



Winter 2025

**Highland Mental Health and Wellbeing
Delivery Group Newsletter**

In this newsletter...

As the Festive season approaches and winter settles in, many people find themselves facing unique emotional and mental health challenges. The festive period is often associated with joy, celebration, and togetherness, but for some, it can also bring feelings of stress, loneliness, or heightened anxiety. Additionally, the shorter days and colder weather can impact our overall feeling of wellbeing, making it all the more important to focus on self-care and community support.

While it's wonderful to celebrate at this time of year, the expectation to be constantly merry or to host flawless gatherings can be overwhelming. For some, financial pressures, family tensions, or memories of lost loved ones can make this time especially challenging. It's important to remember that it's normal to experience a mix of emotions, and that seeking help or setting boundaries is perfectly acceptable.

- **Stay Connected:** Reach out to friends, family, or neighbours — even a simple message or phone call can make a difference.
- **Embrace the Outdoors:** Take advantage of daylight hours by going for a walk, even if it's brief. Fresh air and movement can boost your mood.
- **Set Realistic Expectations:** Focus on what's meaningful to you, and don't be afraid to say no when you need to.
- **Practice Self-Compassion:** Treat yourself with kindness and patience. If you're struggling, it's okay to ask for support.
- **Make Time for Rest:** Prioritise relaxation and sleep when possible.

While looking after our own wellbeing, we can also be mindful of those around us who might be having a tough time. A thoughtful gesture or a listening ear can brighten someone's day more than we might realise.

This winter, focus on kindness — to ourselves and each other. By being gentle with our expectations, making time for rest and connection, and reaching out for support when needed, we can help ensure that the season is one of genuine care and wellbeing.

If you or someone you know is struggling, there are many resources available. Local GPs, mental health charities, and helplines can provide guidance and support. Remember, asking for help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Cathy Steer

Chair of the Mental Health Delivery Group

Welcome to the Winter 2025 edition of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Group (MHDG) newsletter

This edition will highlight some of the ongoing work of subgroups of the multi-agency Highland Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Group.

In this edition, we will look at:

- How to winter well.
- Support available during the Winter months.
- Financial wellbeing and poverty.
- Domestic abuse increasing over the festive period.
- After A Suicide project.
- General updates from organisations.
- Looking forward to 2026.

The following diagram shows the different sub-groups across MHDG.



You can give feedback on communications and engagement across MHDG using the [Highland Mental Health Delivery Group, Newsletter Registration, Website Updates and Feedback form](#), where you can feed back on this Newsletter and the [Highland Mental Wellbeing website](#). The Communications and Engagement Sub-Group is Chaired by Kieran Scott (Head of Communications at Change Mental Health).

We publish this newsletter every three months and your content contributions are greatly appreciated. Should you ever want to submit anything, please contact Lachlan.Buick@nhs.scot.

Wintering Well

WINTERING

Well

The winter months can be more difficult for some, particularly with festivities like Christmas that can impact mental health but also financial wellbeing, physical health, social connection, while exacerbating other aspects of life. This winter, you don't have to do this alone.

University of Glasgow has developed [Wintering Well resources](#) to help better understand living with Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) during the festive months. It should be remembered that SAD can affect people at all times of the year, but it can be particularly prevalent during the winter months.

Change Mental Health also has resources on [understanding SAD](#) in more detail, along with a resource on [Christmas and Mental Health](#).

Support during the Festive months



This edition includes direct language related to suicide and suicide prevention. Some readers may find this content distressing.

If you or someone you know is struggling and you are worried about your own or someone else's immediate safety:

- Call **999** or go straight to your local Accident and Emergency (A&E) immediately.
- If you are calling for someone else, try to establish the person's name, contact details and location.

If the crisis is not life-threatening but you are concerned for your own, or somebody else's mental wellbeing:

- Advise them to call NHS 24 on **111** or speak to their GP. The route into formal mental health services is through a GP surgery.
- If someone discloses to you that they are already being supported for their own mental health, it's useful to link them to where they are currently receiving support.

