

1 July 2004

PRESS RELEASE

Links between health and homelessness on the mend

Research released by Homeless Link today at its annual conference, *More to life: improving quality of life for homeless people*, shows evidence of good and much needed links between homelessness and health professionals.

Eighty seven per cent of the organisations helping homeless people say that at least some of their service users have substance misuse problems. Eighty two per cent say that at least some of their service users have mental health problems.

The survey of Homeless Link members on accessing health care services for homeless people, revealed that, in the previous three months:

- 77 per cent of homelessness organisations received referrals from substance misuse workers
- 64 per cent received referrals from community mental health teams
- 57 per cent received referrals from mental health hospital discharge officers
- 81 per cent had contact with substance misuse workers
- 74 per cent had contact with GPs.

But there is room for improvement. The research highlights the need for increased joint working between homelessness and healthcare professionals to make services more appropriate for homeless people and overcome any stigma they may experience.

Seventy per cent of respondents believed access to health services was difficult due to stigma.

MORE ...

The research also shows the need to monitor the implementation of local homelessness strategies to ensure that the health needs of homeless people are being addressed effectively. Homeless Link Chief Executive, Jenny Edwards, said:

'The development of local homelessness strategies has been an important move forward. Now we look to see them strengthened to ensure that there are practical and determined steps in place to address the range of needs of homeless people. Health is an area of real concern as many homeless people do not have the chance to gain access to even basic health services.

'Local authorities, who act as service commissioners for Supporting People, should seize the opportunity to ensure that health representatives are actively involved in the development of strategies and the preparation and delivery of joint action.

'Over the next three years Homeless Link's health inclusion project will strengthen joint working between agencies addressing homelessness and health. It will also focus on raising awareness among clinicians and medical practitioners about the issues that homeless people face and promoting examples of good practice.'

ENDS

EDITORS' NOTES:

1. *Homeless Link Health inclusion report* provides research, based on surveys of frontline homelessness organisations, into levels of inclusion for homeless people in accessing primary healthcare and health services. It will inform the work of Homeless Link's three-year health inclusion project. A copy of the full report and summary can be found at www.homeless.org.uk
2. Homeless Link annual conference 2004
More to life: improving quality of life for homeless people
30 June - 1 July 2004
Keynote speaker: Rt Hon Lord Rooker, Minister of State for Regeneration and Renewal Morning 1 July 2004

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