

Scottish Community Link Worker and Macmillan ICJ Link Worker Joint Networking Event 9 September 2025

Introduction

The Scottish Community Link Worker and Macmillan ICJ Link Worker Networks hosted their first joint event to enable link workers and leads from across both Networks to share learning and good practice. There has been considerable interest, particularly from the ICJ link workers, to find out more about Scotland's CLWs and the SCLWN, particularly as a number of ICJ and CLW programmes across Scotland have come together under one management structure. Gordon McLean, Nations Lead Scotland for Macmillan Cancer Support welcomed everyone to the event and invited them to introduce themselves in the chat.

Community Link Worker National Review

Sushrith Kasturi from Scottish Government's Primary Care Directorate provided an overview of the national strategic context for Scottish Government's Health and Social Care Directorate, highlighting key priorities including tackling child poverty and improving public services. He explained the role of General Practice Community Link Workers (CLWs), funded through the Primary Care Improvement Fund. CLWs support individuals with health and wellbeing issues and patients are primarily referred to CLWs by GPs in the practices to which they are linked.

Sushrith outlined the Scottish Government's current review of Community Link Workers, which is aimed at improving data collection, establishing good practice models, and aligning resources with areas of greatest need, particularly targeting poverty and deprivation. The review is governed by an advisory group involving various stakeholders, with workstreams focused on evidence and outcomes, workforce development, and national funding and is due to report in April 2026.

Scotland's Cancer Strategy Overview

Debbie Provan from Scottish Government's Cancer Policy Unit presented an overview of Scotland's cancer strategy and action plan, highlighting the ambition to provide person-centred care and improve cancer survival through initiatives like the Improving the Cancer Journey (ICJ) model. She emphasised the importance of data collection through the Holistic Needs Assessment to inform policy and showcase impact. Debbie also discussed the upcoming Year 2 Progress Report and the expectation of a new action plan in 2026.

The Scottish Community Link Worker Network

Roisin Hurst, Project Manager for The Scottish Community Link Worker Network, presented an overview of Voluntary Health Scotland and the Network's activities and impact. The Network currently has 360 members from across Scotland, made up of practising CLWs and those responsible for the operational and strategic management of the programme. She highlighted the Network's role in supporting community link workers through peer-to-peer support and shared learning and relevant training opportunities. Roisin emphasised the importance of raising awareness about the vital role community link workers contribute to tackling health inequalities and that this is a key aspect of the Network's activity. She finished her presentation by sharing a video of 3 patients who shared their stories of how support from their community link worker had transformed their lives.

Standardising Cancer Support Across Scotland

Margaret Greer, Programme Lead for Macmillan Cancer Support, presented on the Improving Cancer Journey (ICJ) programme which aims to support people with cancer and long-term conditions through a standardised approach across Scotland's 32 local authority areas. The programme focuses on early intervention, using a Holistic Needs Assessment tool in 22 languages, and targets reaching 50% of cancer patients within 6 weeks of their diagnosis. Margaret highlighted the programme's success and discussed opportunities for collaboration with Community Link Workers, particularly in areas of palliative care and mental health support. Roisin agreed to explore practical ways of collaboration, noting that some Community Link Worker programmes are already incorporating the ICJ link workers within their teams.

Development of a Knowledge and Skills Framework for Community Link Workers

Gordon Paterson, Director of Social Care and Communities at NHS Education for Scotland (NES), presented on the proposed development of a Knowledge and Skills Framework for community link workers in Scotland. He explained that NES has expanded its work into social care and is supporting social prescribers and community link workers through curated learning resources on their TURAS Learning platform. Gordon outlined the benefits of a Knowledge and Skills Framework, including providing consistency, supporting professional development,

and enabling career conversations. The Framework will be co-produced with the community link worker review advisory group and is expected to be completed by April 2026, with further development and implementation planned for the following year.

Breakout Groups

Participants were divided into breakout groups to give them an opportunity to get to know each other a bit better and discuss their reasons for attending the event. A couple of key points from the breakout groups were highlighted in the plenary including the importance of local knowledge and the need to keep community directories updated, with some areas using tools like Microsoft Lists for better tracking. The groups also discussed funding challenges and innovative ways to support communities, such as setting up support groups and cafes. Kay Johnston, Clan Cancer Support, said that they have found that facilitating local community mapping engagement events is a great way of engaging all key stakeholders and nurturing ICJ links and joint understanding. In Angus the team have their own Angus Community Connecter Application that is updated regularly. Gordon McLean mentioned ongoing discussions about adopting the ASCEND (Aspirant Cancer Career and Education Development Programme) in Scotland.

Zoom Chat

- A question was raised regarding an update on The Scottish Social Prescribing Network. Roisin confirmed that the Network has not been funded for this year, so the Chair of the Network is limited in terms of how much activity she can do.
- Sandra Bagnall, ICJ manager from NHS Lothian commented that there could be lots of opportunities for joint training between the two Networks. She has also got some case studies which showcase good examples of joint working between CLWs and ICJs and she will share these with Roisin to disseminate. She stressed that there is lots of common ground, although one of the key differences is the end-of-life agenda and around 10-15% of people they see in Lothians are at the palliative stage. She also commented that Agenda for Change doesn't really lend itself to this workforce unless there is an appetite for a refresh. She raised the point about career progression opportunities which don't really exist currently for the link worker workforce.
- Margaret Greer suggested it would be useful to share Macmillan's Electronic Holistic Needs Assessment with the SCLWN.
- Ruth Matthews from North Lanarkshire commented that they have ICJs and LTCs and work closely with CLWs, mainly if a home visit is required. In South and North Lanarkshire they have set up ICJ support groups and work out of the libraries and community hubs to help with access. NLDF has an Engagement and Participation Network which finds and funds small groups and lets them know all about what is going on in the local area.

- Lynn Anderson, CLW in South Ayrshire, commented that their CLWs carried out TCAT assessments using the Macmillan Concerns Checklist, prior to the introduction of the ICJs.
- Gordon Paterson, NES, shared the below links:

    - National Trauma Transformation Programme
    - Mental Health Improvement Knowledge and Skills Framework
    - Knowledge and Skills Framework for Working with Victims and Witnesses
    - GP Nurse Knowledge and Skills Framework
    - Transgender Care Knowledge and Skills Framework

- Erika Copland, CLW from Orkney, highlighted the importance of a trauma-informed approach in both roles and she is an advocate for this to be a core part of CLW induction training.
- Sean Mannion, CLW from Renfrewshire, acknowledged the tension between looking at the long-term opportunities for career progression and training for CLWs and the lack of long-term funding stability for many of them. Ruth Matthews added that in relation to funding, although it is vital to show it, the amount of time evidencing what link workers do can sometimes outweigh what is being done.
- Finally, Roisin Hurst shared details in the Zoom chat of VHS's 2025 Annual Conference on 28 October in Glasgow which is focused on the theme of Collaboration for Change.

Next Steps

with potential interest from nursing colleagues. The group agreed to follow up with an evaluation survey for those who attended and to arrange a catch-up meeting in the next couple of weeks to discuss next steps.

Further information

Roisin Hurst Project Manager – Scottish Community Link Worker Network