Important Support Line Numbers and Links:

- [NHS 24](#) on 111
- [Samaritans](#) on 116 123
- [Breathing Space](#) on 0800 83 85 87 (6pm Friday – 6am Monday & 6pm – 2am on weekdays)
- [Mikeyslines](#) - text and multimedia crisis support
- [Shout](#) by texting 85258
- [Clear Your Head](#) website.

Highland Prevent Suicide App



The Highland Prevent Suicide App is designed to support individuals at risk of suicide and those affected by it. The app offers:

- Information and support for those feeling distressed or suicidal.
- Guidance on conversations about suicide and recognising signs.
- Safety planning features, including a useful template to use to guide the development of this.
- Contact details for helplines and support services across Highland.

The app is available for both Android and iPhone:

- [Prevent Suicide - Highland App - App Store.](#)
- [Prevent Suicide - Highland - Apps on Google Play.](#)

If you need urgent help, then call 999 if someone is in immediate risk. If the crisis is not life-threatening but you are concerned, contact NHS 24 on 111 or speak to your GP.

Other available support services previously listed can also be located on the Highland Mental health and Wellbeing website or the Highland Prevent Suicide App.

Signposting to Information and Support



The Highland Mental Wellbeing website, a one-stop shop of information on services, training, events, and other resources. If you haven't had a look at the website or used it already then take the time now to have a look:

Highland Mental Wellbeing – A collection of resources to support mental wellbeing

On the Highland Mental Wellbeing website, you will be able to find a wealth of information and local services supporting communities across Highland:

- **Find a service** has a filter option to help you narrow down your search and find the right support for you, in your area.
- The **Training** section provides information about training available around the Highlands, provided by many different organisations covering various topics.
- **Resources** offer a broad range of free downloadable resources and apps covering themes such as stress, grief, money worries, mental distress, and suicide.
- The **Events** tab aims to highlight upcoming training and events. It needs you, in local areas, to tell us what's planned, so please tell us about it so it can be shared for the benefit of all concerned. You'll find a contact form in the section titled 'Spread the Word'.
- **Newsletters** provide all editions of the newsletter uploaded on the website. They are packed with information and resources.

Poverty and Mental Health

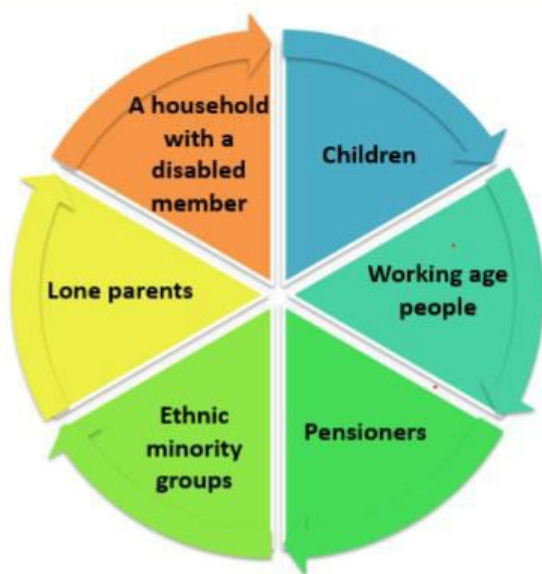
There is a vast array of evidence that shows that poverty is a key driver for mental health problems. What might be less clear is which comes first but the interrelated linkage of these two issues is without question.

Imagine the challenge of facing each day not knowing if you have enough money to pay the bills, heat your home or feed your family, far less being able to socialise and take part in leisure activities. This will undoubtedly impact on your mental health. Then add into this having a mental health condition and trying to manage the challenges of living in poverty - a perfect storm.

Having a higher income is likely to result in better health. Good health allows you to gain and sustain employment and to have more options to live a more active life. A higher income is likely to mean less stress, an ability to meet your own needs and allows you to take part in health-promoting activities as well as accessing better life enhancing options like better housing and higher quality food. Poor health and less income mean exactly the opposite of the above.

To find out more about the impact of poverty on people's lives, watch the Joseph Rowntree Foundation Film, [This is Poverty](#).

Who is likely to be living poverty?



From the diagram, we can see that it's essentially anyone.

