

Personalised Care



Social prescribing link workers: Reference guide for primary care networks

Updated June 2020

NHS England and NHS Improvement



**Social prescribing link workers:
Reference guide for primary care networks** (updated June 2020)

Other formats of this document are available on request. If required, please contact england.personalisedcare@nhs.net

Who is this guide for?

This guide has been created for practice managers and clinical leads within primary care networks (PCNs), for social prescribing link workers, commissioners and local system partners, including voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) leaders, public health leaders, people with lived experience and patient groups. It should be read in conjunction with the accompanying document: [Reference guide for primary care networks – Technical Annex](#).¹

Aims of this guide

This guide is provided as additional information to help PCNs introduce the role of social prescribing link worker into their multi-disciplinary teams as part of the expansion to the primary care workforce introduced under the GP contract reforms, using the national funding available from July 2019, as part of the Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service (DES). It builds on the local system guidance provided in the [Social Prescribing and Community-Based Support Summary Guide](#).² It should be read alongside other guidance that will be published about PCNs and the additional roles being funded under the [Network Contract DES Specification 2020/21](#).³

Social prescribing is part of a commitment to personalised care

Personalised care means all people have choice and control over the way their care is planned and delivered, based on ‘what matters to me’ and individual strengths and diverse needs. This happens within a system that makes the most of the expertise, capacity and potential of people, families and communities in creating better health access, outcomes and experiences. Personalised care takes a whole-system approach, integrating services around the person. It is an all-age model, from maternity and childhood through to end of life, encompassing both mental and physical health support. It can contribute to advancing equality and reducing inequalities in access and outcomes for all⁴.

Social prescribing is one of six key components of the [NHS England comprehensive model for personalised care](#).⁵ Alongside shared decision making, personalised care and support planning, supported self-management, personal health budgets and broader choice within the NHS, social prescribing enables people to be more involved in their care. Social prescribing should be delivered as part of a broader shift to personalise care in PCNs and local areas.

A key component of the Network Contract DES from 2021/22 will be the implementation of the Personalised Care service specification. Social prescribing link workers will take a role in supporting the delivery of this service specification.

¹ NHS England and NHS Improvement (2019), Social prescribing link workers: Reference guide for primary care networks – Technical Annex: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/social-prescribing-link-workers/>

