

# HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING GUIDE

## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION AND POLICY CONTEXT

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## PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE

We have developed this guide to support frontline staff and managers of homelessness services to work successfully with clients who present with various mental health and wellbeing needs. The aim of the guide is to give staff and managers the confidence to work with a range of complex needs in a personalised and dynamic way, enabling clients to receive the appropriate support they need to live happy and fulfilled lives.

## WHO IT IS FOR

This guide is for generic and specialist mental health homelessness services. This includes hostels (both first and second stage), day services, and outreach teams. It is crucial that managers and staff across all levels including night workers have an understanding and awareness of mental health and wellbeing issues that affect homeless people.

## WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

Our health needs audit<sup>1</sup> revealed that:

Homelessness services play a large part in stabilising and preventing more serious mental health problems by offering emotional and psychological support to vulnerable people. They work with individuals at an extremely fraught and complex time and can offer essential support to those in need. They also play a key role in guiding people through statutory and voluntary support services.

## WHAT THIS RESOURCE WILL HELP YOU WITH

This guide will enable workers to recognise the importance of your work and build on your skills to assess and support people's mental health and wellbeing proactively. It has been divided into helpful sections and offers top tips to navigate services and support clients successfully within a range of projects.

- **over 70% of people using homelessness services report having experience of mental distress**
- **over 45% feel they need more support in coping with their mental health needs**

## WHAT IT IS NOT

This guide is not a psychological framework or assessment tool to diagnose clients. While we encourage organisations to become increasingly psychologically aware, train staff and use psychologically-informed tools and approaches, it is also important that staff know where their role starts and stops. Homelessness services are not there to replace statutory mental health support or, necessarily, to deliver counselling or additional psychological services (although some do this excellently and such partnerships should be encouraged). Homelessness services need to ensure they can work effectively alongside mental health services in a joined up and cohesive way, which puts the client at the centre.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://homeless.org.uk/health-needs-audit>

### The guide will

- explain the policy context of health and wellbeing
- help you to understand the complex language that exists in the mental health field, especially around diagnosis and treatment
- provide practical tools and advice for working with challenging people on a day-to-day basis
- enable you to work with external services that can offer more intensive support for those most in need
- provide solutions for working with complex individuals

### USING THIS GUIDE

It has been divided into five sections. For each section there is signposting to further resources to increase your knowledge and understanding of mental health and wellbeing issues. There are good practice case studies and top tips throughout to help in your work. All resources can continue to be updated with more good practice examples, so please contact [jessica.plant@homelesslink.org.uk](mailto:jessica.plant@homelesslink.org.uk) if you would like to add any examples or you would like to suggest any additional resources that could be included.

### POLICY CONTEXT

Health reforms are currently on-going, the way mental health services are structured is likely to change significantly in the next few years. Mental health services are increasingly likely to be commissioned locally with a focus on *recovery*. Homeless Link will be working in this area to try and ensure homeless people needs are recognised within the new commissioning structures. It is helpful to be aware of the following documents:

In July 2010 the government launched the white paper; **Equity and excellence: liberating the NHS**

This outlines the major health reforms proposed by the government and the second consultation has recently closed. For more information visit the Department of health website:

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_117353](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_117353)

In February 2011 the Coalition launched its new mental health; **No health without mental health: a cross-government mental health outcomes strategy for people of all age**

To read more about it, please visit the Department of Health website:

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_123766](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_123766)

In November 2010 the White Paper; **Healthy Lives, Healthy People: Our strategy for public health in England** was launched.

This White Paper sets out the Government's long-term vision for the future of public health in England. The aim is to create a 'wellness' service (Public Health England) and to strengthen both national and local leadership.

[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_121941](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_121941)

### Homeless Link's policy pages

To find out more about mental health policy and how affects the needs of homeless people, please visit our website: <http://homeless.org.uk/mental-health-policy-context>

Also see Homeless Links consultation responses: <http://www.homeless.org.uk/closed-consultations>