While there is a lot of focus on child poverty, with 1 in 4 children in Scotland living in poverty, it is important to remember poverty is impacting on other groups in society too.

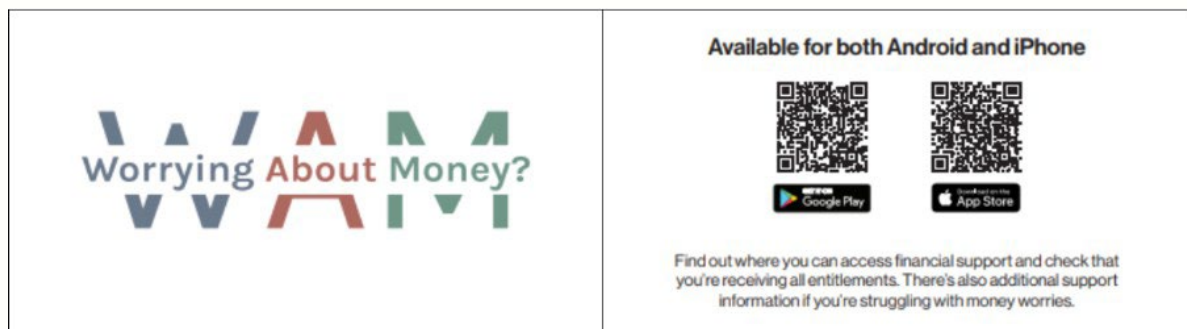
However, the childhood impact of poverty can create negative impacts in adulthood. Research by Public Health Scotland found that children living in households with the lowest income are four times more likely to experience mental health problems which extend into adulthood.

There is a stigma associated with poverty and a perception that people in poverty should just try harder to get themselves out of poverty. This stigma may be rooted in the belief that poverty is a result of personal failings. These negative perceptions will undoubtedly negatively impact on someone's confidence and self-esteem and result in a greater likelihood of mental health issues developing.

So what can be done?



With the current rising cost of living crisis, it is appropriate for anyone dealing with individuals to check if they are receiving all the benefits and entitlements they should be.



The **Worrying About Money?** leaflet is a step-by-step guide to identifying what someone's financial issue may be and identifying where they can access the most appropriate help. To access the leaflet in different formats, visit the [Highland - Worrying about Money? Website](#).

An additional resource alongside the leaflet is the [Worrying About Money app](#) which provides more information for a range of groups about where support might be accessed with money worries. The leaflet, app business cards and poster can all be ordered through the [Health Improvement Resource Service \(HIRS\)](#).

The screenshot shows the 'Public health zone' website. At the top is a blue header with the text 'Public health zone' and a search bar. Below the header is a breadcrumb trail: 'Learn home > Public health zone > Health inequalities'. On the left is a sidebar with a back arrow and 'Public health zone', and a highlighted 'Health inequalities' link. The main content area has a title 'Health inequalities' with an 'Add to favourites' button. Below this is a description: 'This page provides information and resources to support you to develop knowledge and skills related to health inequalities.' There are two main sections: 'Courses' and 'eLearning'. The 'Courses' section lists three items: 'Health inequalities : health inequalities [why bother?]', 'Health inequalities : money counts [poverty informed practice]', and 'Health inequalities : money counts [supportive conversations]'. The 'eLearning' section lists one item: 'Health inequalities : money counts - brief conversations'.

To be able to support individuals, use the leaflet and app, and feel confident to have a conversation about money worries, **Money Counts** training is now available for booking on the [Health Inequalities page on the TURAS website](#).

Supportive Conversations is around 1.5 hours long and is suitable for frontline staff in any organisation who have a supporting role and are likely to be able to build up relationships which can be used to ask about money.

Poverty Informed Practice is around 2 hours long and aims to support staff and teams explore what changes can be made by individuals and within organisations to ensure that poverty stigma is considered and what actions might be taken to reduce this.

Alongside this is the eLearning **Brief Conversations training**. As an online module, this will mean that you can undertake the 30 minutes learning at a time that suits you. It's designed for anyone who is likely to have an opportunity to have a brief discussion about money and can signpost to support organisations using the Worrying about Money leaflet. Each of the courses can be done as a stand-alone.