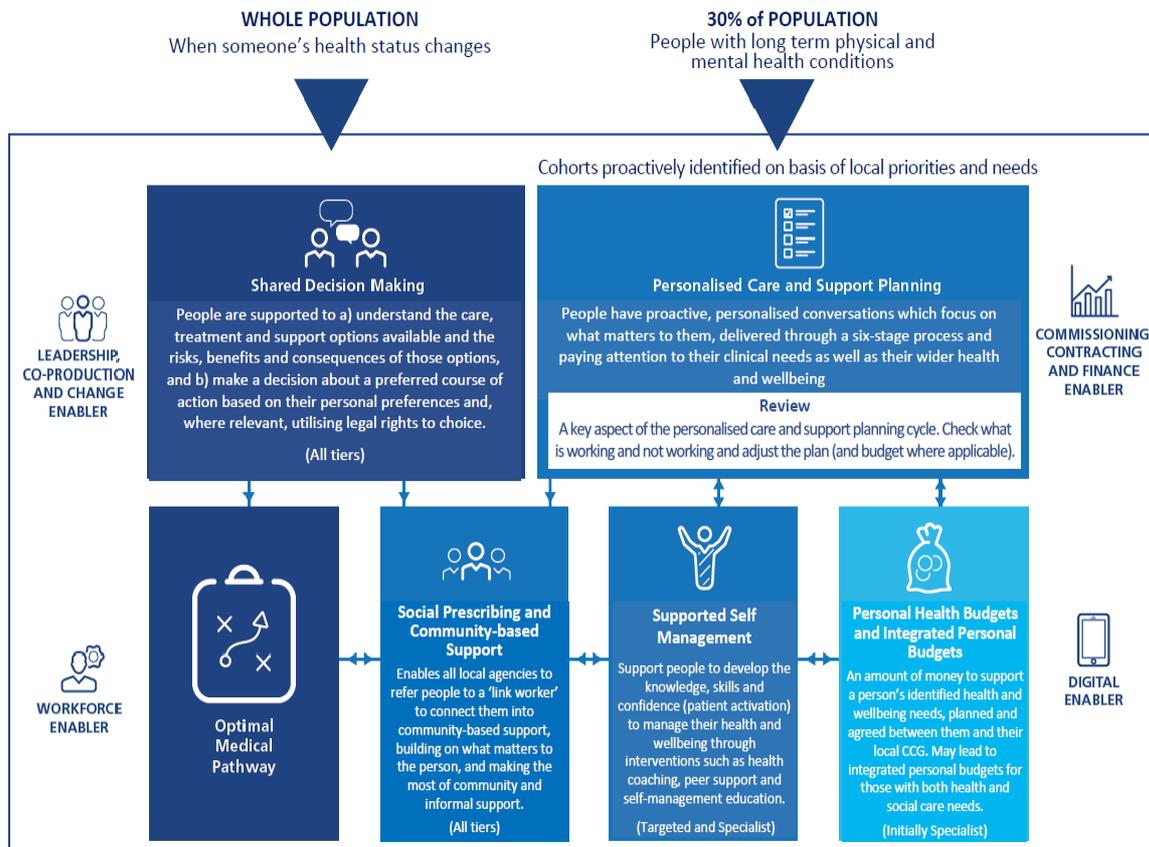
² NHS England (2019), Social prescribing and community-based support: Summary guide: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/social-prescribing-and-community-based-support-summary-guide/>

³ NHS England and NHS Improvement (2020), Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service (DES) Contract Specification 2020/21 - PCN Entitlements and Requirements: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/des-contract-specification-2020-21-pcn-entitlements-and-requirements/>

⁴ This includes Health Inclusion groups defined as groups of people who are not usually well provided for by healthcare services, and have poorer access, experiences and health outcomes. The definition covers people who are homeless and rough sleepers, vulnerable migrants (refugees and asylum seekers), sex workers, and those from the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

⁵ NHS England (2019), Universal Personalised Care: Implementing the Comprehensive Model: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/universal-personalised-care-implementing-the-comprehensive-model/>

Personalised Care Operating Model



Personalised care represents a transformative relationship between people, professionals and the health and care system. It provides a positive shift in power and decision-making that enables all people to feel informed, have a voice, be heard and be connected to each other and their communities.

Boosting the multi-disciplinary team in primary care

Social prescribing link workers are one of ten additional roles being funded within primary care, to bring additional capacity into the multi-disciplinary team, under the Network Contract DES 2020/21. The other roles are clinical pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, health and wellbeing coaches, care coordinators, physician associates, first contact physiotherapists, dieticians, podiatrists and occupational therapists. Expanding the primary care workforce will alleviate workload pressures on existing staff, improve patient experience of access, cut waiting times and meet the Government's commitment to provide 50 million more appointments within general practice⁶. Boosting capacity in this way will also improve the quality of care and implement NHS Long Term plan goals⁷, including the integration of care as set out in the January 2019 five-year GP contract deal.⁸

Two of the additional roles being introduced under the Network Contract DES from 1st April 2020 are new personalised care roles. Health and wellbeing coaches and

⁶ NHS England and NHS Improvement (2020), Investment and Evolution: Update to the GP contract agreement 2020/21 - 2023/24: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/investment-and-evolution-update-to-the-gp-contract-agreement-20-21-23-24/>

⁷ NHS England (2019), The NHS Long Term Plan: <https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/online-version/>

⁸ NHS England and the BMA (2019), A five-year framework for GP contract reform to implement The NHS Long Term Plan: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/gp-contract-five-year-framework/>

care coordinators will work alongside the social prescribing link worker role to form a social prescribing service, supporting a range of people to take more control of their health and wellbeing. Further information and guidance on the social prescribing service and the two new personalised care roles will follow in 2020.

