



Revolving Doors Agency response to the Independent Review into the impact on employment outcomes of drug or alcohol addiction, and obesity call for evidence

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About Revolving Doors

Revolving Doors Agency is a charity working across England to change systems and improve services for people who face multiple and complex needs, including poor mental health, and come into repeated contact with the police and criminal justice system. We work with policymakers, commissioners, local decision-makers, and frontline professionals to share evidence, demonstrate effective solutions, and change policy, while involving people with direct experience of the problem in all our work through our National Service User Forum.

Summary

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this review. This submission will focus on employment outcomes for individuals facing drug and/or alcohol addictions. However, in doing so **it is important to stress that such conditions rarely arise in isolation and are likely to be linked to a range of other problems and barriers, such as: poor mental health; trauma; violence and abuse; repeat victimisation; social isolation; homelessness; and challenges linked to current or past offending behaviour.** A recent report identified that half (48%) of people accessing drug treatment services are also in contact with the criminal justice system and/or homelessness services.¹ It is therefore likely that an even higher percentage will have experience of some of the other issues highlighted above.

We focus in particular on the significant proportion of those addicted to drugs and/or alcohol who face multiple and complex overlapping needs. Many people in this situation will be living chaotic lives. They experience repeated exclusion from mainstream support services, which struggle to respond to their multiple problems, and have in many cases been let down by generic employment support and mainstream welfare to work initiatives like the work programme.² We agree that work should be the ultimate aspiration for everyone. However, for the estimated 58,000 individuals across England facing the most complex needs,³ employment is usually seen as a more distant goal compared with the immediate need to achieve greater stability and to escape from a negative 'revolving door' cycle of crisis and crime.

¹ Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., et al (2014) *Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage – England* London: LankellyChase Foundation, p. 13. Available here:

http://www.lankellychase.org.uk/assets/0000/2858/Hard_Edges_Mapping_SMD_FINAL_VERSION_Web.pdf

² See *Can the Work Programme work for all user groups?*, DWP Committee, May 2013

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmworpen/162/162.pdf & Work Programme Official Statistics, DWP, March 2014 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300387/work-programmestatisticalrelease_mar14.pdf

³ Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., et al (2014) *Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage – England* London: LankellyChase Foundation, p. 13.

Evidence suggests that people in this situation have already been hard-hit by increased use of sanctions in the welfare system.⁴ For people in this situation, **an increase in conditionality by linking benefit entitlements to engaging in treatment is unlikely to improve employment outcomes alone, and could jeopardise the recovery journey** by, for example, cutting off support just when it is needed most in a period of relapse. We are also concerned that such as policy places the focus too squarely on the individual, without paying sufficient attention to the systems and services that are struggling to provide the right kind of support. With significant cuts to public health budgets, and substance misuse services reporting challenges,⁵ we feel that greater attention should be given to efforts to coordinate effective support from across the system for those with drug and alcohol addiction, rather than to relying on sanctions as a driver of change.

With the right intensive, coordinated, and holistic support in place, the evidence shows that people facing multiple and complex needs linked to drug and/or alcohol addiction can begin to turn their lives around and achieve the stability that could be a stepping stone towards employment.

This submission draws on evidence from our research and local development work, as well as the views of members of our National Service User Forum, and calls for:

- A locally-led approach to commissioning employment support for the most vulnerable groups, enabling a more tailored approach to avoid the challenges faced by the Work Programme in responding to clients with complex needs.
- An immediate review of the impact of welfare sanctions on vulnerable groups who face multiple needs, with recommendations for a fairer and more proportionate system
- An understanding of multiple needs should be at the heart of any welfare reforms
- We suggest a stepped approach to welfare for people facing multiple and complex needs, outlined below.

In our response, we focus on questions 1 and 3 in the review.

1. What is the experience of people with obesity or drug or alcohol conditions within a) employment support services; b) health care; and c) the benefits system?
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As our response to question 3 sets out in further detail, drug or alcohol conditions rarely arise in isolation and should not be treated as such. A significant minority of those experiencing addiction will face multiple and complex needs, with substance misuse issues overlapping with poor mental health, homelessness, and offending needs among other problems.

