

June 2020



CLINKS  
RESPONSE

# Call for evidence: A review to guide the future of prison mental health care in England

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## About Clinks

1. 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.
2. We are a membership organisation with over 500 members, including the voluntary sector's largest providers as well as its smallest. Our wider national network reaches 4,000 voluntary sector contacts. Overall, through our weekly e-bulletin Light Lunch and our social media activity, we have a network of over 13,000 contacts.
3. 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.
4. Clinks previously published a report, *Whole prison, whole person*<sup>1</sup>, which sets out key principles and recommendations towards developing a whole prison approach to good mental health for people in contact with the criminal justice system, especially those with protected characteristics.

## How far mental health support in prisons is currently meeting needs

5. The voluntary sector working in the criminal justice system provide essential services that support people's mental health in prison. Due to lockdown under Covid-19, they face significant barriers accessing people in prison. Prisons across England are currently on lockdown and voluntary organisations are unable to access people in prisons to provide support. Prisoners are locked up in their cells for 23 hours a day, and unable to access face to face visits, the library, the gym, or facilities for worship. A recent report from HM Inspectorate of Prisons stated that, in one prison, symptomatic prisoners had been isolated in their cells without any

opportunity to come out for a shower or exercise for up to 14 days, with one prisoner noting the negative impact this had on his mental health.<sup>2</sup> Specialist mental health interventions in several prisons have also ceased.<sup>3</sup> Anecdotal evidence from Clinks' health and justice network meetings found that voluntary sector organisations are reporting deteriorating mental health of people in prison having to self-isolate without access to face to face mental health services.

6. Clinks' most recent survey<sup>4</sup> to determine the impact of Covid-19 on voluntary sector organisations working in the criminal justice system, found that organisations are reporting the needs of the people they support have become greater during the pandemic. One organisation stated, "Several service users have reported deterioration in mental health, increased anxiety and this has led to more self-harm with some individuals."

## **Examples of promising or good practice**

7. Despite the restrictions in place due to Covid-19, voluntary organisations working in the criminal justice system are adapting to prison regime changes in order to deliver mental health interventions to service users in prison. Many organisations, including Recoop and Project 507, have put together distraction packs for people in prison. These include activities such as word searches, Sudoku, crossword puzzles, quizzes, a health section, poems, interesting reading and art appreciation.<sup>5</sup> RECOOP's trained buddy support workers<sup>6</sup> have been moved onto healthcare wings to support older, higher risk prisoners to avoid cross-contamination between wings.

## **How needs are likely to change in the future and what this might mean for prison health services**

8. Even before the Covid-19 outbreak, the mental health needs of people in prison have been reported as becoming increasingly acute over the last few years. There are growing concerns that these needs are likely to become even more acute due to Covid-19, as well as a reduction in voluntary mental health services in prisons.
9. Voluntary organisations delivering mental health services in prisons have had to completely scale back or adapt their services. Clinks' recent survey on the impact of Covid-19 found that voluntary organisations working in the criminal justice system are anticipating cash flow problems within the next six months. 43% of organisations surveyed said that they have had to use their reserves due to Covid-19. Our 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.
10. With concerns about the sustainability of the voluntary sector working in the criminal justice system, there may be fewer services available in the future to respond to the increased mental health needs of people in prison, and this is a consequence that needs to be mitigated.

## **Areas for further development and improvement**

11. Voluntary organisations delivering mental health services to people in prison need to be seen as strategic partners that prisons engage with, to ensure that they are able to reach and support service users. However, the sustainability of these organisations is under threat. It is imperative that these organisations receive funding to support them to operate, not only



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through emergency funding, but also through long-term pipeline funding. The funding must ensure, in line with the recommendation from Clinks' *Whole Person, Whole Prison* report, that support is provided for wide range of tailored services to be available to meet the needs of different groups of people in prison, taking into account the different barriers people may face in accessing existing services.

### End Notes

1. Clinks (2019) *Whole prison, whole person*. Online: [https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/clinks\\_whole-prison-mh\\_V4.pdf](https://www.clinks.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/clinks_whole-prison-mh_V4.pdf) [last accessed: 22nd June 2020]
2. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons (2020) *Report on short scrutiny visits to local prisons*. Online: <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmiprison/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2020/05/Locals-SSV-web-2020.pdf> [last accessed: 22nd June 2020]
3. Ibid.
4. Clinks (2020) *Never more needed*. Online: <https://www.clinks.org/community/blog-posts/never-more-needed> [last accessed: 22nd June 2020]
5. RECOOP (2020) *In-cell activity packs*. [online] Available at: <https://www.recoop.org.uk/pages/services/in-cell-activity-packs.php> [last accessed: 22nd June 2020]
6. RECOOP (no date) *Buddy support*. [online] Available at: <https://www.recoop.org.uk/pages/services/buddy-support.php> [last accessed: 22nd June 2020]

# CLINKS

**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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