

What do you mean I have a right to health?

Introduction

As part of Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights (SNAP), a participatory action research initiative looked at what the right to health means to people whose health is at risk because they live in poverty, face discrimination or have other difficult circumstances.

What are human rights?

Human rights are the rights that everybody has. Human rights are important because they protect everyone's right to live with dignity, including the right to life, freedom and security.

The right to health

The right to health means you should have access to everything you need to stay in good physical and mental health. This includes healthy food, housing, information and safety, as well as good services.

About the research

The research involved two groups of people in Glasgow: people who are homeless, and women refugees and asylum seekers. The health of homeless people is worse than most other people in society and homeless people are less likely to be able to make use of services. The health of asylum seekers and refugees is affected by uncertainty, isolation and the trauma of what they have been through. They may also find it difficult to know how to use health services in this country.

Through interviews and focus groups, the participants discussed their experiences of services and whether they were able to take part in decisions about their health. They identified a list of the common barriers they face, and suggested some changes that could make a real difference in people's lives. The list includes:



Clearer language and communications.



Provision of advocates to help people know their rights and how to act on them.



Providing staff in NHS Scotland and other services with information on how being homeless or seeking asylum damages your health.



Drawing on people who have lived through these experiences to train staff in services, including primary care teams.



Challenging racism and prejudice in NHS services.



Funding peer support groups and peer workers.



Improving access to interpreters.



Peer researcher Mhuari performing with the Joyous Choir

The research was carried out by peer researchers from Glasgow Homelessness Network and the Mental Health Foundation who all had experience of homelessness or seeking asylum. They helped to develop questions and were given training in how to carry out discussion groups and interviews. The University of Strathclyde Centre for Health Policy and the Alliance supported the peer researchers, who said they gained confidence and skills from taking part and learned a lot from listening to the people who spoke to them.

'I've never seen anything through in my entire life. This is probably the first thing that I've done that I've seen from the get-go and I'm still involved and we're nearly at the end of it so that's been an achievement for me as well.'

Duncan Easton, peer researcher

What next?

Since the report was published in August 2016 the peer researchers are taking action to address the challenges identified by the research.

The partnership and peer researchers have established a lived experience collective to carry out further research and support rights holders to influence policy and practice in Scotland.

They are currently:

- working with colleagues in Fife to carry out participatory action research into employability services
- supporting Scottish Government to revise the health literacy strategy
- working with NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde to ensure workforce training has a peer element.

The partnership between the NHS, the third sector, academics and people with lived experience has led to new opportunities to transform research and practice in health and social care, all through the process of participatory action research.

'I don't know anything about my human rights. I have been homeless for 20 years and I've learned more here in one afternoon than I ever have.'

Research participant