People in this situation experience significant barriers to engaging with mainstream support services, including employment support, healthcare, and the benefits system. Based on a review of key literature, our report *Complex Responses: Understanding poor frontline responses to adults with multiple needs* notes that people facing multiple and complex needs typically experience:⁶

- Poor relationships with staff
- A lack of user involvement in care planning
- Delays in getting help when needed
- Problems navigating systems
- Refusal of or exclusion from service

⁴ MEAM (2014) *Evidence from the frontline: How policy changes are affecting people experiencing multiple needs*. Available here: <http://meam.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/EvidenceFromTheFrontline.pdf>

⁵ DrugScope (2015) *State of the Sector 2014-15*. Available here: <https://drugscopelegacysite.files.wordpress.com/2015/06/sosfinal2015.pdf>

⁶ Anderson, S. (2011) *Complex Responses: Understanding poor frontline responses to adults with multiple needs* London: Revolving Doors Agency, available online here: <http://www.revolvingdoors.org.uk/documents/complexresponses-2011/>

- Poor continuity of care
- A fragmented service response

Underlying these poor service responses is a combination of: **interpersonal barriers** (e.g. stigma, client histories of trauma resulting in a lack of trust and linked to challenging behaviours; and staff anxieties about responding to complex needs); **professional and organisational barriers** (e.g. service design with restrictive operating hours and rigid appointments that exclude chaotic clients; professional models of care that focus too narrowly on single or 'primary' issues; and organisational cultures with a low tolerance of risk), and **structural barriers**. Structural barriers identified included:

- **Lack of coordination** – Their overlapping problems cut across different service boundaries, with no one agency ultimately responsible
- **Funding and commissioning arrangements** which are focused in silos, and create barriers to partnership working and coordination of support
- **Limited resources** leading to high service thresholds and high caseloads, and professionals acting as gatekeepers – turning those with complex needs away as they do not fit the service
- **Legislative framework** – gaps in services where there is no statutory duty to support, and categories that exclude particular groups

Specifically in relation to each of the service areas raised:

Employment services

Revolving Doors held a recent workshop '*Supporting people with complex and multiple needs in Sutton to find employment*', in Sutton bringing together people with multiple needs who are unemployed, along with commissioners and service providers. The workshop identified key barriers for this group in finding employment.

Lack of connection between services was identified as one of the main barriers. Users point out that many service providers do not have any information about their needs and progress from other services they are involved with (e.g. Job Centre Plus not aware of user's health or treatment needs). Service providers are sometimes unaware of the existence of complementary services that could help the user. This became particularly problematic as the service user tried to move from capability into employment.

“no real connection between Work Programme and probation”

“getting too many appointments from probation, job centre and support groups”

Another identified problem was the risk involved in moving from benefits into employment if this were to be unsuccessful. Service users felt it was too “risky” to make the move into work as they were not confident about maintaining the job or that they would enjoy the job.

“being able to trial something and not risk losing benefits”

“scaffold of support around individuals that can be removed when ready”

“transition period where you keep your benefits”

Other key identified issues included: stigma, especially in regard to poor mental health: *“employers won't take the chance of employing people with mental health problems, criminal record or drugs”*; lack of face to face support; difficult telephone systems blocking service users from getting help; and difficulty getting financial support and advice.

Recent reports on the Work Programme reflect the negative experiences members of our National Service User Forum have reported in stating that it does not work for those who are 'hardest to reach' and face the most complex needs. The structure of the programme often meant that those facing the most complex problems were 'parked'.⁷

As our report *Adding Value? Reflection on payment by results for people with multiple and complex needs* found, large payment by results schemes such as this are likely to fail this group, with significant challenges in making this kind of model work for individuals facing multiple and complex needs.⁸

We support more localised employment support for those facing more complex needs, enabling local flexibility and better coordination with local services. We support plans to include this within local 'devolution deals' as part of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill, and suggest that the government should encourage local areas to provide more tailored employment support people facing multiple and complex needs, which: links with other support in place, takes a gradual "stepped" approach (see question 3 below), and recognises progress such as volunteering and increased stability.

The benefits system

Research by Revolving Doors Agency shows that many individuals facing multiple and complex needs also experience exclusion from the benefits system. Our Hand to Mouth report showed that individuals with multiple needs live lives defined by poverty. Transitions such as entering or leaving prison or becoming homeless often led to both personal and financial crisis, and with no financial contingency this group were usually reliant on a benefits system which they experienced as complicated, slow and unhelpful. In extreme circumstances, some returned to crime as a proven source of income. Unexpected costs, such as fines, led to stress and anxiety and could also precipitate a return to criminal activity.⁹

Evidence suggests that people facing multiple and complex needs have already been hard-hit by increased use of sanctions in the welfare system.¹⁰ We call for **an immediate review of the impact of welfare sanctions on vulnerable groups who face multiple needs**, with recommendations for a fairer and more proportionate system.

3. What other physical and mental health conditions are these groups likely to face? How do these interact with non-health related barriers to employment? What additional support or interventions might be required to help people overcome these barriers to employment?

We welcome the acknowledgement in this review that issues relating to drug and alcohol addiction and employment cannot be treated in isolation. There is strong evidence of the overlap between substance misuse, poor mental health, and a range of other needs and barriers to employment.

⁷ See *Can the Work Programme work for all user groups?*, DWP Committee, May 2013 www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmworpen/162/162.pdf & Work Programme Official Statistics, DWP, March 2014 www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/300387/work-programmestatisticalrelease_mar14.pdf

⁸ Britton, S. (2015) *Adding Value? Reflection on payment by results for people with multiple and complex needs* London: Revolving Doors Agency. Available here: <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/adding-value-reflections-onpayment-by-results/>

⁹ See Pratt, E., & Jones, S. (2009) *Hand to Mouth: the impact of poverty and social exclusion on adults with multiple needs* London: Revolving Doors Agency. Available here: <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/hand-to-mouth/>

¹⁰ MEAM (2014) *Evidence from the frontline: How policy changes are affecting people experiencing multiple needs*.

The most comprehensive statistical study of overlapping need to date is LankellyChase Foundation's *Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage* report. This mapped across key homelessness, criminal justice, and substance misuse databases in England to identify an estimated:

- 58,000 individuals facing all 3 needs (offending, substance misuse, homelessness)
- 99,000 people have a combination of substance + offending issues
- 34,000 homelessness + substance issues,
- 1,470 cases facing 2+ of the above needs in an average local authority each year

Strikingly, *Hard Edges* report finds that almost half (48%) of people in drug misuse services are also accessing homelessness or criminal justice services.

Other characteristics of this cohort included: poor mental health (40% had an identified mental health problem); high levels of unemployment and poverty (with over half of those experiencing all 3 needs reliant on welfare benefits for most of their adult lives); and histories of trauma (85% had traumatic experiences in childhood).¹¹ On their own, each of these issues represents a significant barrier to employment. However, when they combine this adds the problem adds up to more than the sum of its parts, with each problem feeding into each other and creating a negative cycle. For people caught in this situation, the goal is more immediately likely to be achieving stability rather than achieving employment.

Our experience over 20 years of piloting and evaluating services for people in this situation shows that intensive support is required to achieve greater stability. As our recent publication *Comprehensive services for complex needs: A summary of the evidence* shows, services taking a person-centred approach and coordinating interventions that work intensively and holistically can help to improve health, housing, criminal justice, and wellbeing outcomes for people in this situation, and move people towards the stability that could be a stepping stone to employment.¹²

Principles of effective support

Through our research and local development work, Revolving Doors Agency have developed 10 emerging principles of effective support for people facing multiple and complex needs:

1. **'Someone on your side'**: Lead professional approach, with opportunity to build consistent, positive and trusting relationships.
2. **Assertive and persistent**: An assertive and persistent approach to engagement that does not give up on people. Continuous and consistent support over a prolonged period, responding positively and constructively to setbacks.
3. **Tailored**: A personalised approach which addresses the full gambit of an individual's needs and is culturally sensitive to particular needs of specific groups including women, people of Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and young adults.
4. **Building on strengths**: Supports the client to recognise and develop personal strengths, recognising more than a 'bundle of needs and problems'.
5. **Coordinated and seamless**: Understands and links with other services, pulls services together around the client, helps clients to access and coordinate support through brokerage and advocacy. Ensures continuous support across key transitions, avoiding gaps in care.
6. **Flexible and responsive**: Flexible approach to support and an ability to react quickly in a crisis.
7. **'No wrong door'**: If a service cannot provide support, they take responsibility for connecting the client with someone who can.
8. **Trauma informed**: Understands the emotional and behavioural impact of traumatic childhood and life experiences on clients and vicarious trauma on staff, avoids retraumatisation, facilitates reflective practice, builds resilience and supports recovery.
9. **Coproduced**: Designed in partnership with service users.
10. **Strategically supported**: Has the buy-in of senior, strategic stakeholders.

¹¹

Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., et al (2014) *Hard Edges: Mapping severe and multiple disadvantage – England* London: LankellyChase Foundation, p. 13. Available here:

http://www.lankellychase.org.uk/assets/0000/2858/Hard_Edges_Mapping_SMD_FINAL_VERSION_Web.pdf

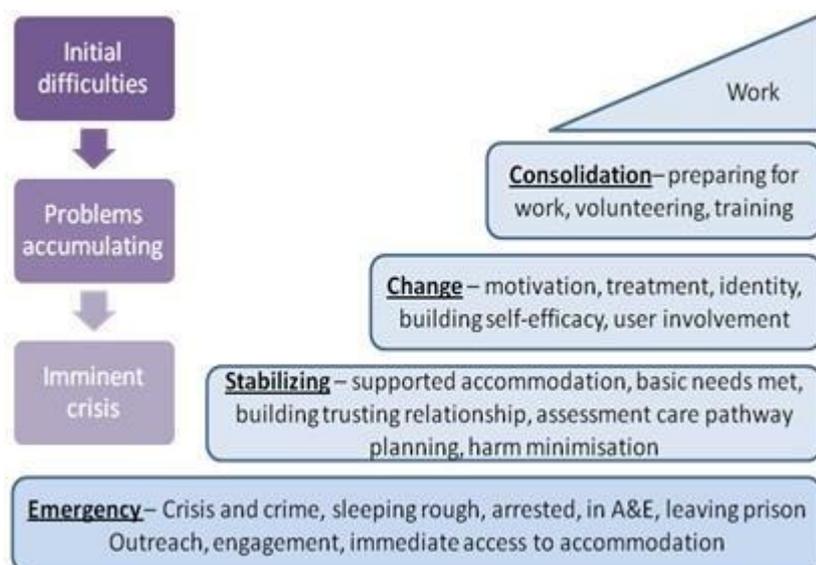
¹²

Revolving Doors Agency & Centre for Mental Health (2015), *Comprehensive Services for Complex Needs: A summary of the evidence*. Available here: <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/comp-services-complex-needs-summary-of-the-evidence/>

For this reason, **we support a stepped approach to welfare for people facing the most complex needs, recognising the need for a period of stabilisation and a gradual move towards employment**. Figure 1 below provides a representative of this stepped approach, which should be considered in the commissioning, design and delivery of welfare services for individuals facing multiple and complex needs.¹⁰

Figure1: A stepped approach to welfare for people facing multiple and complex needs.

¹⁰ See <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/policy--research/key-issues/welfare/a-stepped-approach-to-welfare/> for further information.



Taking such an approach, **it is also important to ensure that support for the most excluded individuals continues into employment, where people are able to find a job.** For those facing the most entrenched needs, recovery is an often fragile journey, and removing support as soon as a job outcome is achieved can risk not only the chances of sustaining employment, but also make relapse more likely. As one member of our National Service User Forum has stated:

“Once I got a job, I was left with very little support. And what ended up happening was I had practically a breakdown. It was take the drugs again because I knew they took the pain away”

In our recent Good Life¹¹ research, many participants articulated their ‘good life’ as a journey. Journeys of desistance from crime and recovery from substance misuse were part of their progress. However, it is important to note that this journey was about much more than simply becoming drugfree or crime-free, but that this status could help achieve a broader ‘good life’. Progress on this journey was characterised by a stable, healthy life which included good friends, internal calm, and making a positive contribution. These journeys were often challenging and non-linear, with setbacks to be expected. Two participants used a metaphor of a mountain to illustrate their ‘uphill climb’ towards a good life (see Collage 5, p. 15). This progress was recognised by one participant to have its drawbacks: *“it’s good to get to the mountain top...but it’s also lonely on the mountain top, so it’s good to come down to the valley for fun, nuttiness and people.”*

Conclusion

We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to this review, and the acknowledgement throughout the review document that drug and alcohol addiction is usually linked to a range of other problems and should not be considered in isolation. We have significant concerns regarding proposals to link benefit entitlements to engaging with drug and alcohol treatment, and feel this could be counterproductive to the recovery process for those facing multiple and complex needs linked to their

¹¹ Revolving Doors Agency (2015), *A Good Life: Exploring what matters to people facing multiple and complex needs*. Available here: <http://www.revolving-doors.org.uk/documents/good-life/>

addiction. However, we hope this review provides an opportunity to take stock and redesign how employment support works for the most vulnerable people.

While we have reflected some of our research in this submission, we feel that the review would benefit from direct input from individuals with direct experience of multiple and complex needs and drug and/or alcohol addiction. We therefore invite representatives of the review to discuss these issues with members of our National Service User Forum. Please get in touch on the contact details below if this would be of interest.

For further information, or to discuss these issues with members of our National Service User Forum, please contact:

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