
Partner update – Public Health

The Argyll and Bute HSCP Public Health team is pleased to provide an update on three areas of work: Community Link Working, Living Well & the NHS Highland Director of Public Health report.

Community Link Working

Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care Partnership is pleased to announce the launch of a new Community Link Worker service in the region. The Community Link Worker service can be accessed through referral from 12 GP practices across Argyll and Bute.

Community Links Workers (CLW) can take referrals from GP teams and use a person-centred social prescribing approach to strengthen the link between primary care, other health services, and community resources. Community Link Workers recognise that social issues such as debt, relationships, employment and loneliness affect people's health and wellbeing, and will connect people to sources of support or resources within their community. The CLW works with an individual to identify underlying causes and stressors in their life, which are having a negative impact on their health. These causes and stressors are often complex socioeconomic issues which are more appropriately addressed by services other than primary care. The CLW supports individuals to set goals and to navigate barriers to accessing services. The aim is to support people in taking control over their own health and wellbeing, and includes referring them to community services which can support them in doing so.

The service has been developed in line with the modernisation and expansion of services delivered in GP practices, resulting in multidisciplinary teams working together to support people holistically and improve outcomes for patients.

We Are With You has been contracted to provide this service for Argyll and Bute. We Are With You have been working in Argyll and Bute since 2015 and have a strong understanding of the rural geography of our communities.

The service will cover patients registered at the following practices: Campbeltown Medical Practice, Dr G Hall & Partners, Church Street Surgery, Cowal Medical Practice, Bowmore Medical Practice, Port Ellen Practice, Rhinns Medical Centre, Lochgilphead Medical Centre, Lorn Medical Centre, The Bute Practice, Millig Practice, Dr B McLachlan & Ptnrs

At present, the service is targeted at patients who live in Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) decile 5 or less. The service will cover 78% of the patients in SIMD decile 5 or less in Argyll and Bute and the remaining 22% have been marked as potential for future community link working services.

For more information you can email argyllbutelinks@wearewithyou.org.uk. Further information for the public and patients at these practices will be issued shortly.

Living Well

The Argyll and Bute Living Well strategy was launched in September 2019 and makes a commitment to support people living with long-term conditions and those at risk of developing them. The strategy focuses on supporting people to manage their own health, and supporting communities to build groups and networks which can link people together.

The Living Well Implementation plan aligns to the HSCP strategic intentions under four themes:

- **People** – enabling and informing to ensure healthy living and self-management of long-term health conditions
- **Community** – joined up approaches to support for health living within communities
- **Leadership** – high level commitment within the HSCP to ensure investment in prevention of health and social care problems
- **Workforce** - supporting and educating frontline health and social care professionals to anticipate and prevent problems before they arise

The Living Well strategy incorporates work relating to physical activity, self management, type 2 diabetes prevention, link working, emotional wellbeing, suicide prevention, workforce development, and tobacco. More information about the Living Well strategy can be found at <https://www.ablivingwell.org/living-well-strategy>).

In addition, the Living Well self management grants are an opportunity for Third Sector organisations to fund projects that support the health and well-being of people living in Argyll & Bute, while aligning to the key priorities set out in the Living well Implementation plan. In years 1 and 2 of the Living Well strategy, £70,000 and £76,000 respectively were awarded to 3rd sector organisations. Year 3 of the grants saw £46,100 allocated to projects run by Argyll & the Isles Coast & Countryside Trust (ACT); Lorn and Oban Healthy Options Ltd; Dochas Carer Centre; Dunoon Community Development Trust; Jean's Bothy and Garelochhead Station Trust.

Director of Public Health report – Suicide and Mental Health

Suicide is an important Public Health issue. The 2021 Director of Public Health Report addresses a number of issues relating to suicide, including mental health and illness, background influences such as adversity in childhood, poverty, and what is being done to improve mental health and reduce suicide rates across NHS Highland.

The report highlights that there is a consistently higher rate of deaths by suicide in the NHS Highland area than the Scottish average. The Argyll and Bute male rate was higher than Scotland, but the difference was not statistically significant. There are very substantial demographic and socio-economic inequalities in suicide risk. Suicide is more common in men than women, with men generally around three times more likely to die from suicide. Mental illness substantially increases the risk of death by suicide and most people who die by suicide are thought to have a mental illness at the time of their death. Suicide rates are higher in people who live in deprived areas. Adverse life events increase suicide risk and previous exposure to traumatic events, including sexual and interpersonal violence also increases risk. Some rural parts of Scotland have higher than average suicide rates and some occupational groups, including some rural occupations such as farming and forestry

have a higher proportion of deaths from suicide than average. Occupational risk may be partly due to access to lethal means of self-harm, but low-paying jobs probably contribute.

