Homeless Health Matters
Our campaign impact
October 2015
Homelessness hurts

St Mungo’s Broadway provides a bed and support to more than 2,500 people a night who are homeless or at risk. We see the impact of poor health for our clients, and support our clients to improve their physical and mental health as part of their recovery from homelessness.

Our specialist health services

Our LifeWorks service provides psychotherapy to our clients, regardless of substance use. In Bristol, our Assertive Contact and Engagement (ACE) service reaches out to people who currently find it much harder than most to access mental health services. The Sanctuary and our Men’s Crisis House support people in distress or facing mental health crisis.

Our Hospital Discharge Network provides beds for people to recover when they leave hospital, reducing emergency readmissions. StreetMed is an innovative nurse led project that combines the skills of nursing and homeless outreach to help clients overcome barriers to healthcare.

Our Homeless Health Projects in Hammersmith and Westminster work to improve the health of people living in hostels.

We provide end of life care for clients, and training for staff.

Homeless health matters

Research shows that the average age of people who die while homeless is 47. For women, it is just 43. Beyond our own services, we need local and national government to better understand, measure and meet the health needs of people who are homeless. We launched our Homeless Health Matters campaign in October 2014 with the aim of improving the poor health experienced by homeless people.

Single homelessness

St Mungo’s Broadway works primarily with single homeless people – those who are homeless but do not meet the priority need criteria to be housed by their local authority. This group includes couples without children. Single homeless people may be sleeping rough, living in hostels or other supported accommodation, sofa surfing, or living in squats. Many need significant support to move on from homelessness.

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Brian’s story

Brian is 57. After two years sleeping rough, he moved into a St Mungo’s Broadway hostel in Hackney. Brian has angina, suffers from anxiety and depression, and drank 28 cans of cider and beer a day.

When he collapsed in his hostel room, Brian was taken to hospital and diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver. Once he left hospital, he was accepted into the Hospital Discharge Network where the on site nurse and visiting psychiatrist and GP offered him help with his drinking and his mental health.

He says: “Since I’ve been in the unit, I’ve had so much help. I get looked after so well that I’ve cut down [my alcohol intake] to three or four cans a day. It’s been hard but I’ve got the staff here to support me.”

His mental health has improved. “The anxiety stopped me from leaving my room. That has changed now. I attend art, cooking and pottery classes.”

But Brian’s story could have been very different. Too many people who are homeless are discharged from hospital back to the streets.

“If it wasn’t for a place like this, who knows what would have happened.”

“If it wasn’t for a place like this, who knows what would have happened. When you’re on the streets and it’s pouring with rain or snow, you’re down and out, you tend to think things…When you come to a warm bed and staff, things change.”

Brian’s story has also been featured in theguardian.com – ‘Homeless people discharged from hospital had nowhere to go – until now’ (19 August 2015).

Cover photo: St Mungo’s Broadway clients, staff and supporters demand better healthcare for people who are homeless on World Health Day, 7 April 2015
Our case for change

Homelessness is a health issue

- 44% report a long-term physical health problem, compared to 37% of the general population.
- 44% have a diagnosed mental health condition, compared to 23% of the general population. 86% report mental health difficulties.1

This research by Homeless Link backs up what we know about residents in our hostels and supported housing. According to a recent survey of 1,940 St Mungo’s Broadway residents:2

- 44% of our residents report a significant physical health condition
- 56% of our residents use alcohol and/or drugs problematically
- 44% of our residents report a mental health diagnosis or issue
- 21% of our residents report all three problems at the same time

People who are homeless face barriers to accessing services and improving their health.

- Many miss out on mental health care, particularly if they have substance use issues
- Health services are designed to treat one condition at a time, rather than multiple health problems
- Despite recent improvements, some homeless people still struggle to register with a GP
- 51% of people who are homeless lack the basic literacy skills needed to understand written information, like medical guidance and appointment letters.3

How is our campaign creating change at the local level?

We asked local decision makers to understand and include homeless health in their planning, and to commission services that meet the needs of local people who are homeless.

Direct influencing
We started conversations with health leaders across England

Supporter action
3,187 of our supporters contacted local health leaders

Media coverage
We worked with local and national press to raise awareness

We asked Health & Wellbeing Boards to sign our Charter for Homeless Health

Across England, 152 Health & Wellbeing Boards bring together local councils, professionals, commissioners and partners to shape local health plans. By talking about homeless health with Health & Wellbeing Boards, we were able to reach and influence key decision makers in each local area.

We worked with Health & Wellbeing Boards and partners to develop our Charter for Homeless Health. Those who signed the Charter pledged to:

- Identify need by gathering information about homeless health and including it in local plans
- Provide leadership and encourage local agencies to work together
- Commission services that welcome people who are homeless and meet their health needs

We continue to work with Boards who sign the Charter to make sure they are putting it into practice

People who are homeless have their health needs understood and addressed by local health and housing services

A healthier future for people who are homeless

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2 Survey of 1,940 St Mungo’s Broadway residents; May 2015
Nearly 1 in 4 English Health & Wellbeing Boards signed the Charter, including Boards in every region of England.

Plans made by these 35 Boards affect the health of a quarter of England’s population – 13 million people.

Last year, in these 35 local areas:

- More than 32,000 households made a homelessness application to their local authority.
- Nearly 68,000 at risk households were offered homelessness prevention and relief support.
- Over 2,600 people were seen sleeping rough during 2014-15 in the 12 London boroughs that signed the Charter.