Why social prescribing?

One in five GP appointments focus on wider social needs⁹, rather than acute medical issues. In areas of high deprivation, many GPs report that they spend significant amounts of time dealing with the consequences of poor housing, debt, stress and loneliness. Social prescribing and community-based support is part of the NHS Long Term Plan's commitment to make personalised care business as usual across the health and care system and to bring additional capacity into the multi-disciplinary team. This approach aims to reduce pressure on clinicians, improve people's lives through improved and timely access to health services and strengthen community resilience, meeting the needs of our diverse and multi-cultural communities.

Social prescribing enables all primary care staff and local agencies to refer people to a link worker and supports self-referral. Working under supervision of a GP, link workers give people time and focus on what matters to the person, as identified through shared decision making or personalised care and support planning. They will manage and prioritise their own caseload in accordance with the health and wellbeing needs of their local population, and where required discuss and/or refer people back to other health professionals and GPs in the PCN. They also connect people to local community groups and agencies for practical and emotional support. Link workers work within multi-disciplinary teams and collaborate with local partners to support community groups to be accessible and sustainable and help people to start new groups and activities.

Social prescribing can support a wide range of people, including (but not exclusively) people:

- with one or more long term conditions
- who need support with their mental health
- who are lonely or isolated
- who have complex social needs which affect their wellbeing.

There is emerging evidence that social prescribing can lead to a range of positive health and wellbeing outcomes for people, such as improved quality of life and emotional wellbeing.¹⁰ Whilst there is a need for more robust and systematic evidence on the effectiveness of social prescribing,¹¹ social prescribing schemes may lead to a reduction in the use of NHS services,¹² including GP attendance. 59% of GPs think social prescribing can help reduce their workload.¹³

Social prescribing, equality, diversity and inclusion

⁹ Citizens Advice policy briefing (2015), A very general practice: How much time do GPs spend on issues other than health?

¹⁰ Dayson, C. and Bashir, N. (2014), The social and economic impact of the Rotherham Social Prescribing Pilot. Sheffield: Sheffield Hallam University: <https://www4.shu.ac.uk/research/cresr/sites/shu.ac.uk/files/social-economic-impact-rotherham.pdf>

¹¹ Bickerdike, L., Booth, A., Wilson, P.M., et. Al. (2017), Social prescribing: less rhetoric and more reality. A systematic review of the evidence, BMJ Open 2017;7: e013384. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2016-013384

¹² Polley, M. *et al.* (2017), A review of the evidence assessing impact of social prescribing on healthcare demand and cost implications. London: University of Westminster

¹³ RCGP (2018), Spotlight on the 10 High Impact Actions: <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/about-us/news/2018/may/rcgp-calls-on-government-to-facilitate-social-prescribing-for-all-practices.aspx> (accessed 2 June 2018)

The embedding of social prescribing link workers within multi-disciplinary teams enables PCNs to provide personalised support and give individuals more control over their lives. Social prescribing helps to address the wider impacts of social inequality and can significantly improve people's health and wellbeing. Link workers practically help PCNs to create a culture that embeds the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion is fundamental to delivering high-quality personalised care approaches.

Social prescribing link workers provide PCNs with practical opportunities to lead good practice, ensuring that services are culturally responsive and meet the requirements of diverse communities within the neighbourhood.

PCNs as employers have a responsibility to ensure that all staff feel valued, are treated with respect and dignity, and that all patients receive a service that is responsive, inclusive and tailored towards their individual needs. Social prescribing link workers will help PCNs to meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty and the health inequalities duties in relation to improving healthcare access and outcomes.

