

Evidence Brief: Social Prescribing Link Workers

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Produced by the Knowledge Management team Evidence Briefs offer an overview of the published reports, research, and evidence on a workforce-related topic.

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Key publications – the big picture

What is social prescribing?

Healthwatch, September 2025

Around one in five GP visits are for non-medical problems. Many things that affect our health can't be treated by doctors or medicine alone. This includes loneliness, money problems, housing, education or employment status.

Social Prescriber Report

Healthwatch Hammersmith and Fulham, August 2025

The social prescribing service was selected as a topic for further investigation by Healthwatch, primarily as the service represents a great opportunity to improve health and wellbeing of residents, and considerably reduce pressure on and better support primary care. We wanted to better understand how the service was working from a patient perspective and use the patient voice to shape the service's ongoing improvement journey.

How to become a social prescribing link worker

National Academy for Social Prescribing, February 2025

Social Prescribing Link Workers, sometimes known as Social Prescribers or Community Connectors, play a key role in the delivery of social prescribing. This is a rewarding role that helps to empower people to take control of their health and wellbeing by finding out what matters to them and making a personalised plan. Link workers can have a wide range of backgrounds and prior experience, which creates an inclusive and diverse workforce. While there are often no specific qualifications needed to apply for a Link Worker role, applicants may have many years of relevant expertise in supporting people – for example, having previously worked as NHS staff, youth workers, or charity professionals, as well as having experience in the arts, physical activity or advice and information services, whether through work or volunteering. Some Link Workers also bring

lived experience of health challenges to their role and a deep understanding of their local community.

A guide to setting up a Connectors programme

National Academy for Social Prescribing, May 2024

In many communities, there exists a disconnect between individuals and the support, resources, and opportunities available to them that might help them improve their health and wellbeing. This is where Connectors come in, serving as vital conduits, and breaking down barriers.

This toolkit is designed for anyone looking to set up a Connectors programme in their locality. It is aimed at those who want to build a movement of people making a difference by passing on information to friends, family, neighbours and strangers.

Social Prescribing Link Worker Induction Guide

National Academy for Social Prescribing, 2023

Social Prescribing Link Workers (SPLWs) are a key role in personalised care that can transform the health and wellbeing of individuals. SPLWs often join teams of varied health professionals and organisations that are revolutionising the way we practice health care in the UK.

Case Studies

Social Prescribing

NHS England

Social prescribing: case studies and insight from practitioners in the South West of England

South West Academic Health Science Network, 2021

This report shares learning and insight, to help inform what is needed for the adoption and spread of social prescribing in the South West and beyond.

Social Prescribing Link Worker

National Association of Link Workers, 2020

Heritage Social Prescribing Stories

National Academy for Social Prescribing

Social prescribing, just like history and heritage, is all about personal and shared stories. Here are some of the ways social prescribing has helped change people's lives for the better...

The Star for workforce redesign

More resources and tools are available in [the Star](#)

Statistics

You can find relevant statistics on the [Health and Care Statistics Landscape](#)

National Data Programme

Workforce, Training and Education staff can look at the [National Data Warehouse \(NDL\)](#) SharePoint site to find out more about datasets and Tableau products.

Published Peer Reviewed Research

Reviews

The Social Prescribing Link Worker-Clarifying the Role to Harness Potential: A Scoping Review

Health and Social Care in the Community 2025(1), 2025
Recent work outlines definitions of social prescribing, but the role of a social prescribing link worker (SPLW) remains ill defined. Core components of the role must be clarified to enable the study of its impact in connecting people to community-based support and subsequent outcomes. This review compiles and summarises published information on the SPLW role. A scoping review was completed using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis for Scoping Review. Suitable online databases were searched using identified terms, a review of the reference lists of identified papers was completed and relevant grey literature was identified through Google Scholar. Relevant reports from UK-based social prescribing networks and government organisations were gathered. Eligibility of each paper was determined based on the specified criteria.

Social prescribing for adults with chronic pain in the U.K.: a rapid review

British Journal of Pain, 2025

Introduction: Social prescribing links patients to community groups and services to meet health needs; however, it is uncertain what the benefits and impacts of social prescribing are for people with chronic pain. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) undertook a systematic review to investigate the clinical and cost effectiveness of social interventions aimed at improving the quality of life of people with chronic pain; no relevant clinical studies comparing social

interventions with standard care for chronic pain were found, though the inclusion criteria for studies was narrow.,

Understanding How, Why and for Whom Link Work Interventions Promote Access in Community Healthcare Settings in the United Kingdom: A Realist Review

Health Expectations 27(6), 2024

Introduction: Inequity in access to healthcare in the United Kingdom can have a profound impact on people's ability to manage their health problems. Link work interventions attempt to overcome the socioeconomic and structural barriers that perpetuate health inequalities. Link workers are typically staff members without professional clinical qualifications who support patients to bridge the gap between services. However, little is currently known about how and why link work interventions might be effective. This realist review attempts to understand the contexts and resultant mechanisms by which link work interventions affect access to community healthcare services.

