognise how the lack of access to advice has a significant negative impact on their patients' health:

- More than four out of five (88 per cent) said not having access to advice has a negative effect on health to some extent or a great extent.<sup>17</sup>
- More than two thirds (70 per cent) of GPs say they would use more social prescribing for common mental health problems if they had the option.<sup>18</sup>

#### Liverpool Advice on Prescription project

The service is managed in partnership with the CAB and 23 hubs are now in place across the city, reaching into every GP practice. The scheme has also enjoyed the full support of many partner agencies including the Mayor's office, Public Health Liverpool and a number of patient and service user groups.

Dr Nadim Fazlani, GP and Chair of Liverpool CCG, said: "We are absolutely thrilled by the impressive results that the Advice on Prescription service has delivered in just six months. The project is providing timely access to advice and support for some of the city's most vulnerable and socially excluded people. In turn, this intervention is having a positive impact on their health and wellbeing by reducing hardship, debt levels, social isolation and hospital admissions."<sup>19</sup>

NESTA defines social prescribing as a clear, coherent and collaborative process in which healthcare practitioners including GPs, practice nurses and community matrons work with patients and service users to select and make referrals to community-based

services, including Citizens Advice Bureaux.<sup>20</sup> Social prescribing complements medical treatment with interventions which enable patients to become more confident and able to manage their condition. It also tackles the root causes of long-term conditions, such as debt.

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## Synergy with health agenda

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The Department of Health developed a number of frameworks to guide the work of CCGs and public health directors, including the NHS Outcomes Framework (NHSOF) and the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF). Indicators in both frameworks set out the outcomes that CCGs and local council public health departments should aim to boost.

Health-related quality of life for people with long-term conditions is a key indicator within the NHSOF as part of 'enhancing quality of life for people with long-term conditions'.

More than a third (38 per cent) of CAB clients identify as having a long-term condition and/or disability as compared to a fifth (21 per cent) of the wider population for England and Wales.<sup>21</sup>

Within the PHOF outcome of 'improving the wider determinants of health' there are a number of key indicators which CAB advice helps to tackle:

- children in poverty
- sickness absence rate
- domestic abuse
- statutory homelessness
- fuel poverty
- social isolation

Timely and effective advice on the main areas clients seek our help on - benefits and tax credits, debt, housing and employment - has a positive impact on one or more of the listed indicators.

Our opportunities for volunteering are also a bulwark against social isolation, with CAB volunteering having a positive impact on an individual's sense of self and how they feel about their life, ultimately improving their wellbeing. An individual's wellbeing and resilience are closely linked<sup>22</sup> and volunteering positively impacts on both, and is so likely to improve an individual's quality of life both now and in the future. In particular, ensuring that retired people are mentally and physically active also has wider reaching benefits to society, including reducing the NHS provision needed to respond to an aging population.<sup>23</sup>

In the second PHOF domain of 'health improvement', self-reported wellbeing is a key indicator.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) also has acknowledged the health value of advice. Their guidance is that advice should be provided to cancer survivors. And their soon to be published guidance, Excess Winter Deaths and Morbidity and the Health Risks Associated with Cold Homes, is expected to recommend that HWBs ensure that a referral and co-ordination service is commissioned that supports people who live in fuel poverty and are at risk of the associated health issues, to access advice.

**Advice saves money on health spending because social problems cause health problems.**

**Advice solves social problems and achieves both NHS and public health outcomes.**

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## Contact

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## About the Citizens Advice service

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- Citizens Advice's charitable aim is to make society fairer by providing the advice people need for the problems they face; and improving the policies and practices that affect people's lives
  - 340 Citizens Advice Bureaux provide free, confidential and impartial advice from 3300 locations across England and Wales
  - Last year Citizens Advice Bureaux helped two million clients with 5.5 million problems
  - Last year the Citizens Advice Consumer Service answered 1.2 million calls
  - Last year there were 16 million visitors to our advice website  
[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)
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<sup>1</sup> Knapp M, McDaid D. and Parsonage M (2011) Mental health promotion and mental illness prevention: the economic case,

<sup>2</sup> p.118, 25 and 40 Paying the Price: the cost of mental health care in England to 2026 (2008) King's Fund

<sup>3</sup> [http://neweconomymanchester.com/stories/832-unit\\_cost\\_database](http://neweconomymanchester.com/stories/832-unit_cost_database)

<sup>4</sup> Julie Hirst, Public Health Principal, Derbyshire County Council 22/10/14

<sup>5</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government. (2012) Evidence review of the costs of homelessness

<sup>6</sup> The Impact of Housing Advice Citizens Advice (undated)

<sup>7</sup> Healthy Legal Advice: findings from an opinion poll of GPs (2014) The Legal Action Group

<sup>8</sup> Healthy Legal Advice: findings from an opinion poll of GPs (2014) The Legal Action Group

<sup>9</sup> Health and Poverty report foreword [citizensadvice.org.uk/index/professionals/health\\_and\\_advice\\_toolkit.htm](http://citizensadvice.org.uk/index/professionals/health_and_advice_toolkit.htm)

<sup>10</sup> 'What did CAB do for you?' Findings from Citizens Advice national outcomes and impact research (September 2014)

<sup>11</sup> An Action Plan on Problem Debt (2015) StepChange

<sup>12</sup> Still in the red; update on debt and mental health (2011) Mind

<sup>13</sup> The economic and social costs of mental health problems in 2009/10 (October 2010) Centre for Mental Health

<sup>14</sup> Prevention of Mental Disorders: effective interventions and policy options (2004) World Health Organisation

<sup>15</sup> 'What did CAB do for you?' Findings from Citizens Advice national outcomes and impact research (September 2014)

<sup>16</sup> On a scale ranging from 7 to 35, clients' mean [WEMWBS](#) score before receiving advice was 19.15 – a full six points below the UK population average of 25.18. Four to six weeks after receiving help from CAB, clients' mean [WEMWBS](#) score increased significantly to 24.67 – just short of the UK population mean of 25.18: Health Outcomes Monitoring Toolkit: pilot results (March 2014)

<sup>17</sup> Healthy Legal Advice: findings from an opinion poll of GPs (2014) The Legal Action Group

<sup>18</sup> Feel better outside, feel better inside: Ecotherapy for mental wellbeing, resilience and recovery (2013) Mind

<sup>19</sup> Advice on Prescription is Just What the Doctor Ordered (27th October 2014)  
[www.liverpoolccg.nhs.uk/News/2014/October\\_2014/Advice\\_on\\_Prescription.aspx](http://www.liverpoolccg.nhs.uk/News/2014/October_2014/Advice_on_Prescription.aspx)

<sup>20</sup> Langford K et al (2013) More than medicine: new services for people powered health NESTA

<sup>21</sup> Citizens Advice Profile of clients helped England and Wales average over a year to Q4 2012/13

<sup>22</sup> Young Foundation (2012) The Wellbeing and Resilience Paradox

<sup>23</sup> Young Foundation (2012) One Hundred and Not Out: Resilience and Active Aging