To register for the Money Counts training and e-learning module, you need to be registered for a Turas account. If you don't have one, you will need to visit the registration page. This [Introduction to TURAS Learn video](#) demonstrates how to create your own account.

Money Counts: Brief Conversation Online E-Learning Module

Please note: This replaces face-to-face training.

You will now be able to undertake the 30-minute module whenever suits you, rather than waiting on a facilitated course.

Aim of the module

The aim of this Turas eLearning module is to support staff and volunteers to know why and how to ask about money worries and where and how to refer on. It aims to build the confidence of staff or volunteers who work with people that may benefit from income maximisation help and introduces resources for how to refer onto these services.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this module, you will be able to:

- Describe what poverty is and explain what impact it can have on individuals.
- Ask others about their money worries and feel confident to discuss their situation.
- Identify services which can support individuals with money worries.

The module is focused around using the **Worrying About Money?** leaflet and App.

Worrying About Money?
Financial advice and support is available if you're struggling to make ends meet.
Follow these steps to find out where to get help in Highland.

Available for both Android and iPhone

Find out where you can access financial support and check that you're receiving all entitlements. There's also additional support information if you're struggling with money worries.

To access the module, you will need a Turas account. Find the link to the module here: [Brief Conversations Training](#).

Domestic Abuse incident increases over the Festive Period



Christmas should be a joyful time for everyone. However, that is sadly not always the case. Police Scotland have, in the past, reported a large increase in domestic abuse incidents over the festive periods.

A culmination of family pressures through increased contact, financial concerns, school holidays, all heighten conditions where domestic abuse could happen. You are not alone if you experience domestic abuse, there are people who can listen and help you.

There are national 24/7 helplines which are staffed continuously and can support you. All contact numbers are listed as per the following details.

Key Helplines in Scotland

If you or someone you know is affected by domestic abuse, please reach out for help:

- **Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline:** Call free on 0800 027 1234 (24/7) or use their email and [SDAFMH web chat services](#).
- **Police Scotland:** Call 101 for non-emergencies or visit a local police station. In an emergency, always call 999.
- **Victim Support Scotland:** Offers emotional support via their helpline at 0800 160 1985 and online chat on the [Victim Support website](#).
- **Childline** (for children and young people): Call 0800 1111.

Highland Services

- **Inverness Women's Aid:** Call 01463 220719 or go to their [website](#).
- **Ross-shire Women's Aid:** Call 01349 863568 or go to their [website](#).
- **Caithness & Sutherland Women's Aid:** Call 0345 408 0151 or go to their [website](#).
- **Lochaber Women's Aid:** Call 01397 705734 or go to their [website](#).
- **RASASH:** Call 03330 066909, text 07451 288080 or email support@rasash.org.uk or go to their [website](#).
- **Highland Violence Against Women:** go to their [website](#) for more information.

After a Suicide project



The **After a Suicide** project has been a successful initiative delivered in partnership by different organisations across Highland. Funded by the Highland Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults, it has enabled the creation of a pack for first responders to present to those bereaved by suicide, a general awareness leaflet on the impact of suicide, videos on suicide bereavement, stigma and the impact on communities, and events to enable open conversations across Highland.

This has been made possible by organisations such as Mikeysline, Change Mental Health, James Support Group, Police Scotland, Cruse Scotland,

Events



Fort William event



North Kessock event

A number of events were held across Highland - in North Kessock, Thurso, Ullapool and Fort William - to get the community to come together and talk about suicide prevention.

At these events, videos were shown that spoke about the impact of suicide, stigma, and bereavement. Organisations involved in the project had stalls and showcased their work, while some spoke about how suicide impacts the communities they work in.

Literature



The '**Support After a Suicide**' pack is given to those bereaved by suicide by first responders, ensuring that support and signposting is available.

You can order copies of the '**Impacted by Suicide**' leaflet for free from the [Health Improvement Resource Service \(HIRS\)](#) website.

Videos

There will be a full launch online in the new year along with guidance notes and ideas for use.