Australian link worker social prescribing programs: An integrative review

PloS One 19(11), 2024

Link worker social prescribing programs are gaining recognition in Australia for addressing health and social needs outside routine medical care. The evaluation of these programs is essential for informing future social prescribing programs, research and evolving policy. However, diverse outcome evaluation measures present challenges for benchmarking across link worker social prescribing programs. An integrative review was conducted to identify and describe outcome domains and measures, and the methodological approaches and evaluation designs of link worker social prescribing programs in Australia.

Community initiatives for well-being in the United Kingdom and their role in developing social capital and addressing loneliness:

A scoping review

Lifestyle Medicine (26883740) 5(1), 2024

Introduction: Loneliness can have a negative impact on people's physical and psychological well-being; building social capital is a potential means of addressing this connection. Community initiatives (e.g. groups, clubs, neighbourhood activities) may be a route that enables people to build social capital to tackle loneliness. Understanding what is known, and where gaps in knowledge exist, is important for advancing research on this topic. Methods: A scoping review was undertaken to explore the question – What community initiatives, with a focus on well-being, have been evaluated in the United Kingdom that include information about social capital and loneliness?

A meta-ethnography of the factors that shape link workers' experiences of social prescribing

BMC Medicine 22(1), 2024

BACKGROUND: Social prescribing is gaining traction internationally. It is an approach which seeks to address non-medical and health-related social needs through taking a holistic person-centred and community-based approach. This involves connecting people with and supporting them to access groups and organisations within their local communities. It is hoped that social prescribing might improve health inequities and reduce reliance on healthcare services. In the UK, social prescribing link workers have become core parts of primary care teams. Despite growing literature on the implementation of social prescribing, to date there has been no synthesis that develops a theoretical understanding of the factors that shape link workers' experiences of their role.

Children and Young People

A rapid review of opportunities and challenges in the implementation of social prescription interventions for addressing the unmet needs of individuals living with long-term chronic conditions

BMC Public Health 24(1), 2024

Background: People with long-term chronic conditions often struggle to access and navigate complex health and social services. Social prescription (SP) interventions, a patient-centred approach, help individuals identify their holistic needs and increase access to non-clinical resources, thus leading to improved health and well-being. This review explores existing SP interventions for people with long-term chronic conditions and identifies the opportunities and challenges of implementing them in primary healthcare settings.

Effect of social prescribing link workers on health outcomes and costs for adults in primary care and community settings: a systematic review

BMJ Open 12(10), 2022

Objectives To establish the evidence base for the effects on health outcomes and costs of social prescribing link workers (non-health or social care professionals who connect people to community resources) for people in community settings focusing on people experiencing multimorbidity and social deprivation. Design Systematic review and narrative synthesis using the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) approach. Data sources Cochrane Database, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, ClinicalTrials.gov, EU Clinical Trials Register, CINAHL, Embase, Global Health, PubMed/MEDLINE, PsycInfo, LILACS, Web of Science and grey literature were searched up to 31 July 2021. A forward citation search was completed on 9 June 2022.

Link Workers in Social Prescribing for Young People Work: A Case Study From Sheffield Futures

International Journal of Integrated Care 24(1), 2024

Introduction: Social Prescribing has an established recognition regarding the benefits provided to the health-related social needs of adults, but little is known about how the intervention addresses young people's needs. There is optimism regarding the central role of two core mechanisms that allows social prescribing to be effective, such as the empathetic role of Link Workers and the connection with community resources. This paper aims to describe the role played by Link Workers working a Social Prescribing intervention targeting young people., Description: This paper adopts a case study methodology to describe the role of Link Workers addressing young people's needs and implementing Social Prescribing scheme in Sheffield (UK).

Community Connectors (CCx): the strategies employed by peer to peer connectors to foster relationships with early years caregivers to improve universal early child health and development

BMC Health Services Research 21(1), 2021

Blackpool is one of the most deprived Local Authority (LA) areas in England; in April 2015 the Blackpool Better Start (BBS) Partnership was allocated 45 million over 10 years from the Big Lottery Fund (BLF) as one of five 'A Better Start' initiative areas in England. The aim of the 'A Better Start' initiative is to improve outcomes for children from conception to 3 years of age. Co-designed by professionals and the community, the Community Connector (CCx) programme employs residents to directly engage caregivers of children, in seven of Blackpool's most socio-economically deprived wards.

Chronic Kidney Disease

The Impact of Trusted Community Navigators in Improving Care Utilization Patterns for a Population With Chronic Kidney Disease Enrolled in Medicare Advantage: A Longitudinal Claims Based Study

Journal of Primary Care & Community Health 16, 2025

BACKGROUND: Chronic Kidney disease (CKD) accounts for approximately 82 billion dollars of Medicare spend. Implementing culturally competent, community-based programs may be a strategy for changing utilization behaviors and lowering cost while maintaining quality in this population., METHODS: A longitudinal claims based study was carried out from April 2023 to August 2024 in the state of CA to assess the impact of the program on cost, utilization, and quality metrics.

