

## Innovative ideas: Healthcare

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This briefing provides an overview of innovative approaches to healthcare in the field of migrant<sup>1</sup> integration. It is one of four<sup>2</sup> which MigrationWork CIC has produced to inspire and inform readers about what has worked well and why in the run-up to our MiFriendly Cities social innovation<sup>3</sup> workshops that we are hosting in the West Midlands. The approaches outlined below do not represent an exhaustive list.

### Innovative approaches - introduction

Here are some examples of healthcare projects from across Europe which we hope will inspire you. We looked at projects that:

- **Focus on rights**
- **Improve mental health**
- **Encourage a healthy lifestyle (wellbeing)**

### What is healthcare?

'Healthcare' includes helping migrants access a wide range of health services as well as more 'home made' solutions to encouraging and promoting positive mental and physical health. Here are some suggestions for approaches to support migrants in your area to set up schemes which promote good health in some way.

Health is a particular issue for migrants for various reasons. The trauma associated with some migration journeys can affect people's mental and physical health and [some studies](#) point to higher rates of **depression** and **anxiety** amongst asylum seeker/refugee populations. For those arriving in the UK, health also appears to decline over time rather than improve, the result of multiple factors such as **discrimination**, **isolation** and **lack of access to good food and opportunities for exercise**, for example. Particularly vulnerable groups include children and women experiencing **sexual or physical abuse**, including trafficking victims. Some detailed [research on migrant health](#) in Birmingham where 'health histories' of migrants in the city were collected was done in 2016<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In this context we define this as a person who was born outside of the UK.

<sup>2</sup> On the topics of housing, employment, active citizenship and healthcare.

<sup>3</sup> Innovation is broadly defined here as a new approach that the sector can learn from, or an approach which builds on previous insights to offer something new, to deliver effective results.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-social-sciences/social-policy/iris/2016/health-histories-report-final.pdf>

## Rights-based approaches

Migrants may not access the healthcare they need for various reasons:

- They may not be aware they have a right to the service
- They may be fearful that accessing the service may compromise in some way their right to stay in the UK or the progress of their asylum claim
- They may not understand the complexities of how to access a service e.g. how to register with a GP

### Innovative approaches:

- **Opposing the 'Health Surcharge' through demonstrations:** In 2014, the UK Government introduced an 'Immigration Health Surcharge' of up to £200 per year, as well as extending the charging rules from secondary to primary care and A&E departments. Many have strongly opposed these changes, including [Docs Not Cops](#) and [Doctors of the World](#), who have run campaigns including public demonstrations, social media days of action, and set up a 'border checkpoint' to [blockade the entrance to the Department of Health](#). These actions won them support from leaders in the NHS.<sup>5</sup>
- **'Healthcare for all':** Some cities in Europe have embraced the concept of 'healthcare for all' and initiated city-wide programmes which make the rights of all citizens explicit. For example, Frankfurt's health department states openly that "It is our business to provide healthcare for any person without health insurance or papers!"
- **Firewalls:** Having a 'firewall' (meaning data cannot be shared) between healthcare and immigration control is a key plank of having a fair, rights-based and effective health system in place which works for migrants, as PICUM notes in its good practice guidelines on healthcare for undocumented migrants. *"There should be a 'firewall' between healthcare services and immigration control. A prohibition on carrying out immigration enforcement actions near health facilities or sharing personal data should be explicit in law and implemented in practice. This should apply to all those involved in health services, including related administration."*
- **Taking legal action to protect data privacy:** Migrants' Rights Network and Liberty have successfully legally challenged the recent moves by the UK government which enabled the Home Office to access patient information<sup>6</sup>. However it seems the Home Office is still keen to access medical information if it can: this briefing<sup>7</sup> by [Just Fair](#) and [Doctors of the World](#) sets out why it is so bad for migrant health.
- **Befriending: The Refugee Council** has a '[Health Access for Refugees programme](#)' which could be adapted to any local context. This trains volunteers to help them act as advocates and befrienders for newly arriving asylum seekers and refugees and 'know their rights'.

