

Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership – Community Link Worker Network submission of 26 February 2024

PE2053/H: Stop the cuts to community link workers and help secure their long-term future within GP practice teams

I am a GP in Wester Hailes Medical Practice, serving a very deprived community in Southwest Edinburgh. I also work as a Clinical Advisor to our Edinburgh Health & Social Care Partnership Community Link Worker Network.

Community Link Workers play a key role in addressing health inequalities by,

- i. helping patients in need identify & engage with appropriate local services,
- ii. addressing basic problems (homelessness, food poverty, health literacy) that preclude good health,
- iii. facilitating attendance at local health and wellbeing programmes, that vulnerable patients would otherwise struggle to participate in.

It is sometimes overlooked that Community Link Workers *also* help grow and evidence local support networks, not only by linking patients to services, but by linking services to each other and to Primary Care Colleagues.

The link between Primary Care and local Third Sector Services is correctly acknowledged as very important, but GP's and other primary care team members are seldom able to find time to co-develop services and pathways with Community partners. The development of Community Link Working and Social Prescribing in Scotland has helped mitigate this gap.

Services also understand that we need to work preventatively around inequalities (i.e., intervening “Upstream not Downstream”) –but it is difficult to understand how we could do this, without access to these supported networks of local and very local resource.

With these considerations in mind, it would be concerning if Community Linking Working resource was seen as an 'easy' or as a 'non-clinical' target for financial cuts. It should be obvious that we need to ensure Primary Care is *more*, not *less*, orientated to the needs of local communities, and Community Link Working plays an important role in supporting this; we see Community Link Workers as part of the 'natural landscape' of Primary Care, particularly in deprived communities.

We respect the needs of service providers to balance budgets, but we hope the Committee could support this petition and ensure forward-looking and prevention focused initiatives like Community Link Working are protected and supported as far is reasonable.