General updates across MHDG

Kooth's Your Move Campaign



Kooth's Your Move Campaign

Building mental resilience isn't about being perfect. It's learning to bend without breaking and to keep showing up, even on the hard days. You get better with practice, just like your physical fitness. Kooth's current [Your Move](#) campaign focuses on the importance of having support around you, taking care of yourself and the value of Kindness. For resources, online sessions or a visit from our engagement team please contact: tfinch@kooth.com.

Kooth consultation

Soluna by Kooth is a pioneering new Mental Health and Wellbeing platform through which Kooth will deliver our existing support for young people in a modern, mobile-first and highly engaging way. As we bring this exciting new product to the UK, we are seeking the views of young people. We want to know what they like, anything they don't like, and get their views on how we should design Soluna to meet the needs of the UK's young people. We would really like to involve young people from across Highland.

- Workshops will be delivered online
- Workshops will be up to 50 minutes long (shorter for younger groups)
- Workshops will be discussing themes around wellbeing and mental health support, but will not be a therapeutic group
- All participants will receive a token of thanks. We will provide food and travel expenses for in-person workshop attendees, and Amazon vouchers will be given to all - either as individual gifts or to the organisation as a whole.
- For more information and to book a session please contact Sarah Campbell at sacampbell@kooth.com.

You First

Introducing [“You First”](#) – a 4 part podcast series focused on the wellbeing of staff

Public Health Scotland and Suicide Prevention Scotland have developed a podcast series aimed at anyone working in roles or with data or information which has the potential to be emotionally demanding or upsetting. It aims to highlight the importance of maintaining wellbeing across the workforce, but particularly for staff in these types of roles where the impact may not always be recognised. We have had some really positive feedback on the podcasts so far.

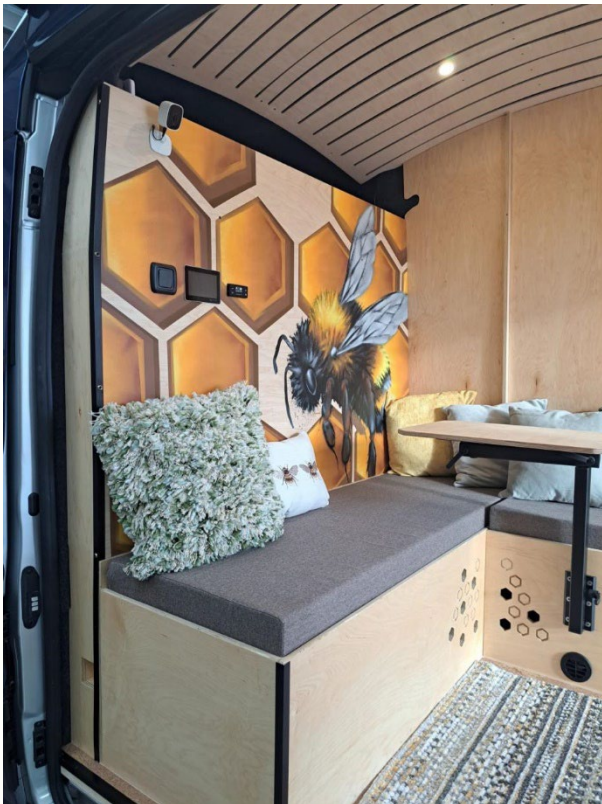
The podcast and accompanying document provides reflections and suggestions for how staff, line managers and organisations can support. More information is provided in the document attached and the podcast is available wherever you normally listen to your podcasts. Please do share with anyone you think may benefit and we hope that this provides a valuable tool to support you personally. It may be something that might be a useful addition to training handouts or resource lists for example.

Do get in touch if you want to chat about the podcast or have ideas about how we can spread the word.

Mikeyslines



Charlotte Butler, Development Manager with the new Hive on the Road on Strothers Lane, Inverness.



Inside first Hive on the Road vehicle.

Mikeyslines announced the launch of the second Hive on the Road support vehicle on World Mental Health Day, made possible through a new multi-agency partnership with The Royal Foundation of the Prince and Princess of Wales, the National Suicide Prevention Network.

The new mobile hub follows the success of their first Hive on the Road, which will enable Mikeysline to reach even more rural and remote locations throughout Highland, the Islands and Moray. It provides a safe, welcoming and confidential space for people of all ages and genders who are struggling with their mental health and/or at risk of suicide.