<sup>5</sup> <https://keepournhspublic.com/social-care-nhs/docs-not-cops-protect-access-to-nhs-on-basis-of-need/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/news/doctors-of-the-worlds-statement-on-legal-victory-to-stopsharing-patient-information>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.statewatch.org/news/2017/jun/uk-healthcare-border-control-paper-dotw-just-fair-6-17.pdf><sup>2</sup>



**Faced with these changes, concerns and confusions, migrants' groups can consider setting up projects which help people to:**

- understand their entitlements,
  - understand what information they are expected to provide (and what they are not expected to provide) and
  - understand where to go if they feel that they are being wrongfully charged for services.
- **Providing information about rights:** Research done by **Maternity Action** has shown that many migrants are being charged (or threatened with being charged) for maternity services causing, potentially extreme distress.<sup>8</sup> The Migrant Women's Rights Service at Maternity Action give migrant women information about their rights, and advocate for their rights, as well as training midwives so that they are more aware of the rights and entitlements of their female migrant patients.
  - **Explaining: PAFRAS (Positive Action for Asylum Seekers)** in Leeds supports asylum seekers in a range of ways, including explaining the health system and how they can access what they need. They have produced [leaflets](#) to help with this and they run information sessions and give one to one advocacy support.

## Improving mental health

- **Improving understanding among health service providers of specific migrant needs:** The Equality Improvement Team at MIND has produced [guidance](#) around supporting vulnerable migrants and has a programme of trying to influence Mental Health Service Providers in the NHS to become more aware of migrant communities and their needs.<sup>9</sup>
- **Mindfulness + lifestyle:** Causeway Irish Housing Association was funded in 2017 to develop a programme to *"help deal with trauma experienced before coming to the UK and the feelings of grief and loss that can prevent emotional, economic and social integration."*<sup>10</sup> Their approach has focussed on setting up mindfulness sessions, encouraging healthy eating and doing exercise.
- **The power of therapeutic groups:** Praxis Community Projects in London works with women in therapeutic groups to do art, cookery, dance and exercise activities which encourage sharing. Some of the groups, for example, women victims of trafficking, have shown notable improvements as women begin to 'come out of their shells' and start to open up about their experiences. Critically, the therapeutic groups are facilitated by people who are trained in counselling or therapeutic techniques.
- **'Walk and Talk' groups:** this simple exercise has been pursued by various migrant groups who find volunteers to go for a walk ... and talk... with migrants who may have issues or concerns they want to discuss. This needs to be supervised and recognised as not being counselling, but there is evidence to show that for a range of

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/18/nhs-fees-maternity-care-putting-migrant-mothers-at-risk>

<sup>9</sup> Here are some [useful documents](#) + resources on [MIND's resources page](#), which can be used to educate migrants and services alike.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/charity-funds-trauma-support-for-migrants-and-refugees>



reasons talking when walking is physically, emotionally and culturally easier for some people than attending more formal sessions. Walking is also clearly good for you physically and gets people out of the house.

### Encouraging healthy lifestyles (wellbeing)

There is a range of ways in which projects might contribute to either mental or physical health in some way. 'Wellbeing' is the phrase of the moment and makes us think about health as not only being to do with disease prevention and cure, but everything which makes up a healthy and happy individual. Vital components of wellbeing include:

- **Being connected to others:** Activities which promote group work, cooking together, dancing or socialising or learning with others are all on this spectrum. So too are activities which help migrants understand the 'lay of the land' in terms of services: not just health services, but also a range of others (such as libraries, transport, museums and so on) which might be of use to migrants in their daily lives but they may not know about.
- **Being able to express yourself:** ESOL lessons are, for some, profoundly connected to their sense of wellbeing as if you cannot speak to most people around you over time this can prove intensely isolating. Language lessons in a non-judgemental environment will contribute greatly to people's 'wellbeing'.
- **Eating well:** taking part in events which involve helping people cook and share food is not just about eating well but also connecting and feeling that identity, as expressed in food, remains alive and 'shareable'. Various projects have focussed on this as part of a wellbeing programme.<sup>11</sup>

Examples of such projects include Active Lives and [Healthy Minds](#), a project set up by Race on the Agenda that is encouraging wellbeing amongst a range of local community groups.

### Summary

- Helping migrants access healthcare requires them to know their rights and understand what services are on offer and how to access them. Producing leaflets is one cost-efficient way forward, but face to face information-giving and one to one advocacy (for instance, accompanying them to hospitals or GPs) may also be required.
- Mental health is a particular issue: help in accessing services may also be needed but there is also a range of therapeutic interventions such as group work which groups can consider setting up.
- Wellbeing encompasses mental health, but is also about combatting social isolation, improving diet, smoking cessation, creating relationships and starting doing some form of exercise. Any activities which contribute to migrants starting to connect, create and think about their wellbeing alongside others can fit into this bracket, including activities which boost confidence such as group trips and outings.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/mar/08/little-taste-of-home-immigrants-food-defines-them>