

Providing smoking cessation support within homelessness services and settings

Guidance based on a public consultation involving people with lived experience together with frontline staff and local authority commissioners in Portsmouth



CONTEXT

Tobacco smoking is the 'leading cause of preventable illness and premature death in England'. Smoking increases the risk of developing serious health conditions (70% of cases of lung cancer can be linked to smoking)². In the UK, over 75% of people experiencing homelessness (PEH) smoke tobacco compared to a national average of almost 14%.³ Deaths for PEH are high for smoking-related illnesses and continuing to smoke through substance use treatment makes someone twice as likely to relapse.⁵ Health inequalities are greatest for PEH; the average age of death for PEH is 30 years lower than the national average, at 45.4 years for men and 43.2 years for women.⁷ Barriers to accessing healthcare for PEH include stigma and discrimination, finances, and exclusionary policies.⁸ The homelessness workforce would also benefit from cessation support.

“I shouldn’t be smoking anyway. I’m literally killing myself right now.”

Resident

The 2017 Department of Health and Social Care Policy Paper (updated in 2020)⁸ ‘Smoke-free generation: A tobacco control plan for England’ highlighted ‘smoking and its associated harms continue to fall hardest on some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society’ and ‘tobacco dependence is one of the hardest addictions to break’. The reported annual cost of smoking is £2.5bn to the NHS, and £4.1bn to wider society⁸, together with PEH buying cigarettes rather than food⁹, brings meaningful financial outcomes from quitting smoking. Around 50% of PEH smokers would like to give up but lack suitable support.¹⁰

E-cigarettes are less harmful than smoking tobacco.¹¹ Portsmouth City Council ran a successful pilot programme providing vaping products during the ‘Everybody In’ policy^{12, 13}. Research has shown sustained abstinence following provision of free vaping products within homelessness settings, with an additional reduction in mental health symptoms¹⁴. Moreover, training for staff has been identified as an important factor in offering free vaping products.

“What would you like that support to look like? What would the service look like?”

“Well...this really. Someone talking about it, patches and vapes.” Resident

ABOUT THE PROJECT

A co-produced research study in March 2023 conducted by researchers from the University of Southampton and Portsmouth City Council staff.

Stage 1

The views of 32 people experiencing homeless and 9 staff from homelessness services in Portsmouth were gathered in focus groups and individual interviews. 96% of the participants who were currently only smoking cigarettes expressed a desire to quit smoking. 12 participants had already begun the transition to vaping, with 3 of those exclusively using e-cigarettes.

Stage 2

At a research impact event, Public Health and Local Authority commissioning teams, plus staff from local homelessness organisations and substance misuse services, devised the recommendations in this leaflet using the perspectives gained in stage 1.

Visit www.chrphomeless.org.uk/research-library for more study info.

Barriers	Facilitators
Smoke-filled environment	Free alternative products available
Lack of accurate information for support available	Easy access by support being provided in hostels and day centres
Assumptions around desire to quit	Individualised support
Previous negative attempts to quit	Staff training and awareness
Social benefits of smoking	Health warnings
Addiction is hard to break	Internal motivation

“If everyone has drug problems, cigarettes are at the bottom of a 10 page list.”

Staff



RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

Vaping products should be offered free of charge to any person experiencing homelessness. These products should be offered within current services to maximise access i.e. where people are. This could be in day centres, hostels, homeless healthcare teams, and through outreach teams. Training for staff supplying the vaping products is essential, covering aspects of proper use and dosage.

Recommendation 2

Treat vaping differently to smoking so that smoke-free buildings or organisations allow the use of e-cigarettes on the premises. It may be desirable to create vaping areas within these settings to continue to provide areas for those who do not vape.

Recommendation 3

Provide staff training to raise awareness and provide knowledge of available services. Awareness training would be used to speak to clients about the topic of smoking cessation and support options in the normal course of support. Brief advice training could be used to allay staff fears about raising the topic with clients. Up-to-date knowledge of local or online support for smoking cessation is essential for staff to signpost clients, and ideally, providing the option to accompany clients to appointments or services if necessary.

“Tenancy wise, license wise is good, ‘cause being in temporary accommodation or supported... there’s no smoking allowed at all. So it’s helpful for them because... it helps with their licence.”

Staff

Recommendation 4

Create smoking cessation champion roles for both staff and clients. The cessation champion would raise the profile of smoking cessation support, sharing the range of support available and ways to access this support, and embed smoking cessation practice in the service. Champions would also collect feedback to inform support services of ways to improve, address barriers to access together with affirmation of effective elements and delivery. Cessation champions may receive financial incentives, which is particularly desirable for low-paid staff or clients relying on limited benefits.

Recommendation 5

Create a consistent approach across the locality, with a city-wide tobacco control strategy to which individual policies can be linked. Provide opportunities for joint working and knowledge sharing so that continued learning for policy and practice can happen. Include a range of people in this process, including those with lived experience and working on the frontline.

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Thank you to all the staff and clients who contributed their time and expertise to this project.



Contact us

We would welcome the opportunity to provide you with more information about this project, its findings and its outputs so please get in touch. The full research findings will be published in due course.

Research Team

Dr Becky Ward
University of Southampton
r.j.ward@soton.ac.uk

Katie Wood
Portsmouth City Council
katie.wood@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Jennifer Tarabay
University of Southampton
j.tarabay@soton.ac.uk

Sophie Kecsmar
Portsmouth City Council
sophie.kecsmar@portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Find out more

www.chrphomeless.org.uk/research-library

For support in the delivery of smoking cessation interventions, visit the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training at www.ncsct.co.uk/

If you are in Portsmouth and would like support to stop smoking, visit Portsmouth Wellbeing Service at www.wellbeingportsmouth.co.uk/

In other areas, visit: www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit/ to find local support

