

# **Debt and Mental Health**

Information and Advice for  
Health and Social Care Workers

## Why do health and social care workers need to know about debt?

- Research shows many service users and carers want health staff to provide more information and support on managing finances.
- People with mental health problems are three times more likely to report debt.
- Debt can influence many of the risk factors for mental health problems, such as putting a strain on relationships.

## Key advice for health and social care workers

Fitch et al (2009)

[www.rcpsych.ac.uk/clinicalservicestandards/healthservicesresearch/debtandmentalhealth.aspx](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/clinicalservicestandards/healthservicesresearch/debtandmentalhealth.aspx) has been adapted to provide the following guidelines on how health and social care workers can help when it comes to debt.

### Talk about debt

- Ensure that you regularly raise the issue of money and budgeting with all your clients.
- Talking about debt can be difficult, yet it is important that professionals become aware of debt before it reaches crisis point.

### Help clients respond to a crisis

- Encourage the client to face the problem.
- Identify with the client, which debts carry the highest consequence if left unpaid.
- Be aware that complicated financial situations may need specialist help. Try to get help from a free and impartial debt advice agency, see back page of this leaflet for details.

### Analyse the causes

- Consider with the client, what may have been the trigger for the debt crisis and what can be done to reduce the risk of future debt.
- Triggers could include major life events, low income and capacity issues.

### Help assess

- Work with the client to outline money coming in, going out and money needed for creditors.

## Understand repayment options

- These include suspending the payments (if no available income), trying to negotiate with lenders and enlisting the help of an outside agency to develop free debt management plans.
- Debt advisors may be able to advise clients on repayment options.

## Work with debt advisors

- Ensure both you and the client have good understanding of finances prior to meeting.
- Support clients with repayment schedules where possible by continuing to assess the situation with them.

## Research support

- An analysis of schizophrenia and income revealed that low socioeconomic status increases people's risk of developing schizophrenia by 2-3 times.
- A Finnish study of over 4,000 people showed repaying debts in the last 12 months independently predicted the likelihood of someone thinking about suicide.
- Financial hardship has been linked to an increase in depressive symptoms at 3 year follow up.
- In studies of 1,000 participants, self-reported anxiety has increased according to the ratio of credit card debt to income.

## Sources of information about debt

- **[www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk](http://www.moneymadeclear.fsa.gov.uk)**  
Useful information to help with all aspects of personal finance from the Financial Services Authority.
- **[www.adviceguide.org.uk](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk)**  
Provides free information and advice. This website can also help you find your nearest CAB branch, where you can arrange a meeting with specialist debt advisors.
- **[www.nationaldebtline.co.uk](http://www.nationaldebtline.co.uk)**  
Free, impartial debt advisory service.  
Telephone: 0808 808 4000

- **[www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk)**  
Free, confidential and impartial advice service paid for by legal aid. Covers benefits, housing, employment and other issues as well as debt advice.  
Telephone: 0845 345 4 345
- **Dawn (Advice) Ltd. Free legal and debt advice in Northumberland**  
Telephone: 01670 785 512
- **NHS Credit Crunch Hotline**  
Trained health staff will give callers self care and self help advice, signpost to other appropriate sources of advice and help to tackle any underlying debt, redundancy or housing issues  
Telephone: 0300 123 2000

**This leaflet has been collaboratively produced by Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust and the Low Income Good Health Team (LIGHT)**

Published by the Patient Information Centre  
2009 Copyright, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Trust

Ref, PIC/188/0809 August 2009

[www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic](http://www.ntw.nhs.uk/pic)