

June 2020



CLINKS
RESPONSE

Health and Social Care Committee's call for evidence: Delivering Core NHS and Care Services during the Pandemic and beyond

About Clinks

Clinks is the national infrastructure organisation supporting voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system (CJS). Our aim is to ensure the sector, and those with whom it works, are informed and engaged in order to transform the lives of people in the CJS and their communities. We do this by providing specialist information and support, with a particular focus on smaller voluntary sector organisations, to inform them about changes in policy and commissioning, to help them build effective partnerships and provide innovative services that respond directly to the needs of their users.

We are a membership organisation with over 500 members, including the voluntary sector's largest providers as well as its smallest. Overall, through our weekly e-bulletin Light Lunch and our social media activity, we have a network of over 13,000 contacts.

Clinks, in partnership with Nacro, are members of the Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Health and Wellbeing Alliance (the alliance), a partnership between the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and Public Health England and 21 national voluntary sector organisations and consortia. The alliance aims to bring the voice of the voluntary sector and people with lived experience into national policy making, to promote equality and reduce health inequalities. Clinks and Nacro work together to raise awareness of the health needs of people in the criminal justice system and the vital role the voluntary sector can play in addressing them.

About this response

Clinks welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry. This response focuses on the impact Covid-19 is having on voluntary sector organisations delivering health and care services in the criminal justice system, and their service users, in both the short and long-term. It makes recommendations for action that can be taken by Government to mitigate the negative effects.

Our submission draws on evidence gathered from a variety of sources, including:

- The Reducing Reoffending Third Sector Advisory Group (RR3) which has convened a special interest group (SIG) on Covid-19 to formally channel policy discussions and suggestions into the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS).



- Clinks' bi-weekly survey of voluntary organisations working in criminal justice to track the impact of Covid-19.
- Network meetings with voluntary sector organisations delivering health and care services to people in contact with the criminal justice system through which we have gathered evidence of the impact of Covid-19 on service delivery and service users.

Overview of the health and care needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system and role of the voluntary sector in meeting them

People in contact with the criminal justice system suffer from some of the starkest health inequalities in the country, with higher health needs and poorer health outcomes than the general population. People in prison have a mortality rate approximately 50% higher than the general population, and those released on probation and people serving community sentences have over 2-3 times the mortality rate of the general population.¹ 36% of people in prison are estimated to have a physical or mental disability. This compares with 19% of the general population.²

Voluntary sector organisations are key to providing effective health and social care for people in the criminal justice system. 46% of organisations responding to Clinks' State of the sector survey 2019 said that their primary area of work was mental health, and 20% said their primary area of work was physical health.³ Many of these organisations are commissioned to deliver services by both NHS England and the MoJ/HMPPS and they work hand in hand with local health services to provide flexible, holistic support for people who face significant barriers to getting the health and care services they need. As well as delivering frontline health services, they support people to access and engage with health providers, provide holistic support, accompany people to appointments and assist them to understand and manage their health needs.

The voluntary sector plays a vital role in reducing health inequalities. Clinks' 2019 State of the sector research found that 69% of voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system support people with mental health needs, 66% support people with substance misuse needs, 53% support people with learning difficulties/disabilities, and 38% support people with physical disabilities.

Many organisations also provide tailored support to people with characteristics protected under the Equality Act (2010) including but not limited to: older people, women, and people from black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, in response to the unique and often entrenched health inequalities they experience. For instance, statistics show that women account for a disproportionate amount of self-harm in prison; despite making up only around 5% of the prison population, women accounted for 18% of all self-harm incidents in prison from September 2018-19.⁴ BAME women have less access to mental health support within prison.⁵ Older prisoners are more likely to suffer health problems and even die in custody, have higher rates of disability and mobility difficulties and can struggle to access activities and services.⁶ These statistics provide stark examples of the often complex and urgent health and care needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system, and how crucial the role of the voluntary sector is in supporting them with health and care needs.

Meeting demand for health and care services as a result of the societal and economic impacts of lockdown: service delivery and service user need

Due to social distancing measures being introduced, both in prisons and in the community, with prisons placed under 23 hour a day lockdown and the prevention of physical visits along with access to the gym, library, and worship facilities all suspended, and services in the community being drastically altered due to Government protocols,⁷ voluntary sector organisations have had to substantially alter their services. The most recent findings from Clinks' bi-weekly survey show that the vast majority of organisations have had to reduce their service provision, with some organisations struggling to maintain services remotely. 61% of organisations said that their service provision has decreased and a further 18% have stopped services completely. 13% of organisations cannot deliver any of their services remotely. However, this is taking place at a time when service user need and demand for services is likely to be increasing.

Anecdotal evidence gathered through Clinks' health and justice network meetings indicates that many organisations are working flexibly and are adapting their work by delivering virtual services, such as counselling and other mental health services via telephone or Zoom, to people both in prison and in the community, or designing and distributing 'distraction packs' to be used both by people in prison and people who have been released into the community. Organisations have reflected that whilst some service users are engaging very well with new virtual services, others have disengaged and are struggling with the scaled back services and lack of face to face contact. This is particularly true for those who are digitally excluded, including those experiencing multiple disadvantage.