Since October 2014, 35 Health & Wellbeing Boards have signed up to our Charter for Homeless Health.
Highlighting good practice

Some Health & Wellbeing Boards told us that they had plans in place to address the health needs of homeless people before they signed the Charter.

7 in 9 said they already included or planned to include the health needs of homeless people in their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA).

7 in 9 said they were already commissioning or planning services that meet the health needs of local people who are homeless.

We were pleased to find that so many Health & Wellbeing Boards were already taking action. As part of the campaign, we spread good practice through local and national media coverage to raise awareness among the public and other Health & Wellbeing Boards.

135 pieces of Homeless Health Matters media coverage, with a reach of 7.6 million people reached on Facebook impressions on Twitter

“How are Health & Wellbeing Boards implementing the Charter?”

Health & Wellbeing Boards who signed the Charter said they were:

- Gathering local information using a homeless health needs audit.
- Consulting local homelessness organisations on their Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Improving joint work between housing and health services.
- Agreeing to develop a hospital discharge protocol for people who are homeless.

“By signing St Mungo’s Broadway’s Homeless Health Charter today we are committing to identifying the specific needs of homeless people, developing services that take those needs into account and that are welcoming and easy to access.”

Dr Martin Jones, Bristol Health & Wellbeing Board

“Homeless people are particularly at risk as they might not have the same access to GPs that others enjoy, nor the same support of family and friends, so it is imperative we commit any help we can offer to address this.”

Cllr Vivienne Lukey, Hammersmith and Fulham Health & Wellbeing Board

“By signing the Charter for Homeless Health, Health & Wellbeing Boards are showing their public commitment to continue their work in the longer term.”

Improving knowledge

7 in 9 Health & Wellbeing Boards who responded to our survey agreed that the campaign improved their knowledge of homeless health issues.

88% found St Mungo’s Broadway reports and guidance documents ‘helpful’ or ‘very helpful’.

Encouraging action

6 in 9 of Health & Wellbeing Boards who responded to our survey said they made new homeless health plans after signing the Charter: Most often, Boards reported new plans to consult with people who are homeless on health plans (four Boards).
The Charter for Homeless Health is just the first step towards a healthier future for people who are homeless. We will support and monitor Health & Wellbeing Boards as they put the Charter into practice by:

- Sharing our information, advice and experience
- Encouraging Health & Wellbeing Boards to engage with our services and clients in areas where we work
- Making plans to repeat our audit of local JSNAs with Homeless Link to monitor progress. In 2014, we found that only a quarter included detailed information about single homelessness.8

We invite all Health & Wellbeing Boards to stay in touch with St Mungo’s Broadway to discuss your progress and challenges. We also encourage other Board to sign up to our Charter for Homeless Health.

We would like to thank all Health & Wellbeing Boards who have supported our Homeless Health Matters campaign. We look forward to hearing feedback from several local areas currently considering the Charter, including the City of London Adult Wellbeing Partnership.

Engaging with Health & Wellbeing Boards across England helped us to learn useful lessons for the future about campaigning and the health system.

Feedback on our Charter for Homeless Health

To understand why some Health & Wellbeing Boards decided not to sign the Charter, we analysed comments from 28 Boards to find the most common themes:

10 Health & Wellbeing Boards said they received too many requests from different organisations asking them to sign similar pledges
8 said that they were already taking action on homeless health
2 said they needed more local information
2 said resources were too limited

The Charter for Homeless Health was designed to start conversations about homeless health with Health & Wellbeing Boards across the country and generate a commitment to act. Though feedback shows that other campaigns have taken a similar approach, Charter has proved to be a useful tool.

Even in areas that didn’t sign, the campaign helped us raise awareness and share our knowledge, guidance and information about homeless health with a wider audience.

We learned that thousands of local campaigners across the country care about homeless health in their area. We are grateful to all our campaigners and organisations like the British Medical Association (BMA) and Medsin that got involved in our campaign.

Campaigning during the election

Local elections in May 2015 led to changes in leadership for many Health & Wellbeing Boards, including some that had already signed the Charter:

We have found that homeless health is an issue of concern to local leaders across the political spectrum during our campaign, and we look forward to working in areas with new Health & Wellbeing Board chairs to take forward their work on homeless health.

Our next steps, local and national

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Our Homeless Health Matters petition

Healthcare services should understand and meet the needs of people who are homeless in their area. Local understanding and action is vital to tackle health inequalities that hurt people who are homeless the most.

But national government also plays a role in improving homeless health. That is why launched our petition to the Health Secretary to make homeless health a priority.

We have identified two key areas where national leadership is needed:

- No one should be barred from mental health treatment because they are struggling to tackle drug or alcohol issues.

We say homeless hospital discharge should be an NHS priority.

Since July 2015, more than 12,000 people have signed the petition to make homeless health a priority. There is public support for further action and we look forward to working with government to deliver a better future for people who are homeless.

About St Mungo’s Broadway

Our vision is that everyone has a place to call home and can fulfil their hopes and ambitions. As a homelessness charity and a housing association our clients are at the heart of what we do.

We provide a bed and support to more than 2,500 people a night who are either homeless or at risk, and work to prevent homelessness.

We support men and women through more than 300 projects including:

- Emergency, hostel and supportive housing projects
- Advice services
- Specialist, physical and mental health services
- Skills and work services

We believe in our clients’ potential. We are committed to every individual’s sustainable recovery.

We currently work across London and the south of England including in Bristol, Reading, Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Essex and Sussex, as well as managing major homelessness sector projects such as StreetLink and the Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN).