

Meeting the Requirements of Equality Legislation

A Fairer NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde 2013 – 2016

Briefing Paper:
Prisoners

June 2013

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Prisoners

Demographics / Health needs

Demographics

- Latest statistics indicate that the number of prisoners held in Scottish prisons is rising significantly.
- In 2009/10, the average daily population in Scottish prisons totalled 7,964, an increase of 1.7% on the previous year, an increase of 27% on the previous decade and the highest average annual level ever recorded. The main driver of the significant increase in prison numbers is an increase in sentence lengths and in the number of indeterminate sentences.
- Among men, the largest single group is young men aged under 30, with a progressive tailing off by age, with relatively small numbers of men aged over 55 typically in custody.
- There has also been a disproportionate increase in the population of women prisoners, although they still make up a small proportion of the prison population. In 2009/10 the female prison population was 424, 5.3% of the total, an increase of 3% on the previous year. Over the ten year period, 2000/01 – 2009/10, the average daily female prison population has doubled.

Health needs¹

- There has historically been no national routine reporting on health statistics of prisoners.
- A comprehensive health care needs assessment on the health of Scottish prisoners was conducted in 2007 (Graham, L. 2007, Prison Health in Scotland: A Healthcare needs Assessment) and there is selected self reporting by prisoners on key health issues in the annual prisoner surveys.
- All available data from the study indicates that there are significant health inequalities experienced by people in prison as compared to the general population.
- Significant recent findings on key health issues for the prison population are given here.

Alcohol

- 45% of prisoners are likely to have an alcohol problem compared to 15% of men and 9% of women in the general population.

Drug misuse

- In 2008/09 71% of prisoners tested positive for illegal drugs on reception to prison with 29% testing positive on release.
- The high percentages of alcohol and drug use amongst the prison population may be seen to reinforce popular stereotyping that offenders are drug addicts or alcoholics. It should be acknowledged that while drugs and alcohol are significant contributing factors in offending behaviour they are not necessarily indicative of the life and health circumstances of all prisoners.

Tobacco use

- 76% of prisoners smoke compared with 26% of the general population (or 34% in men aged 16-64 years).

Coronary Heart Disease

- 2% of prisoners were recorded as having Coronary Heart Disease, similar to expected figures (1.8%). This is lower than figures for the population as a whole (3.5-4.5%)

Mental Health

- There are no robust figures for the prevalence of mental health problems in Scottish prisoners though prescribing indicators suggest a considerable burden, in particular for depression and psychosis. 14% of prisoners were reported as having a psychiatric history and 7.3% a history of self harm, including attempted suicide. In 2008, 4.5% prisoners were identified as having a 'severe or enduring' mental health problem, rates of which were higher than those in the general population
- Research has also found that there are higher instances of asthma amongst the prison population, while severe dental decay in male prisoners was three times that of the general population (29% compared to 10%) whilst for women prisoners it was 14 times greater (42% compared with 3%).
- From epidemiological studies, it is estimated that 16-20% of the Scottish prisoner population are Hepatitis C positive.

Patient experience

NHSGGC has undertaken 2 significant prison health engagement exercises since 2011. The first sought to better understand the potential differentials in health care experience resulting from legally protected characteristics and was conducted by the Corporate Inequalities Team in November 2011. The second and more in-depth assessment of health care in prisons was undertaken during the first half of 2012, with a final report, NHSGGC Prison Health Assessment, published in August 2012. Both reports and their specific engagement activity are available at – http://www.equalitiesinhealth.org/public_html/prisoners.html

Experience of discrimination

Prisoners and ex-offenders are more likely to experience additional inequalities as a result of negative stereotyping or discrimination and this contributes to their views not being heard, lack of access to resources and services and to poorer health outcomes generally. General perceptions of prisoners and ex-offenders are that they are anti-social, untrustworthy and liable to display threatening behaviour.

As a distinct group, people with criminal convictions, particularly those who have served custodial sentences, experience amongst the highest levels of discrimination and stereotyping in comparison to the unfair treatment experienced by other protected characteristics and marginalised groups.

Resources to help

A wide range of resources are available on the Equalities in Health website –
http://www.equalitiesinhealth.org/public_html/prisoners.html

Training available in house

NHS staff can access an E-learning module on prisoners and ex-offenders on StaffNet –
<http://www.staffnet.ggc.scot.nhs.uk/Human%20Resources/Learning%20and%20Education/E-Learning/Pages/E-Learning%20Homepage.aspx>

Involvement

To reduce barriers to services local areas should include ex-offenders in local engagement.

Activity to address discrimination

A criminal record can be a significant barrier to employment. The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 supports the position that some criminal convictions can be 'spent' after a period of time and so do not need to be disclosed to prospective employers. Any employer discriminating on the grounds of a 'spent' conviction would be in breach of the law.

Families of prisoners may also experience stigma and increased poverty so their needs should be considered by local services.

References

1. Graham, L. 2007, Prison Health in Scotland: A Healthcare needs Assessment
2. Alcohol Statistics Scotland, 2009
3. The Scottish Health Survey, 2008
4. Drug Misuse Statistics Scotland, 2009
5. Scottish Prisoner Survey, 2009
6. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons, 2008.

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1. **Age**
2. **Asylum Seekers and Refugees**
3. **Bowel Screening**
4. **Gender Reassignment and Transgender**
5. **Homelessness**
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