

News story: Social prescribing schemes across England to receive £4.5 million

The government will invest nearly £4.5 million in programmes to refer patients to local voluntary and community services such as walking clubs, gardening or arts activities.

The practice, known as 'social prescribing', aims to improve patients' quality of life, health and wellbeing by recognising that health is affected by a range of social, economic and environmental factors.

Evidence shows that this approach can reduce demand on NHS services: a UK study found that after 3 to 4 months, 80% of patients referred to a social prescribing scheme had reduced their use of A&E, outpatient appointments and inpatient admissions.

A total of 23 social prescribing projects in England will receive a share of the funding to extend existing social prescribing schemes or establish new ones.

The schemes include a focus on:

- reaching out to people who may be socially isolated, for example because of mental health problems or learning difficulties
- providing support for those impacted by health inequalities, such as transgender people or people from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds
- helping people with particularly complex needs who regularly access health services

Examples of the schemes receiving funding include:

- a new street games scheme across Sheffield, Southampton, Luton, and Brighton and Hove, focusing on socially excluded young people aged 5 to 25
- a Dudley Council project to expand support for people with a very high dependency on A&E
- a new Citizens Advice North Oxfordshire and South Northamptonshire scheme to support those who are lonely or socially isolated in deprived rural areas

The funding will come from the Health and Wellbeing Fund, part of a programme of government investment in the voluntary sector. The projects will be fully funded through the scheme in their first year. Additional joint funding from local commissioners will be agreed for the subsequent 2 years.

Care Minister Caroline Dinenage said:

The voluntary and community sector has such a vital role to play in

working with our health system to provide the kind of support that you can't receive at your local GP surgery or hospital.

This new funding will mean that many more people receive support that looks at their needs holistically, enabling them to live happier, more independent lives. I look forward to seeing these projects put their plans into action and provide support to hundreds of thousands more people.