Dementia

What are the challenges that social prescribers face when supporting people within dementia and how can these be addressed? A qualitative study

PloS One 20(1), 2025

INTRODUCTION: Evidence suggests that social prescribing might have a positive impact on identity, control, creativity and quality of life in people with dementia. While evidence on the benefits of social prescribing is accumulating, there is a sparsity of research on the experiences of social prescribers. This study aims to identify the challenges that social prescribers face when supporting people with dementia and their families and strategies to address these.

Education, Training and Skills

'Power to the People, to the people': Training for social prescribers improves support of persistent pain

British Journal of Pain 17(3), 2023

Abstract: Introduction: Supported self-management is an important aspect of managing pain, however widely held beliefs about the biomedical nature of pain and limited time availability can make it a tricky concept to introduce to patients. Social prescribers are in an ideal position to support self-management of pain if appropriate training is available to support them. This study aimed to evaluate training for social prescribers and to explore their opinions and experiences about providing self-management support.

Prospects and Aspirations for Workforce Training and Education in Social Prescribing

International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health 20(16), 2023

BACKGROUND: A social prescribing (SP) link worker (LW) is responsible for enabling and supporting individuals, by assessing their personal goals and co-producing solutions to make use of appropriate local non-clinical resources or interventions. As an emerging new role, LWs are not regulated by professional bodies associated with SP. Therefore, currently there is no standardised training for LWs who are from varied backgrounds. As such, LWs have varying knowledge about how to deal with individuals with complex needs, which can impact on their decision-making capabilities to seek solutions and navigate complex systems.

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Qualifications and training needs of social prescribing link workers: an explorative study Abstract only*

The Lancet, November 2022

Background: A social prescribing link worker is responsible for enabling and supporting individuals, by assessing their needs and co-producing solutions to make use of appropriate, local, non-clinical resources or interventions. Because the role is new, link workers might not have professional backgrounds in dealing with individuals with complex needs, which can affect their decision making for the referral of individuals to appropriate community assets to support their needs. The aim of this work was to explore link workers' level of education, and past and current training needs, and to ascertain how much link workers were willing to pay to access and complete training to improve their skill set.

"It sounded a lot simpler on the job description": A qualitative study exploring the role of social prescribing link workers and their training and support needs (2020)

Health & Social Care in the Community 29(6), March 2021

Social prescribing is an increasingly popular approach to promoting health and well-being, by addressing the wider determinants of health such as physical inactivity, social isolation and financial insecurity. Social prescribing link workers (SPs) connect people to local, non-clinical services. As part of the NHS Long Term Plan, NHS England aims to recruit 1,000 SPs across England by 2021.

The frontline of social prescribing - How do we ensure Link Workers can work safely and effectively within primary care?

Chronic Illness 17(4), 2021

OBJECTIVE: To identify the training, skills and experience social prescribing Link Workers, working with patients presenting with long-term conditions, need to carry out their role safely and effectively within primary care services., METHOD: Qualitative

data were collected from Link Workers as part of the evaluation of three social prescribing schemes. Interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed.,

Emergency Department

Feasibility, reach, and acceptability of social prescribing in the emergency department Abstract only*

Journal of Public Health, 2025

BACKGROUND: Social prescribing (SP) connects individuals with community resources to address practical, social and emotional needs affecting health. While predominantly located in primary care, SP models have been introduced in some Emergency Departments (EDs). This study evaluated the feasibility, reach and acceptability of an ED-based SP pilot in the United Kingdom., METHODS: Feasibility and reach were assessed through a retrospective review of anonymised patient trackers and clinical records. Acceptability was evaluated via a staff survey exploring knowledge, attitudes and referral practices.

Ethics

Social prescribing link workers: a test for public health ethics?

Perspectives in Public Health, 2025

In a context marked by health inequalities, economic strain, and the long shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for ethical guidance that is responsive to real-world practice has never been greater. The boundaries of public health practice are being redrawn globally. As roles that once belonged solely to either clinical or public health domains become increasingly integrated, the ethical frameworks designed to support these professions are struggling to keep pace.

Health Inequalities

Improving healthcare access with additional support: enhancing and developing the role of community link workers in the UK - Golby et al

Evidence-Based Nursing, 2025

Access to equitable healthcare is a fundamental right for patients and their families.⁵ Yet the consequences of limited or inadequate access to healthcare can result in suboptimal healthcare. The review's findings highlight that link workers can improve and enable access to community services in the UK and can support patients and their families navigate health systems seamlessly.³

Geographic inequalities in need and provision of social prescribing link workers

The British Journal of General Practice: The Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners, 2024

Abstract: BACKGROUND: Long-term health conditions are major challenges for care systems. Social prescribing link workers have been introduced via Primary Care Networks (PCNs) across England since 2019 to address the wider determinants of health by connecting individuals to activities, groups, or services within their local community., AIM: To assess whether the rollout of social prescribing link workers was in areas with the highest need.

