

REC'D 25/4/05

SPB. 227105.



Addressing Homelessness

Regional Strategy Team
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Castle Buildings
Stormont
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DC/mw
20 April, 2005

Dear Sirs

**Simon Community NI response to:
A Healthier Future
A Twenty-Year Vision for Health & Wellbeing in NI**

Please find enclosed Simon Community NI response to a Healthier Future and A Twenty-Year Vision for Health & Wellbeing in NI.

Thank you for accepting at this late stage.

Yours faithfully

David Carroll

DC

David Carroll
Director Development



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE



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Simon Community NI response to:

- **A Healthier Future**
- **A Twenty-Year Vision for Health & Wellbeing in Northern Ireland**

April 2005

Simon Community NI welcomes the opportunity to offer a response to “ a Healthier Future”.

An individual’s health is determined by a wide range of economic, social and environmental influences, as well as hereditary factors. Accommodation is perhaps one of the most important influences on health and wellbeing. Research indicates that homelessness and poor living conditions (or housing exclusion) are closely associated with ill health. It is therefore not surprising to learn that the incidence of illness in homeless people has been shown to be higher than that of the general population.

Not only do homeless people experience more health problems than the general population they also have greater difficulties accessing health care services. The conditions associated with homelessness have been shown not only to have a profound effect on an individual’s ability to maintain good health but also to get treatment when health is compromised and indeed to recover even after treatment is received.

The overarching principles of the Vision are welcome. Simon Community particularly welcomes the recognition within the document (p.79) of the particular health needs of homeless people. The Vision also recognises the requirement for a joined up and integrated approach to the delivery of services to this group and the role that Promoting Social Inclusion has Enquiry into Homelessness has in achieving this goal.

Policy Direction 1: Our overall aim is to improve the physical and mental health and social wellbeing of the people of Northern Ireland.

Policy Direction 1 clearly outlines the intention to improve the health of the people of Northern Ireland. The “Journey of a Lifetime” is a reflection of the intervention required at all stages of life to improve the health of the community. The “Journey” also mirrors the experience of homeless. Homelessness touches all ages. 10, 000 children were part of the families that presented as homeless in 2003/04; leaving care is a major predictor of homelessness and unfortunately the amount of individuals over 60 who present as homeless is increasing. Consequently the interventions required from health and social services targeted at homeless people can play a vital role in intervening in the Cycle of homelessness.

These services include

- Health Visiting Services for Homeless children
- Specific G.P. intervention
- Primary, Secondary and Tertiary care.
- Young people Leaving Care
- Mental health services
- Drug and alcohol Services.

Policy Direction 2: We remain committed to *Investing for Health*, as the overarching cross-governmental policy for promoting population health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities.

Simon community N.I. would support this commitment and welcomed the Investing for Health fund which was administered by the Community Foundation. The impact of the fund was curtailed by the time the bound nature of the fund. In addition the learning from the programme has not yet been collated and shared with interested groups. Furthermore we can find little evidence of the policy’s impact as an overarching cross departmental initiative The PSI Consultation report on homelessness could have reflected the initiative more strongly. Also the recent Water Reform consultation did not make and links between poverty, debt, health and water charging.

Policy Direction 3: Promoting health and wellbeing is the responsibility of everyone across the HPSS, including commissioning organisations and service delivery organisations.

Homelessness is not an uni-dimensional issue. The recent multi-agency enquiry, which was conducted as part of the PSI review, highlighted the need for various agencies to work together on this issue to effectively intervene in the cycle of homelessness. Recent Eastern Health Board funding for the Greater Belfast Multi-disciplinary Assessment Teams demonstrates clear evidence of the success of such intervention. It is recommended that DHSSPS take into account the recommendations and implications within the completed PSI report within its 20 Year Vision.

Simon Community recommend that each Board's Trust publish specific plans in respect of Homelessness and Health in order to co-ordinate its multi-agency approach to this issue.

Simon Community would also recommend that the Anti Poverty Strategy and Regional/National Action Plans on poverty and Investing For Health are examined as a paradigms by which cross departmental responsibilities towards all aspects of homelessness including health could be co-ordinated.

Policy Direction 5: We will break down organisational, sectoral and professional boundaries over the next twenty years to improve the ability of our services to respond to people's individual and collective needs.

The best possible outcomes for homeless people relating to health intervention are achieved when services are integrated between sectors e.g. between voluntary and statutory agencies and between professionals.

One example of current good practice is the Chest Heart and Stroke Energise programme which seeks to deliver health promotion messages and interventions to people in temporary hostel accommodation. It's success depends on the professional co-operation between health promotion workers and homelessness district nursing staff within North & West Belfast HSS Trust and South & East Belfast HSS Trust.

Voluntary and Statutory agency co-operation is also demonstrated in the Extern Homeless Multi-Disciplinary Assessment Team which is a partnership between NIHE/Extern and EHSSB.

Policy Direction 8: We will develop Multi-skilled Teams and Networks based primarily in communities but supported by and including people working in hospitals.

Simon Community NI welcome the recognition for improved pathways between community based services and hospital. In respect of homelessness this has a resonance for a number of issues:

- (i) Care and support planning for homeless people is essential in respect of individuals being discharged from hospital into temporary accommodation.
- (ii) It is essential that Hospital Social Services and A&E staff are adequately trained in homelessness issues, discharge planning and the availability of resources for this group.

Policy Direction 10: We will place a special emphasis on meeting the needs of key groups by tailoring services to those needs and by placing a special emphasis on them.

Simon Community NI welcomes the Vision's recognition (p.89) that homelessness should be regarded as a key group in the tailoring of services.

Simon Community NI considers that this could be achieved in the following way:

- Full implementation of the Promoting Social Inclusion report on homelessness.
- For each Trust/Board to arrive at specific strategic plans in respect of homelessness and health which would follow precedent in Scotland.
- Having clear strategic links between NIHE Homelessness Strategy and NI Drugs & Alcohol Strategy.
- The Children's Service Planning process to target homeless young people and children for specific interventions.
- The Review of Mental Health and Learning Disability to take particular cognisance of the mental health needs of homeless people regarding the targeting of services.

Policy Direction 9: We will work to enhance the role of hospitals in supporting community-based services and in providing services which can not be provided appropriately in the community setting.

Deloitte/Simon Community NI 2004 highlights the need for access to appropriate substance use detoxification services for homeless people. Policy Direction 9 should take into account how hospital based services can support homeless people realising stability in respect of substance use and other health issues such as mental health.

Policy Direction 12: We will promote the development of shared learning and common competencies throughout the health and social services including the HPSS, the private sector, the independent sector and the community and voluntary sector.

The training of health and social services staff in homelessness issues is essential to ensure the proper delivery of services to homeless people. Simon Community NI have in the last number of years delivered training to nursing, social work and housing management staff in homelessness issues through the operation of its Education department.

Simon Community NI advocates that homelessness should become a core part of all Health and Social Services professionals' pre qualification and professional development training.