However, some organisations are struggling to meet demand for services against the backdrop of measures to mitigate the impact of Covid-19. For example, one organisation, who deliver counselling services for women as part of a prison's mental health service commissioned by an NHS Trust, stated "we are currently unable to deliver our service, due to regime restrictions at the prison and the need for social distancing in the mental health offices which we share with the rest of the team."

This is particularly concerning given Clinks' State of the sector 2019 research findings which show that organisations continue to report an increasing number of people accessing their services and that people's needs have become more complex and urgent. Combined with the scaling back of health and care services, the needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system are likely to become entrenched even further – or even left unaddressed – as the measures to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 remain in place.

Anecdotal evidence gathered from Clinks' health and justice network meetings exemplifies this further, as organisations report concerns over:

- The scaling back of specialised maternity services for pregnant women released from prison and in the community causing anxiety for pregnant women
- Potential rising levels of low-level offending due to people with substance and/or alcohol misuse issues relapsing without support in place
- People potentially engaging less with both physical and mental health services due to fears of being in healthcare settings during the Covid-19 outbreak
- Deteriorating mental health of people in prison who are living under a significantly reduced prison regime.



The voluntary sector working both directly and in-directly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic are important partners in working to address these issues. Indeed, the recent report by the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee outlines "many charities and voluntary organisations perform essential work that, while not directly tackling Covid-19, underpins the fabric of our society. Losing their services in either the short term or after the country emerges from this crisis will cause untold damage to individuals and communities."⁸

Meeting demand for health and care services as a result of the societal and economic impacts of lockdown: financial concerns for the voluntary sector

Many voluntary organisations are also experiencing financial challenges. Results from Clinks' most recent Covid-19 impact survey indicate that 40% of organisations report having to use their reserves due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is particularly concerning for the long-term, given that Clinks' annual state of the sector research has consistently shown specialist criminal justice organisations to have far lower levels of reserves on average – just 1.4 months – than the wider UK voluntary sector which has an average of 6.3 months of reserves. Our survey also shows that organisations are experiencing cash flow problems, with 42% expecting to have to use reserves and of those, 27% of the 42% anticipate having to use reserves in the next six months. Due to the continued uncertainty related to the Covid-19 pandemic, it is challenging for organisations to plan for the future or predict their financial position.

It is welcome that both anecdotal evidence from Clinks' health and justice network meetings as well as Clinks' Covid-19 survey results have demonstrated that funders have been flexible and supportive of the voluntary sector, with many releasing emergency funding. Whilst this is positive in the short term, many organisations are concerned that there will be a reduction in the availability of funding in the long term, which will have a detrimental impact on the voluntary sector and its ability to support service users.

We welcome NHS England's flexibility and work to commission voluntary organisations to deliver health services in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is important that this work is built upon and joined up with efforts across government departments to mitigate the risk of duplication and to use resources most effectively.

We recommend that NHS England alongside HMPPS and the MoJ should work with the voluntary sector to understand and determine what the gaps in service delivery are as a result of Covid-19, to work to address this and commission appropriate services to support the health and care needs of people in contact with the criminal justice system.

Clinks welcomes the £300,000 funding that HMPPS and the MoJ have made available to support the voluntary sector working in criminal justice in its response to Covid-19. Clinks are pleased to be able to distribute £275,000 of this on behalf of HMPPS and the MoJ as part of activities under the grant for the provision of infrastructure support for small and medium sized voluntary organisations, and hope that this grant will benefit voluntary sector organisations delivering health and care services in the criminal justice system.



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This grant programme is an important part of the support the sector needs to continue providing its services now and in the future. However, the criteria for these grants and the total sum available means that not everyone in the sector who requires financial support will be able to benefit.

We are extremely disappointed that the MoJ was not successful in its bid for funds to support the voluntary sector working with people in the criminal justice system from the £360m available from the Department of Culture Media and Sport as part of the government's £750m emergency package for charities providing key services and supporting vulnerable people during the crisis. Our sector provides vital support to some of the most vulnerable in society and it is frustrating and disheartening not to see this work and the needs of the sector's beneficiaries recognised across government beyond HMPPS and the MoJ.

We welcome the recent report from the Digital, Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee and are pleased to see the committee are supportive of a "a stabilisation fund to secure the long-term financial health and organisational diversity of the sector." It is further welcome that the report recommends that "In addition to the support that has already been announced, the Government should establish further funding to assist charities and voluntary organisations to stay afloat throughout the Covid-19 crisis. This should be available to organisations facing financial pressures, even if they are not involved in the frontline response to Covid-19."

To sustain the vital services our sector provides in the delivery and support of core NHS services, voluntary organisations providing health and social care services to people in the criminal justice system must be considered in future discussions and decisions regarding financial support from government for the voluntary sector and criteria for its distribution.

Conclusion

Clinks will continue to support and advocate on behalf of the voluntary sector working in criminal justice, including those delivering health and care services. We will continue to consult with and gather evidence from organisations to remain up to date with the impact of Covid-19 measures on voluntary sector organisations delivering health and care services, as new developments occur in this fast-moving environment.

In recognition that things are moving at significant pace, we would be glad to provide the committee with additional information on the impact Covid-19 is having on the voluntary sector delivering health and care services in the criminal justice system on an ongoing basis, and how to support their ability to operate during and after the Covid-19 outbreak.



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Clinks supports, represents and advocates for the voluntary sector in criminal justice, enabling it to provide the best possible opportunities for individuals and their families.

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End notes

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