Primary care-based link workers providing social prescribing to improve health and social care outcomes for people with multimorbidity in socially deprived areas (the LinkMM trial): Pilot study for a pragmatic randomised controlled trial

Journal of Multimorbidity and Comorbidity, May 2021

Introduction: Individuals with multimorbidity in deprived areas experience worse health outcomes and fragmented care. Research suggests that primary care-based link workers

providing social prescribing have potential to improve health and well-being. This paper reports the results of a pilot study conducted in preparation for a randomised controlled trial (RCT) that aims to test the effectiveness of primary care-based link workers providing social prescribing in improving health outcomes for people with multimorbidity who attend general practices in deprived areas in Ireland.

"Holding"

"she's Been a Rock": The Function and Importance of "holding" by Social Prescribing Link Workers in Primary Care in England - Findings from a Realist Evaluation

Health and Social Care in the Community 2024, 2024

Social prescribing link workers are recently introduced roles in English primary care. One of their intended functions is to support patients with conditions influenced by the wider, social determinants of health. Their main purpose is to connect people to community resources to meet their nonmedical needs. However, our research reveals that link workers provide not only connections but also what we have described as "holding" for individuals with complex needs, who lack informal networks of support or who are waiting to access services. We explore the concept of holding, its meaning and significance in this context, and consider its consequences. As part of a realist evaluation, we observed seven link workers in GP practices in England during focussed ethnographies over a 3-week period.

Implementation

The consequences of micro-discretions and boundaries in the social prescribing link worker role in England: a realist evaluation

Health and Social Care Delivery Research 13(27), 2024

Background: Social prescribing addresses non-medical factors affecting health and well-being. Link workers are key to its

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delivery by connecting people to relevant support, often in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. Funding from the National Health Service means that link workers are becoming a common part of primary care in England., Objective: To explore and understand the implementation of link workers in primary care in England.

Learning from Covid-19

Exploring lessons from Covid-19 for the role of the voluntary sector in integrated care systems

Health & Social Care in the Community 30(6), 2022

Integrated care systems (ICS) in England are partnerships between different health and social care organisations, to co-ordinate care and therefore provide more effective health and social care provision. The objective of this article is to explore the role of the 'Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise' (VCSE) sector in integrated care systems. In particular, the paper aims to examine recent experiences of the voluntary sector in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, and the lessons that can be learnt for integrated care provision. The article focuses on the case of Oxfordshire (UK), using a mixed methods approach that included a series of semi-structured interviews with key informants in health and the VCSE sector as well as online surveys of GPs and organisations in the VCSE sector.

Challenges and Approaches to Green Social Prescribing During and in the Aftermath of COVID-19: A Qualitative Study

Frontiers in Psychology 13, 2022

The last decade has seen a surge of interest and investment in green social prescribing, however, both healthcare and social enterprise has been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, along with restricted access to public green spaces. This study examines the challenges and opportunities of delivering green social prescribing during and in the aftermath of COVID-19, in the light

of goals of green social prescribing to improve mental health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. Thirty-five one-to-one interviews were conducted between March 2020 and January 2022.

Social prescribing for older people and the role of the cultural sector during the COVID-19 pandemic: What are link workers' views and experiences?

Health & Social Care in the Community 30(6), 2022

Abstract: Older people's well-being can be bolstered by engaging with cultural activities and venues. They may be encouraged to try cultural offers by a link worker as part of social prescribing. However, the cultural sector, like all parts of life, was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; this has had implications for cultural offers available to link workers. A study was conducted to explore the views and experiences of link workers in using the cultural sector within social prescribing, particularly for older people (aged 60+) during the pandemic.

Loneliness

Impact of social prescribing to address loneliness: A mixed methods evaluation of a national social prescribing programme

Health & Social Care in the Community 29(5), pp. 1439-1449

Loneliness is considered a global public health issue because of its detrimental impact on physical and mental health but little is known about which interventions can reduce loneliness. One potential intervention is social prescribing, where a link worker helps service-users to access appropriate support such as community activities and social groups. Some qualitative studies have identified that social prescribing may help to reduce service-users' loneliness. Given this, the British Red Cross (a third sector organisation) developed and delivered a national social prescribing service in the United Kingdom to support

people who were experiencing, or at risk of, loneliness. Service-users could receive up to 12 weeks of support from a link worker.

Long-term conditions

Role of social prescribing link workers in supporting adults with physical and mental health long-term conditions: integrative review

Health & Social Care in the Community, November 2023

Social prescribing link workers interventions have been widely adopted within healthcare systems, particularly in the UK, to support a range of patients' needs and to help improve condition management for those living with multiple long-term conditions. However, there is a lack of consistency in implementation and unclear guidance about how social prescribing link workers might address these needs, particularly in individuals living with physical and mental health long-term conditions who bear a greater burden of multifaceted everyday problems and health challenges. This review aimed to identify the existing ways in which link workers might support the needs of this group.