The Network will run over an initial three-year period, aiming to create a single, universal and evidence-based pathway for suicide prevention, which is effective and accessible to all. Spanning all four home nations, four charities have joined as founding partners to transform suicide prevention in the UK, with Mikeysline representing Scotland. More than a dozen other charities and organisations have joined the Network, backed by over £1 million funding from The Royal Foundation.

Mikeysline CEO Emily Stokes said:

“The complex geography of our area can increase the sense of isolation felt by those struggling with their mental health. By bringing our services directly into these communities, we can make sure that support is accessible, immediate, and without stigma. By launching on World Mental Health Day we’re underlining Mikeysline’s commitment to ensuring that no one feels alone or without help, no matter where they live.

Our partnership with The Royal Foundation has enabled us to buy and staff this much needed second van and extend our reach significantly, while our position within the NSPN gives opportunity for connection and sharing of knowledge, expertise and best practise with our colleagues across the UK.”

DBI hits 100,000 referrals in Scotland



Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) hit 100,000 referrals in Scotland this year, revealed at its DBI Gathering in Perth. The initiative continues to support people experiencing distress across the country, offering a compassionate and connected response.

Change Mental Health delivers the programme in Highland.

Looking forward to 2026



Learning and Development for Health and Improvement

The Health Improvement team at NHS Highland are planning ahead for the delivery of training programmes in 2026.

You can find all the details of the training offered in the prospectus, including several different ones on mental health and wellbeing and suicide prevention. There are also some dates for our newly offered Self-Harm course, supported through Penumbra but run by local health improvement trainers.

[Learning and Development for Health Improvement 2025 to 2026](#)

Most of the courses can be booked through our Turas Learn booking platform and the details of how to do this is in the prospectus.

For any more information you can contact: nhsh.healthimprovementtraining@nhs.scot.

Scotland's Mental Health First Aid



Scotland's Mental Health First Aid (SMHFA) is a two-day course aimed at anyone looking to increase their knowledge and understanding of mental health issues. The course will equip you to become a Mental Health First Aider. This course is intended to support people to recognise someone in distress, understand how to respond and signpost people on for help and support where required. It is not intended to diagnose or treat individuals.

Topics covered include:

- Attitudes to mental health
- Listening skills
- Suicide
- Self-harm
- Drugs & Alcohol
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Psychosis
- Recovery

Course length

9.30am to 4pm (in person and over two days)

Course dates and Venue

- 4th & 5th February 2026: Inverness
- 11th & 12th March 2026: Ullapool/Wester Ross
- 18th & 25th May 2026: Aviemore
- 12th & 19th August 2026: Invergordon
- 7th & 8th September 2026: Caithness

Booking

Courses can be booked through Turas Learn. They can be found on the [NHS Highland Public Health Zone: Mental Health and Wellbeing](#).

If you do not currently have a Turas Learn account you can register for one on the [TURAS Learn website](#).

Please note that these SMHFA courses are run and supported through NHS Highland and Highland Council.

You will receive an additional registration link thereafter to secure your place. For further enquiries contact: nhsh.healthimprovementtraining@nhs.scot.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Group (MHDG) Explained



The MHDG is one of 3 regional sub groups of the [Highland Community Planning Partnership](#) (HCPP). The partnership brings together public agencies, third sector organisations and other key community groups to work collaboratively with the people of Highland to deliver better outcomes.

Other regional groups:

- [Poverty Reduction](#)
- [Community Safety and Resilience](#)

Aim: All people in Highland will benefit from good mental health and wellbeing.

This multi agency group is chaired by Cathy Steer, Head of Health Improvement NHS Highland and is committed to:

- Sharing best practice, ideas and resources, avoiding duplication of effort.
- Act as a coordinating group for delivery of the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention priorities including the Creating Hope Together in Highland action plan.
- Developing an action plan that reflects identified need as highlighted via services from people with lived experience and from data provided both nationally and locally.
- Ensuring the people around the virtual table represent the range of activities and services from communities across all [9 local community partnership areas](#).