A public health approach to suicide and suicidal behaviour is important and is widely regarded as the approach that is most likely to achieve sustained reductions in suicide. A Public Health approach helps us understand the epidemiology, risk and protective factors for suicide both in the general population and in groups of people at elevated risk of suicide. It also helps us to understand how we can work to prevent suicide in the first instance and to improve support for those in crisis or bereaved.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health is also discussed within the report. A high global prevalence of both depression and anxiety during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic has been reported. At country and regional levels a wide variance in the prevalence of these mental health conditions has been observed, making it difficult to accurately describe the impact of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing at this point in time. The impact of COVID-19 on mental health has been described as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also as a “concurrent epidemic”. Reported positive effects on mental health during the pandemic include having the opportunity to spend more time with family, to help others and make a positive contribution to communities, and enjoy a better work-life balance. The measures put in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spreading, such as physical distancing and quarantine measures are also likely to have taken their toll on mental health and wellbeing.

Good mental health is essential in achieving improved outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Good mental health is determined by a wide range of social, economic, environmental, physical and individual factors that operate throughout the life course. To achieve good mental health, we need to improve the circumstances in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. This report details a compelling case for gaining better understanding of and responding to the mental health needs of our population. Across Highland and Argyll and Bute there is already a great deal of work underway, but we will need sustained, coordinated action across agencies that is focussed on prevention and early intervention if we are to make a difference to the mental health of our population.

Current activity – page 46 of the report details a range of current activity around mental health, wellbeing and suicide prevention in Argyll and Bute. Some examples are provided below:

Argyll and Bute Suicide Prevention Strategy Group

The local structure for suicide prevention is well established within Argyll and Bute and complements Scotland’s commitment to mental health and suicide prevention. The Argyll and Bute Suicide Prevention Strategy Group is a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary group with representation from Police Scotland, the Royal Navy, third sector partners, social work, child protection and other NHS Highland colleagues. Chaired by the Interim Chief Officer, Argyll and Bute HSCP, partners are committed to delivering a local action plan supporting the delivery of Scottish Government’s ‘Every Life Matters’, Scotland’s Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2018 – 20214. The group has developed programmes of work on data, communications, training and bereavement support to deliver a range of interventions to meet the needs of both adults and children. The Argyll and Bute Suicide Prevention Action

plan is being reviewed to take into account the unanticipated changes to our lives since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting local consultation and planning for the new national strategy for suicide prevention anticipated to be published in 2022. The strategy group sits within the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership structure, reporting to the Community Planning Partnership Management Committee

Child Suicide Prevention Training

The Argyll and Bute Suicide Prevention Strategy Group identified a need for multi-agency and multi-disciplinary child suicide prevention training. The Lifeworks Assessing Suicide in Kids (ASK) Suicide Workshop programme was chosen to build workforce capacity, knowledge and skills. The programme focuses on children and young people aged five to fourteen years old. The workshops specifically address suicide risk in children and provides developmentally appropriate tools and strategies to identify, gather and organise key details needed to assess risk and inform safety planning. The course adopts a blended approach whereby participants individually complete online training modules before attending face-to-face sessions that are delivered using an online video platform.

Recommendations

The report concludes with a number of recommendations, including:

- The work of the Highland Suicide Prevention Steering Group and Argyll and Bute Suicide Prevention Strategy Group should be supported and effective up to date strategies and action plans delivered across Highland and Argyll and Bute.
- Evidence on effective interventions for the prevention of suicide should be reviewed. Where services or interventions with good evidence exist but are not in place within NHS Highland, cases should be made for implementation.
- The relationship between poverty, deprivation and urban rural variation in suicide rates in Highland should be researched and the extent to which the Highland picture contributes to rural suicide rates in Scotland should be identified.
- Health intelligence should be prioritised to place suicide in a broader population mental health context that will inform local plans and strategies, including evidence on mental health hospitalisations, mental health prescribing and wider service access.
- Intelligence and evidence should be provided to support mitigation of the mental health impacts of the pandemic in NHS Highland.
- Preventative approaches that increase personal and community resilience should be prioritised.
- Available resources should be targeted towards groups experiencing multiple disadvantage to mitigate the mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The NHS Highland Director of Public Health Report 2021 is available to view in full here <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/News/Pages/DirectorofPublicHealthreportpublished.aspx>.

For more information contact:

Name: Alison McGrory (Health Improvement Principal)

E-mail: alison.mcgrory@nhs.scot