Impact of a social prescribing intervention in North East England on adults with type 2 diabetes: the SPRING NE multimethod study

Public Health Research (Southampton, England) 11(2), 2023

Abstract: Background: Link worker social prescribing enables health-care professionals to address patients' non-medical needs by linking patients into various services. Evidence for its effectiveness and how it is experienced by link workers and clients is lacking. Objectives: To evaluate the impact and costs of a link worker social prescribing intervention on health and health-care costs and utilisation and to observe link worker delivery and patient engagement.

Service-users' perspectives of link worker social prescribing: a qualitative follow-up study

BMC Public Health 19(98), 2019

Background: Social prescribing enables health-care professionals to address non-medical causes of ill-health by harnessing the resources of the voluntary and community sectors in patient care. Although increasingly popular in the UK, evidence for the effectiveness of social prescribing is inconclusive and longer-term studies are needed. This study aimed to explore experiences of social prescribing among people with long-term conditions one to two years after their initial engagement with a social prescribing service.

Link Worker social prescribing to improve health and wellbeing for people with long-term conditions: qualitative study of service user perception

BMJ Open 7(7), 2017

Objectives: To describe the experiences of patients with long-term conditions who are referred to and engage with a Link Worker social prescribing programme and identify the impact of the Link Worker programme on health and well-being.

Design Qualitative study using semistructured interviews with thematic analysis of the data. Intervention Link Worker social prescribing programme comprising personalised support to identify meaningful health and wellness goals, ongoing support to achieve agreed objectives and linkage into appropriate community services. Setting Inner-city area in West Newcastle upon Tyne, UK (population n=132 000) ranked 40th most socioeconomically deprived in England, served by 17 general practices.

Mental Health

Improving access to primary mental health services: are link workers the answer?

London Journal of Primary Care 6 pp. 23-28, 2014

Background The incidences of common mental disorders such as anxiety, depression and low-level post-traumatic stress are associated with deprivation. Since 2007, the Improving Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT) programme in Ealing has made it easier for primary care practitioners to refer patients with common mental disorders for treatment. However, fewer patients of a black and minority ethnic (BME) background were referred than expected. Setting Southall, Ealing, is a diverse ethnic community; over 70% of the population is classified as having a BME background. Aim To evaluate the effect of locating mental health link workers in general practitioners' (GP) surgeries on referral of BME patients to IAPT services.

Introduction of a child and adolescent mental health link worker: education and health staff focus group findings Abstract only*

Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing 15(8), October 2008

Policy guidance suggests that outcomes for adolescents with mental health problems can be improved by secondary education services (SES) and child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) working more closely. This study reports on staff experiences of the introduction of a mental health link worker (MHLW). The findings of two focus groups are presented, conducted with staff from CAMHS and SES.

Older People

The Role of Social Prescribers in Engaging Older Adults in Strength and Balance Training After Being Discharged From Physiotherapy Rehabilitation: A Qualitative Investigation

Health and Social Care in the Community 2025(1), 2025

Background: Older adults are advised to undertake strength and balance training (SBT) to prevent falls. This can be provided by physiotherapy services for a limited time, but long-term engagement is required to maintain the benefits. Finding ways to support long-term engagement is needed. Aim(s): To understand if it is feasible to develop a referral pathway from physiotherapy services to social prescribers for engaging older adults in long-term SBT within their daily lives.

A Novel Service: The Role of the Community Connector for Older Persons within ICPOP Abstract only*

Age and Ageing 53(Supplement 4), 2024

Background: The Community Connector (CC) uses a social prescribing model to work with Older Persons who have recently engaged with ICPOP, complementing the multidisciplinary interventions they receive. A holistic approach is used to support the patient to access a range of community supports to benefit their health and wellbeing and address the social determinants of their health.

Does a social prescribing 'holistic' link-worker for older people with complex, multimorbidity improve well-being and frailty and reduce health and social care use and costs? A 12-month before-and-after evaluation

Primary Health Care Research & Development, September 2019

Aim: To evaluate the impact of 'holistic' link-workers on service users' well-being, activation and frailty, and their use of health and social care services and the associated costs. Background: UK policy is encouraging social prescribing (SP) as a means to improve well-being, self-care and reduce demand on the NHS and social services. However, the evidence to support this policy is generally weak and poorly conceptualised, particularly in relation to frail, older people and patient activation.

Palliative Care

Bridging inequities in palliative and end-of-life care: The role and experiences of community connectors

Palliative Care and Social Practice 19, 2025

Background: The Community Connectors programme is a UK pilot initiative designed to bridge gaps between cancer, palliative, and end-of-life care services and diverse ethnic and faith communities. Community Connectors are local individuals with strong cultural insight who enhance two-way communication, increase awareness of care services, and address the unique needs of seldom-heard groups, including South Asian, Black African-Caribbean, and Eastern European communities. By engaging trusted community members, the programme aims to foster relationships, empower communities, and improve understanding of cancer and palliative care pathways among underserved populations.

