

## Extending NHS Stop Smoking Services to People with Mental Health Conditions: A Survey of NHS Stop Smoking Services in London

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Smoking rates are significantly higher among those with mental illnesses compared with the general population<sup>1</sup>. This high smoking rate has been demonstrated to be a major contributor to the excess mortality rates observed among mental health service users<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the evidence that around half of smokers with mental health problems in the UK have expressed a desire to quit<sup>3</sup>, it may be that professional, stop smoking support is not be easily accessible for this group. For example, a large survey of NHS staff revealed that mental healthcare professionals are significantly less positive about taking a role in supporting service users to quit smoking than their general healthcare colleagues<sup>4</sup>. Recent Department of Health guidance highlights the need for NHS Stop Smoking Services to collaborate with specialist mental health services, as well as the importance of attention to issues such as the changes in the metabolism of certain psychotropic medications following smoking cessation<sup>5</sup>.

Semi-structured Interviews were conducted by telephone with staff from 93% London's NHS Stop Smoking Services to examine the extent to which this guidance was being followed. The survey findings highlighted a number of concerns. Most notably, the majority of NHS Stop Smoking Services in London are neither asking their clients about their mental health nor taking any appropriate actions when mental health problems are revealed. These gaps in routine practice have the potential to lead to the clinical mismanagement of quit smoking attempts by people with mental health problems. In addition, Stop Smoking Service staff generally reported poor levels of partnership working and with local mental healthcare providers.

There is an urgent requirement for guidance and training on smoking and mental health aimed at Stop Smoking Services and other professionals delivering smoking cessation support in the community (eg – General Practitioners, Pharmacists). There is also a need for better collaboration between Primary Care Trusts and mental healthcare providers on the issue of smoking.

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