

## The Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES)

Addressing the challenges faced by 'front line' practitioners

### Exploring the impact of Citizens Advice activities on improving health



**Welfare advice services improve people's financial position; however, understanding their potential health impact is more difficult**

#### Background

Citizen Advice (CA) provides people with free advice on issues related to debt, benefits, employment, housing and discrimination. Therefore, they address the social determinants of health, which can affect health inequalities. CA offers a number of interventions, from one off ad hoc advice, responding to an acute crisis, to longer term follow up and focussed help. Reviews highlight evidence for the impact of advice services in improving mental health and well-being, daily living and social relationships (Burrows et al. 2011; Citizens Advice Bureau, 2014).

#### Our practitioner partners

The PHPES scheme enables people working in public health, who are introducing innovative initiatives aimed at improving health, to work in partnership with NIHR SPHR to conduct rigorous evaluations of their cost-effectiveness.

NIHR SPHR researchers worked with Citizens Advice, Gateshead in order to evaluate how some of their intensive programmes may impact people's health.

There is also some evidence for the impact of advice services in increasing accessibility of health services, and reducing general practitioner appointments and prescriptions (Palmer et al. 2012; Citizens Advice Bureau, 2012).

However, the context and mechanisms through which advice services and associated financial or non-financial benefits may generate health improvements is unclear. Research is needed to unpick the different kinds of support offered by CA, how this may lead to changes in health, and the contexts in which health improvements are most likely to happen.

This project focussed particularly on three CA projects:

- A young persons' project targeting individuals between 16 and 25 and their family members
- A mental health project targeting people with severe and enduring mental health issues
- A project for people referred by GP practice staff targeting people who have difficulty leaving their home

#### Key issues

Welfare advice is suggested to improve people's health through action on the wider determinants of health. Demonstrating health impacts is difficult for three principal reasons:

## Key issues contd.

- 1) Interventions are bespoke to individual circumstances and go beyond welfare advice to encompass the person as a whole and their social, personal, health, housing and financial environments. Interventions are therefore not standardised, and could not be evaluated against any clear control.
- 2) Health outcomes, when they do occur, rarely occur as a result of the intervention only, or in any timescale that is easy to capture by intervention deliverers.
- 3) Client's individual circumstances vary widely, and therefore so do the potential for CA interventions to impact health.

## Key research question

How, for whom and in what circumstances do Citizens Advice (CA) interventions improve people's health?

## Methods

Realist evaluation is a theory driven approach that seeks to make explicit how an intervention is expected to work at the outset of the evaluation before going on to test these theories through empirical data.

Development of programme theories (PT) which are tested using qualitative and quantitative data aim to find:

- What are the health outcomes (positive, negative and/or unintended) for CA clients?
- What are the mechanisms (including resource and reasoning) by which these outcomes are achieved?
- What are the facilitative contexts that allow mechanisms to 'fire'.

Project phase	Methods
Building PT	Literature Interviews with CAB staff (n=3)
Refining PT	Interviews with CAB staff (n=3)
Testing PT with empirical data	<b>Quantitative:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Perceived stress scale</li><li>• Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale</li></ul> <b>Qualitative:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Interviews with CAB clients (n= 23)</li></ul>
Development of a bespoke data recording template to capture long term impact	Collaborative work with Gateshead CAB staff

### About NIHR SPHR

The NIHR SPHR aims to build a high quality evidence base for cost-effective public health practices. We work with local practitioners and members of the public, carrying out a wide range of research projects and programmes with a school wide focus on alcohol, ageing well and health inequalities

## Key findings and learnings for practice

CA interventions substantially decrease stress and improve wellbeing. Interim findings suggest that this is because:

- Support from CAB with financial concerns reduces people's stress and anxiety, helping them to feel more in control and able to make healthy lifestyle changes.
- The impartial and non-judgmental nature of CAB advice helps clients who are mistrustful of state services to feel supported in navigating the welfare system, resulting in greater confidence to take action.
- People with an existing health condition are more likely to use income to support healthy decisions than those who see health consequences as very distant.

## Public involvement

Efforts were made to recruit CA users onto project steering groups but these were unfortunately unsuccessful.

## What next?

An event to ensure timely translation of our findings into practice will take place on 21 March 2017. To register for the event, please contact Philip Hodgson ([philip2.hodgson@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:philip2.hodgson@northumbria.ac.uk))

## References/resources

Forster N, Dalkin S, Lhussier M, Hodgson P, Carr S. Exposing the impact of advice services on health and inequalities: A realist evaluation protocol *BMJ Open*. 2016; 6:e009887 doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2015-009887

## SPHR Contact/Find out more

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### About PHPES

PHPES projects are:

- **generated by front line practitioners,**
- **designed to provide transferable, robust evidence on the impact of local practice for local practitioners,**
- **developed and delivered in collaboration with NIHR SPHR academics building evaluative capacity in public health practice.**