Compassionate community connectors: a distinct form of end-of-life volunteering Abstract only*

Progress in Palliative Care 31(1), 2023

Public health approaches to palliative care have long promoted the contribution of formal and informal volunteering to providing effective end-of-life care in neighbourhoods and communities. A central strategy for this is a 'compassionate communities' approach that focuses on building care networks and developing community members' capacities in end-of-life care. There is anecdotal evidence of differences in the motivations and life experiences of traditional palliative care volunteers and volunteers in compassionate community programs.

Patient Centred Care

Patient buy-in to social prescribing through link workers as part of person-centred care: a realist evaluation

Health and Social Care Delivery Research 13(27), 2024

Background: Social prescribing link workers have become part of primary health care in recent years. They help patients to recognise non-medical factors affecting their health and identify sources of support, often in the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector. They form part of wider work to strengthen person-centred care, which actively seeks to engage individuals in decision-making about their health, taking into account their medical, social, psychological, financial and spiritual circumstances., Objective: To understand how buy-in to social prescribing and the link worker role is established for a patient, and how this relates to person-centred care., Design: A realist evaluation., Setting: Patients engaging with link workers in seven different parts of England were involved.

Population Outcomes

Impact of the rollout of the national social prescribing link worker programme on population outcomes: evidence from a repeated cross-sectional survey

British Journal of General Practice, 2025

Background: Social prescribing link workers have been rolled out nationally through the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme. Link workers connect people to advice and support to address the non-medical and social issues affecting their health and wellbeing. Aim: To determine whether the rollout of social prescribing link workers through primary care networks improved population outcomes.

Primary Care

Mapping Variation in Delivery Models and Data Recording of Primary Care Social Prescribing Link Worker (SPLW) Schemes Across Five Regions in England and Scotland

Health & Social Care in the Community, July 2025

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Social prescribing link workers (SPLWs) connect people to community resources for better health and well-being. Over the past decade, SPLW schemes have expanded rapidly in NHS primary care in England and Scotland. However, how these schemes have been implemented and assessed in different parts of England and Scotland is not well understood. A mapping exercise of SPLW schemes in three English and two Scottish regions was undertaken to identify services and describe their key features, as well as any variations in delivery, what data are recorded, and how outcomes are measured.

Community health navigators in Australian general practice: an implementation study

Australian Journal of Primary Health 31, 2025

Background Patient health navigators have an emerging role in assisting people to connect with health and social care services especially those experiencing language and communication barriers. A challenge with navigator programs is sustaining their implementation. This study evaluated the implementation and sustainability of bilingual community navigators (BCNs) in multilingual general practices in Sydney and their impact on patient access.

Best practice approaches to social prescribing in European Primary Care: A Delphi protocol focused on link workers

Advances in Clinical and Experimental Medicine : Official Organ Wroclaw Medical University 34(9), 2025

INTRODUCTION: Social prescribing (SP) is an innovative model that connects individuals to non-clinical community resources. However, its uptake and evaluation have been hindered by inconsistent role definitions for key stakeholders. Although recent studies have refined SP definitions, outside the UK, the responsibilities, educational backgrounds and training requirements of social prescribing link workers (SPLWs) remain poorly defined. Additionally, it is essential to identify which

patient populations will benefit most from SP, establish specific methodologies, and standardize assessment tools and referral pathways.

Experiences of integrating social prescribing link workers into primary care in England - bolting on, fitting in, or belonging: a realist evaluation

The British Journal of General Practice : The Journal of the Royal College of General Practitioners 75(752), 2025

BACKGROUND: Following the 2019 NHS Long Term Plan, link workers have been employed across primary care in England to deliver social prescribing., AIM: To understand and explain how the link worker role is being implemented in primary care in England., DESIGN AND SETTING: This was a realist evaluation undertaken in England, focusing on link workers based in primary care.

Implementation of link workers in primary care: Synopsis of findings from a realist evaluation

Health and Social Care Delivery Research 13(27), 2025

Background: Social prescribing link workers formed part of the Additional Roles Reimbursement Scheme introduced into primary care in England from 2019. Link workers assist patients experiencing issues affecting their health and well-being that are 'non-medical' (e.g. lack of social connections, financial difficulties and housing problems). They give patients space to consider these non-medical issues and, when relevant, connect them to support, often within the voluntary-community-social-enterprise sector. We conducted an earlier realist review on the link worker role in primary care.

