

## Health provision for young people aged under 18 in and leaving SPS custody

Debbie Nolan, CYCJ

It is widely recognised that there is a cyclical link between inequality, offending, being a victim and poor health (see for example the [Report of the Ministerial Group on Offender Reintegration](#)). However, a period of detention in custody can present an opportunity to address the health and wellbeing of a particularly marginalised group of people. Since 2011, responsibility for health care in prisons, including for dental and optometry treatment, has belonged to [NHS Scotland](#). Under Principle 9 of the [UN \(1990\) Basic Principles for the Treatment of Prisoners](#): “Prisoners shall have access to the health services available in the country without discrimination on the grounds of their legal situation”. As a result, individuals are entitled to the same healthcare whether they are in the community or in custody. Moreover, the [Mental Health Strategy: 2017-2027](#) includes actions around increasing the support for the mental health needs of young people involved in offending and increasing the workforce to enable access to dedicated mental health professionals in all prisons (Actions 7 and 15), with a focus on joined up accessible services. Similarly, under the Scottish Government’s Youth Justice Strategy [Preventing Offending Getting it right for children and young people](#) commitments include improving the health and wellbeing of young people involved in offending behaviour and transitions and reintegration of young people from secure care and custody under the priority theme of improving life chances. Inspections by [HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland](#) include a focus on health and wellbeing based on the [standard](#) that “The prison takes all reasonable steps to ensure the health and wellbeing of all prisoners” and associated quality indicators.

It is however acknowledged that a range of barriers to the continuity of healthcare have been [identified](#). For [young people](#), this includes difficulties with accessing generic and specialist services in custody, differential access for young people who are remanded and those who are sentenced, information sharing between services, and accessing services on return to the community (including GP services, prescriptions and specialist services). The following information highlights the supports that should be made available to young people on their journey through custody and on return to the community.

### During a period of detention

When a young person is remanded or sentenced to custody, Criminal Justice Social Work Reports and the Child’s Plan (where established) should be shared by the local authority (as per [Information Sheet 44](#)), and any relevant health information should be shared by SPS staff with health centre staff. On admission, the young person’s immediate medical needs (including medication and addictions) will be assessed and addressed by a qualified staff nurse, which will include application of the [suicide prevention strategy](#). Information about the Health Centre will be shared with the young person, consent to share information gained and any necessary basic care plans established. Where young people are serving a sentence of more than six months, they will be de-registered from their GP and registered with the Health Centre GP in custody.

During the induction process when entering custody, all young people are seen by health care staff and advised of what services are available and how to access them (either via self-referral, parents, SPS staff or other agencies). The main healthcare services include primary care; mental health; addictions; emergency care and throughcare, but a range of further clinics, services, groups and programmes are available. Health Centre staff can also refer young people on for a range of other healthcare services, both internally and externally. This would be determined by individual need and in some cases services are offered as opt out (e.g. sexual health and blood borne virus screening). Length of detention may also affect service access, such as whether treatment would take longer than the period of detention and while on remand routine dental treatment would not commence but emergency dental treatment would be provided. As required, care plans are established and reviewed regularly, with multi-disciplinary case conferencing available to provide management plans for individuals who have complex needs.

### What are the contact details for Scottish Prison Service health services?

#### As In respect of young people, the main points of contact are:

- Denise Allan (NHS Forth Valley Clinical Manager at HMP & YOI Polmont): denise.allan@nhs.net; 01324 722233
- Claire McBeath (NHS Forth Valley Clinical Manager at HMP & YOI Cornton Vale): claire.mcbeath@nhs.net; 01786 835335
- Rosemary Duffy (NHS Forth Valley Prison's Healthcare Manager): rosemary.duffy1@nhs.net; 01324 722233 or 01786 835335

(these are admin contact numbers for HMP & YOI Polmont and Cornton Vale who would be able to direct calls accordingly)

### On release

On liberation, all young people should be provided with a health letter and five day supply of non-over the counter medication, with a letter for their GP. Young people should be signposted to relevant services, including community prescribers, and treatment plans sent to continuing care providers. Details of any outstanding appointments will be placed in the young person's property for release. When a referral for a service is made, this should not be closed off when a young person changes GP (as may happen when a young person enters or leaves custody).

It is acknowledged that accessing health services on return to the community can be problematic. In terms of GP registration, everyone is entitled to be registered with a GP even if they do not have a permanent address. If an individual is trying to register with a GP they can use a care of address, such as a friend or relative's address, or that of the GP Practice itself. If there are issues with registration, the registration helpline can be contacted on 0845 300 1661, with opening hours:

Monday to Wednesday 8.30am - 5.30pm  
Thursday and Friday 8.30am - 4.30pm

Further information is available at [Healthcare Improvement Scotland](#); the [Scottish Government](#); The National [Prisoner Healthcare Network](#) and [Youth and Criminal Justice in Scotland: The young person's journey](#). The Improving Life Chances implementation group is currently developing a document highlighting what prevents young people working with justice services from living a healthy lifestyle and suggestions to address these barriers, which will include young people transitioning to and from custody.

If you would like further information or support, please contact CYCJ on 0141 444 8622 or [cycj@strath.ac.uk](mailto:cycj@strath.ac.uk).

w [www.cycj.org.uk](http://www.cycj.org.uk)  
e [cycj@strath.ac.uk](mailto:cycj@strath.ac.uk)  
 [@CYCJScotland](https://twitter.com/CYCJScotland)