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Health, Social Care and Sport Committee

Via email: HSCS.committee@Parliament.Scot

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Dear Convenor and Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf myself and Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport to draw your attention to the publication today of [Scotland's Alcohol and Drugs Workforce: A Compendium of Mixed-Methods Research](#). This publication is comprised of 'Scotland's Alcohol and Drugs Workforce: An Overview' and four supporting documents : 'A Rapid Evidence Review'; 'Skills and Qualifications Review'; 'Survey of Services'; and 'Reference Groups'.

These reports were commissioned in order that we could better understand the workforce challenges in the alcohol and drugs treatment sector. On 13 January 2022, I outlined to Parliament that:

"In all our projects and initiatives, one of the most significant challenges that we face is the workforce. We are currently mapping the workforce, including existing training capacity. Over the next year, we will focus on increasing capacity and training to ensure delivery of the national mission".

I hope that the Committee and Parliament will welcome the publication of the report and supporting documents.

This is intended to provide an insight into the current challenges and issues faced by drug and alcohol services and the staff who form the workforce delivering these front line services. I would like to use this letter to outline some of the key findings and to provide context as to how the National Mission is addressing the challenges identified.

One of the key issues identified in the report is around recruitment challenges affecting the drugs and alcohol workforce. The report detailed vacancies to be problematic across a wide variety of roles and organisation types. In recognition of such challenges, the National Mission has been underpinned by additional funding of £250 million over five years. Central to this is the embedding of the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) standards which includes funding to recruit more than 100 new posts to local services. Any learning from this planned recruitment will inform further work to address this key challenge.

The second major challenge identified within the report is the retention of staff. One of the factors cited as impacting on staff retention is how challenging it can be to work in drug and alcohol services. Subsequently, it is reported that concerns around increasing workloads are impacting on staff wellbeing. I wish to offer assurance that the Scottish Government values every member of our workforce and their wellbeing remains a key priority. We have made £12 million available to support this and introduced a National Wellbeing Hub and a 24/7 helpline available to everyone working in this area.

The final key challenge identified within the report is in the way that some services are designed. The report identified some barriers to the recruitment, and development of people with lived experience who have such an important and unique perspective. I am clear that the Scottish Government recognises that people with lived experience are a valuable part of the drug and alcohol workforce. In recognition of this fact £500,000 funding a year over the course of this Parliament has already been allocated to Alcohol and Drug Partnerships (ADPs) to bolster and take advice from Lived and Living Experience Panels locally.

I welcome the fact that the supporting '*Survey of Services*' report gives us, for the first time, a good indication of the size of the workforce. The survey found that there are around 3,500 (whole-time equivalent) staff employed in drug and alcohol services. Each one of them is crucial to the delivery of our National Mission. This report tells us a lot about the important and diverse roles and skills which make up the sector and the ways in which we need to support them to allow them to thrive.

With the information published in these reports we can now focus on how these issues may best be addressed in the months ahead. I committed to addressing these issues through this year and I want to make progress as quickly as possible with the support of local services and this Parliament. Workforce planning will play a crucial role in delivery of the commitments and ambitions of the National Mission, and tackling the issues raised in these publications will mean addressing workforce shortages, strengthening service planning and supporting new ways of working. I will be driving change in these areas and I plan to provide Parliament with a further update before Summer recess setting out what is being, and will be done, to tackle these issues.

I hope you will find these reports useful and agree that they contribute to the strong evidence base needed to save and improve lives as part of the National Mission.

Yours sincerely,

ANGELA CONSTANCE MSP
Minister for Drugs Policy