Evidence Brief: Social Prescribing Link Workers

An exploratory randomised trial investigating feasibility, potential impact and cost effectiveness of link workers for people living with multimorbidity attending general practices in deprived urban communities

BMC Primary Care 25(1), 2024

Background: Social prescribing link workers are non-health or social care professionals who connect people with psychosocial needs to non-clinical community supports. They are being implemented widely, but there is limited evidence for appropriate target populations or cost effectiveness. This study aimed to explore the feasibility, potential impact on health outcomes and cost effectiveness of practice-based link workers for people with multimorbidity living in deprived urban communities.

Implementing a General Practice-Based Link Worker Intervention for People with Multimorbidity During the Covid-19 Pandemic- a Mixed Methods Process Evaluation of the LinkMM RCT

International Journal of Integrated Care 24(4), 2024

Background: Social prescribing link workers support patients to connect with community resources to improve their health and well-being. These roles are prominent in policy, but there is limited evidence on what support is provided by link workers and what factors influence implementation of link worker interventions.,

Professional Identity

"Winging It": An Exploration of the Self-Perceived Professional Identity of Social Prescribing Link Workers

Health & Social Care in the Community, 2023

The practice of social prescribing (SP) has been rapidly expanding throughout the UK in recent years. The role of SP link workers (SPLWs) currently has no nationally prescribed requirements in terms of qualifications, background, or

experience. This qualitative study of 13 SPLWs using semi-structured interviews is believed to be the first exploration of perceptions of their professional identity and the agency and structure within their roles.

Retention

Factors associated with link workers considering leaving their role: a cross-sectional survey

BJGP Open, 2025

BACKGROUND: Social prescribing (SP) link workers (LWs) listen to patients' concerns and difficulties, and connect them to relevant community assets (groups, organisations, or charities) that can help with their non-medical issues (for example, loneliness, debt, housing). LW retention is key to sustaining SP within primary care., AIM: To examine occupational self-efficacy, job discrepancy, and other factors as potential predictors of LWs' intentions to leave or remain in their posts.

Scope of Practice

Intervention components of link worker social prescribing programmes: a scoping review

Health & Social Care in the Community 30(6),
October 2022

In the United Kingdom (UK), link worker social prescribing has emerged as an option to improve long-term condition management and address primary care patients' non-medical needs by linking patients with community-based activities and support. Social prescribing is a complex, heterogenous intervention, and there is currently no taxonomy of components to guide its implementation and evaluation. This study aimed to identify and categorise the components of link worker social prescribing schemes in the United Kingdom. A scoping review of peer-reviewed literature was conducted.

Evidence Brief: Social Prescribing Link Workers

Constituting link working through choice and care: an ethnographic account of front-line social prescribing

Sociology of Health & Illness 45(2), October 2022

Link worker social prescribing has become a prominent part of NHS England's personalisation agenda. However, approaches to social prescribing vary, with multiple discourses emerging about the potential of social prescribing and different interpretations of personalisation. The transformational promise of social prescribing is the subject of ongoing debate, whilst the factors that shape the nature of front-line link working practices remain unclear.

Link workers, activities and target groups in social prescribing: a literature review

Journal of Integrated Care 30(5), December 2022

Purpose: Social prescribing is a model of integrated care, in which primary healthcare staff can link patients to the social care sector. However, social prescribing can occur in different forms. To better understand the concept of social prescribing, this literature review examines the role of the link workers, activities and target groups.

The role of social prescribers in Wales: a consensus methods study

Perspectives in Public Health 142(5), 2022

Aims: Social prescribing continues to grow and change across healthcare services in Wales; however, research of the day-to-day performance of social prescribers is limited. This study aimed to explore which roles are perceived to be the most important and frequently used by social prescribers in Wales and compare these results to reports in studies of services in other countries in order to support future role development and potential standardisation.

More than signposting: Findings from an evaluation of a social prescribing service

Health & Social Care in the Community 30(6), 2022

Abstract: This paper presents findings from an evaluation of a social prescribing service, undertaken between January 2019 and December 2020. Data was collected through interviews and focus groups with a range of groups including social prescribing managers, link workers (LWs), referrers (GPs and social work practitioners), clients, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) agencies and groups. Thematic analysis of data was undertaken, and findings were presented in respect of clients' journeys into social prescribing; the support received from LWs; their onward journeys to VCS support.

Link worker perspectives of early implementation of social prescribing: A 'Researcher-in-Residence' study

Health & Social Care in the Community 29(6), 2021

Social prescribing (SP) is increasing in popularity in the UK and can enable healthcare providers to respond more effectively to a range of non-clinical needs. With the NHS commitment to establish an SP link worker in all GP practices, there is a rapid increase in the number of SP schemes across the country. There is currently insufficient evidence concerning the implementation and acceptability of SP schemes. In this paper, we report our analysis of the descriptions of the experiences of SP link workers, regarding the early implementation of SP link workers in two SP programmes in the South West.