How is social prescribing different to the work of care navigators and health coaches?

In many PCNs, receptionists and other staff may have been trained to provide care navigation and active signposting, in addition to their existing roles. Active signposting is a light-touch approach where existing staff provide information and choice to signpost people to services, using local resource directories and local knowledge. Active signposting works best for people who are confident and skilled enough to find their own way to community groups and services, after a brief intervention. It complements social prescribing when viewed in terms of 'as well as social prescribing' not 'instead of social prescribing'.

Health coaching is a personalised approach that is based upon behaviour change theory and is delivered by health professionals with diverse backgrounds. Within the NHS there are 'health coaching' roles, both within primary care and acute settings. NHS health coaching differs from social prescribing in that emphasis tends to be placed on the behaviour change, rather than connecting people with community groups and services. However, there are many similarities, as a motivational coaching approach is an integral part of a social prescribing link worker role.

The role of social prescribing link workers, as a key part of the PCN multi-disciplinary team

The [Network Contract DES Specification 2020/21](#)¹⁴ sets out the key role responsibilities for social prescribing link workers in delivering health and wellbeing services. The information can be found in Annex B.3 (pages 70-73) of the document.

As members of the primary care network team of health professionals, social prescribing link workers will take referrals from the PCN's Core Network Practices and from a wide range of agencies¹⁵ to support the health and wellbeing of patients. PCNs

¹⁴ *op. cit.* NHS England and NHS Improvement (2020), Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service (DES) Contract Specification 2020/21 - PCN Entitlements and Requirements

¹⁵ These agencies include but are not limited to: the PCN's members, pharmacies, multi-disciplinary teams, hospital discharge teams, allied health professionals, fire service, police, job centres, social care services, housing associations and voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) organisations.

must comply with the following requirements in relation to social prescribing link workers, as one of the additional roles. Therefore, social prescribing link workers must:

- be embedded within the PCN's Core Network Practices and be fully integrated within the multi-disciplinary team delivering healthcare services to patients;
- have access to other healthcare professionals, electronic 'live' and paper-based record systems of the PCN's Core Network Practices, as well as access to admin/office support and training and development as appropriate; and
- have access to appropriate clinical supervision and administrative support.¹⁶

Useful links

For information about the practicalities of providing social prescribing link worker services in PCNs, please refer to the following NHS England and NHS Improvement publications:

Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service (DES) Contract Specification 2020/21 - PCN Entitlements and Requirements: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/des-contract-specification-2020-21-pcn-entitlements-and-requirements/>

Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service (DES) Guidance 2020/21: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/des-guidance-2020-21/>

Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service (DES) and VAT Information Note: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/the-network-contract-des-and-vat-information-note/>

A five-year framework for GP contract reform to implement The NHS Long Term Plan: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/gp-contract-five-year-framework/>

Investment and Evolution: Update to the GP contract agreement 2020/21 - 2023/24: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/investment-and-evolution-update-to-the-gp-contract-agreement-20-21-23-24/>

For a full list of all the documents relating to the GP contract and setting up of PCNs, please go to <https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp/investment/gp-contract/>

Technical guidance on recruiting and supporting PCN social prescribing link workers is available in the accompanying [Reference guide for primary care networks – Technical Annex](#)¹⁷ This document also sets out practical guidance as to how social prescribing link workers:

- provide individuals with personalised support;
- undertake quality assurance of the community groups and VCSE organisations into which people are connected, to minimise risks; and
- measure the impact of social prescribing on people's wellbeing and on the community groups and VCSE organisations involved.

¹⁶ *op. cit.* NHS England and NHS Improvement (2020), Network Contract Directed Enhanced Service (DES) Contract Specification 2020/21 - PCN Entitlements and Requirements

¹⁷ *op. cit.* NHS England and NHS Improvement (2019), Social prescribing link workers: Reference guide for primary care networks – Technical Annex