

Citizens Advice Westminster (CAW)

Co-location in GP surgeries

"It's common for a lot of the clients to not know the benefit system and what they're entitled to. After clients get some advice, they feel that they can now deal with their issue and know where to go for any further support required in the future."

Citizens Advice Advisor

BACKGROUND

Citizens Advice Westminster (CAW) received innovation funding in 2023 from national Citizens Advice for a project to build closer relationships between CAW and local PCNs in Westminster.

This funding was sought to pilot welfare advice in GP surgeries to help promote access for vulnerable patients and to support the NHS in tackling the wider determinants of health – in particular issues around poverty and housing.

The project built on existing work, including longstanding relationships with the Community Mental Health Team and the My Care My Way supported Advice on Prescription project.

PROGRESS SO FAR

The project started in November 2023 and is now in 3 GP surgeries across Westminster in areas of multiple deprivation.

So far:

- 231 clients have been supported, with on average 3 issues per client. Support is offered both on phone and face to face in surgeries
- The average age is slightly younger than total client base, with the majority of clients under 60 and 22% under 35.
- 59% of clients have long term health issues or disabilities
- The top issues clients are facing are around housing and benefits
- The total income gain over a ten month period for clients who were supported with benefit claims and debt resolution was £485,000
- 83% clients were new to Citizens Advice

HOW IT WORKS

The main areas of advice covered at the GP surgeries are:

Benefits Advice:

- Providing tailored advice to ensure that people were informed about the benefits they were eligible for and calculating the amounts they were entitled to receive.
- Assisting individuals with understanding and completing benefit applications for disability or sickness benefits, ensuring all required documents are accurately submitted.

Challenges:

- Supporting individuals with the benefit appeals process and help address any challenges faced.

Housing Advice:

- Offering support and advice to those facing homelessness, helping them understand their rights and the support available
- Supporting individuals through the process of lodging complaints regarding housing issues, including disrepair and maintenance concerns.

Homelessness Review:

- Providing support and information on the procedures surrounding possession and eviction procedures ensuring that individuals understand their rights and the legal processes involved.

Debt:

- Providing information and if support is needed carrying out an assessment and then referring the client to an appropriate service, including the CAW specialist debt service.

Case study contact

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About this document

This case study has been developed by [Bromley by Bow Insights](#) and [Transformation Partners in Health and Care](#) who are working together to support the integration of social welfare advice into the health and social care system.

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IMPACT

1. Enabled closer relationships with surgeries

It has taken time to build relationships but the adviser has built strong relationships with practice managers, practice staff and practitioners.

2. Supports future service development

The project has enabled practical experience of challenges and opportunities of this way of working which can inform future development

3. Positive feedback from patients

Feedback from the patient feedback group and individual patients highlighted that the service is really welcome and that clients have had a really positive experience.

4. Saves time for GPs

Where the patients used appointments to seek help about being rehoused under medical conditions,, these cases are now referred to CA to draft letters

5. More appropriate support for social prescribing patients

Social prescribers have described the benefits of having both a face to face offer and the Refernet referral platform to use to support patients most appropriately.

KEY POINTS

- Feedback from patients and health staff has highlighted the value of co-located advice in GP surgeries
- There have been challenges in securing ongoing funding to continue the work. There examples in Tower Hamlets, Hackney, and Liverpool where this work has been funded for a number of years

DIANA'S STORY

- Diana is 77 years of age, single and living on her own. She has with long-term health conditions, including mental health conditions which requires specialised support and care.
- She was referred by her GP because she had been struggling with keeping up with her rent and was worried about having to borrow from friends to cover the shortfall.
- Diana was helped with a Discretionary Housing Payment application to the council to request for support in covering the shortfall in her rent.
- Further exploration found that Diana had previously applied for and been refused DHP. Diana stated she had told the council about her health conditions, and how it affects her capability in understanding certain information, but this was not taken into consideration by the council in her previous application. She was supported in lodging a complaint against the previous decision and a request to backdate her DHP was also made.
- As a result of the complaint and the DHP application, Diana was awarded DHP to cover her whole rent and was also awarded a backdated payment to cover the previous 14 months.
- Diana was very grateful with the support she received as it had lifted the stress of a financial burden, and had she not been referred for help from Citizens Advice she may have fallen into rent arrears.

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