Collaboration with community connectors to improve primary care access for hardy reached people: a case comparison of rural Ireland and Australia

BMC Health Services Research 20(1), 2020

BACKGROUND: This study presents a way for health services to improve service access for hardy reached people through an exploration of how staff can find and collaborate with citizens

(referred to as connectors) who span socio-cultural boundaries in their community. The study explored the local socio-cultural contexts of connectors' boundary spanning activities and if they are health related; boundary spanning occurring between connectors and health professionals at the interface of health systems and community; and the opportunities and barriers to actively seeking out and collaborating with community connectors to access marginalised and hardly reached people.

Link workers' perspectives on factors enabling and preventing client engagement with social prescribing Abstract only*

Health & Social Care in the Community 27(4), January 2019
For a social prescribing intervention to achieve its aims, clients must first be effectively engaged. A 'link worker' facilitating linkage between clients and community resources has been identified as a vital component of social prescribing. However, the mechanisms underpinning successful linkage remain underspecified. This qualitative study is the first to explore link workers' own definitions of their role in social prescribing and the skills and qualities identified by link workers themselves as necessary for effective client linkage.

Third Sector

Third sector perspectives on community link worker referrals in social prescribing: a realist analysis

Frontiers in Public Health 13, 2025

Introduction: Community link workers (CLWs), also known as social prescribing link workers, connect individuals to community support, much of which is provided by third-sector organisations (TSOs). TSOs are common referral destinations for CLWs, yet the relationships between CLWs and TSOs remain under-explored., Method: This realist study investigated TSOs' perceptions of link working, focusing on referral and collaboration dynamics.

Workforce

Social prescribing link workers – a qualitative Australian perspective

Health & Social Care in the Community 30(6), October 2022
Social prescribing (or community referral) is a model of healthcare designed to address social needs that contribute to poor health. At the heart of social prescribing programs is the link worker, who liaises between clients, health professionals and community organisations. Social prescribing is newly emerging in Australia but there are already calls for a large-scale roll out. This research, therefore, aimed to understand Australian link workers' role and skills required, to determine where such a workforce could be drawn from in Australia, and to identify what training and resources are needed to support this potential new workforce.

Networks

NHS England's Social Prescribing Network

By joining the social prescribing network, you will have access to:

1. NHS England Social Prescribing Monthly Bulletin (news, upcoming webinars and events)
2. FutureNHS Social Prescribing Collaboration Platform (access to resources, discussion forums, peer support, webinar recordings and training and development opportunities)

National Association of Link Workers

We are the unifying professional identity for social prescribing link workers, leading the way in setting standards and serving as the guiding force for practitioners. As the bedrock of the profession, we are unwavering in ensuring safety and promoting evidence-based practices. Operating independently, our membership reflects the dedication of social prescribing link workers in providing high-quality services to patients and communities.

eLearning

Social Prescribing – Learning for Link Workers

NHS England eLearning for Healthcare

Social prescribing enables all primary care staff and local agencies to refer people to a link worker. 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 connect people to community groups and agencies for practical and emotional support. They collaborate with local partners to support community groups to

be accessible and sustainable and help people to start new groups. The NHS Long Term Plan commits to embedding social prescribing link workers within every [primary care network](#) (PCN) as part of a wider shift towards universal personalised care. The aim is for at least 900,000 people to be referred to social prescribing schemes by 2023/24.

Competency Frameworks

Canadian Social Prescribing Link Worker Competency Framework

Canadian Institute for Social Prescribing, August 2024

The Canadian Social Prescribing Link Worker Competency Framework, currently in development, will outline the domains, competencies, essential skills and knowledge required for Link Workers and equivalent roles, including Community Connectors, Resource Coordinators, and Navigators (henceforth encapsulated in this document as 'Link Workers'). This framework will be designed to ensure the broader Social Prescribing workforce is well-equipped to consistently deliver high-quality care and support across Canada.

Workforce development framework: social prescribing link workers

See Section 9 Competency Framework and Annex A
NHS England, Publication date: January 2023

The [Competency Framework \(Annex A\)](#) sets out the core competencies that all SPLWs working in or with PCNs need in order to deliver their role, and is designed to assist those who employ or direct the activities of SPLWs to understand the competencies for practicing safely and effectively in their role, and how these competencies can be achieved.

Education Standards for Social Prescribing Link Workers

National Association of Link Workers, 2022

National Association of Link Workers (NALW) is the professional body for Social Prescribing Link Workers in the UK. We are committed to upholding the confidence and integrity of the profession by ensuring patients, clients, service users, and communities receive high-quality social prescribing services. The key aims of this commitment are to have appropriately qualified and skilled professionals trained to robust standards and working within a clear scope of practice.

Social Prescribing Link Worker Competency Framework

NHS, 2022

This Competency Framework has been designed to outline competencies that SPLWs working in or with PCNs require in order to deliver their role. This framework is aligned to the NHS England & NHS Improvement Sample Job Description for SPLWs (Annex A, Summary Guide). This framework is also aligned to the Core Curriculum for Personalised Care published by the Personalised Care Institute (PCI), which acts as the foundational framework for both Personalised Care and specific Personalised Care roles in primary care.