Cross-Party Group on Health Inequalities

1st October 2026, 10-11.30am

Minute

Present

MSPs

Heather Anderson MSP
Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill MSP
Irshad Ahmed MSP
Paul McLennan MSP
Helen McDade MSP

Invited guests

Lewis Bennett, Scottish Government
Professor Katherine Smith, University of Strathclyde
Fiona McHardy, University of Strathclyde

Non-MSP Group Members

Cecily May, VHS
Sarah Latto, VHS
Roisin Hurst, VHS
Tejesh Mistry, VHS
Christine Carlin, VHS
Helene van der Ploeg, Grassmarket Community Project
Vanessa Paynton, Art in Healthcare
Garvin Sealy, Scottish Book Trust
Jessamyn Briers, Walking Scotland
Cindy Gray, Glasgow University
Karen Moffat, Plus Forth Valley
Eileen Cawley, Scottish Women's Convention
Barri Millar, St John's Ambulance
Ruby Shanks, Royal College of Nursing
Ian Woodbyrne, CHSS
Julie Cowie, Glasgow Caledonian University
Rob Gowans, The Health and Social Care Alliance (The ALLIANCE)
June Deasy, BPS
Michaela Devlin, Rowan Alba
Philippa Cochrane, Scottish Book Trust
Sarah Curtis, Durham University
Irina Martin, Nourish Scotland

Evelyn Chong, Culture Counts
Jack Fawcett, Samaritans
John Hawryluk, Community Renewal Trust
Barry Chapman, Royal College of Pharmacists
Ellie Meikle, Samaritans
Maja Mitchell-Grigorjeva, Bipolar Scotland
Kym Kestell, Non-Communicable Diseases Alliance (Pending)
Heather Knox, VOX Scotland
Katie Horsburgh, Bite Back
Ewan Macleod, Volunteer Scotland
Alan Eagleson, Terrence Higgins Trust
Jennifer Stewart, Royal College of Nursing
Susan Hunter, Befriending Networks
Lesley Ross, Murray's Initiative
Daniel Gilius, MEND
Amy Hutton, Cyrenians
Lesley McKee, Change Mental Health
Frances Logan, Breast Cancer Now
Gillian McNicoll, Rowan Alba
Una MacFadyen, Plus Forth Valley
Sara Bradley, University of South Wales
Alice Clarkson, Waverley Care
Konstantina Scott-Barrett, Obesity Action Scotland
Virginia Francis, MECOPP
Andrew Paterson, SCDC
Lorraine Gillies, Winning Scotland
Judith Connell, Kidney Care UK
Viki Sebhelyi, Feniks
Phelim Usher-Purves, Energy Savings Trust
Laura Wilson, Royal College of Pharmacists
Ese Johnson, Waverley Care
Janine Hogan, College of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare
Katie MacGregor, Royal College of Occupational Therapists (Pending)
Dr Dagny Gasking

Apologies

Miles Briggs MSP
Adam Harley MSP
Mona Vaghefian, Marie Curie
Magda Czarnecka, Feniks
Harman Bahia MECOPP

Agenda item 1: Welcome and Apologies

Tejesh Mistry from Voluntary Health Scotland welcomed attendees and introduced Voluntary Health Scotland as the secretariat of the CPG – a membership organisation with a focus on health inequalities that has over 350 members. Tejesh

explained that this is the first CPG meeting of the new parliamentary term.

Agenda item 2: Election of MSP Members and Officer Bearers

Tejesh introduced the new MSP members and invited members to propose and second each.

- Heather Anderson MSP – proposed by Susan Hunter from Befriending Networks, seconded by Alan Eagleson from the Terrence Higgins Trust
- Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill MSP – proposed by Vanessa Paynton from Art in Healthcare, seconded by Rob Gowans from The ALLIANCE
- Irshad Ahmed MSP, proposed by Jen Grant from the Food Train, seconded by Helene van der Ploeg from the Grassmarket Community Project
- Miles Briggs MSP, proposed by Susan Hunter from Befriending Networks, seconded by Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill MSP
- Helen McDade MSP, proposed by Helene Van der Ploeg from the Grassmarket Community Project, seconded by Jen Grant from the Food Train
- Paul McLennan MSP, proposed by Amy Hutton from Cyrenians, seconded by Rob Gowan from the ALLIANCE
- Adam Harley MSP, proposed by Gillian McNicol from Rowan Alba, seconded by Susan Hunter from Befriending Networks

Tejesh thanked all members for voting and welcomed the new MSP members. He then invited a proposer and seconder for the new Convenor and Vice-Convenor:

- Convenor: Heather Anderson MSP – proposed by Gillian McNicol from Rowan Alba, seconded by Helene van der Ploeg from the Grassmarket Community Project
- Vice-convenor: Kayleigh Kinross-O'Neill – proposed by Jen Grant from the Food Train, seconded by Irshad Ahmed MSP.

Tejesh welcomed and thanked the new convenor and vice-convenor, and handed over to Heather Anderson to chair the remainder of the meeting.

Heather shared that she is the new MSP for Dundee West, an area that experiences considerable health inequalities. She also reflected on the reforms proposed regarding Scotland's health system and stated that 'we've got a lot of work to do'.

Heather asked for a proposer and seconder for VHS to continue as the CPG secretariat. This was proposed by Jen Grant and seconded by Rob Gowans.

Agenda item 3: Approve minutes of previous meeting

There were no amendments to the minutes of the meeting from 26th January 2026, and they were proposed by Gillian McNicol and seconded by Rob Gowans.

Agenda item 4: Approval of new non-MSP members

Heather shared the list of organisations seeking membership of the CPG:

- Miscarriage Services
- College of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare
- Scottish Book Trust
- Winning Scotland
- Impact Funding Partners
- Scottish Recovery Consortium
- The Scottish Women's Convention
- Change Mental Health
- Living Streets

No concerns were noted and all were approved.

Agenda item 5: Health Inequalities and Prevention

1) Lewis Bennett from the Scottish Government Prevention Unit

Lewis Bennett shared a presentation detailing the latest developments for embedding prevention. He shared that the Prevention Unit have responsibility for delivering the prevention objectives in the Public Service Reform Strategy, as well as connecting prevention work across government and with external partners, and developing practical tools for embedding prevention.

He shared details about the preventative budgeting pilots, which indicated that 15% of spend covered by the pilots was preventative in nature. Scottish Government are currently rolling out preventative budgeting across the full Scottish Budget.

In joining up work on prevention, the Prevention Unit have recently published Areas of Shared Interest which identify what is being done already and where there are gaps. The Prevention Unit have also published a Prevention Toolkit to build capacity around prevention, as well as publishing a range of other tools.

Going forward, the recently published Prevention Unit Plan will inform future priorities.

2) Professor Katherine Smith and Fiona McHardy, Scottish Health Equity Research Unit, University of Strathclyde.

Professor Katherine Smith introduced SHERU's Analytical Model for understanding the 'implementation gap' in reducing health inequalities, with a particular focus on housing and employability. This model explores the operationalisation of national policy and strategy, as well as Action Learning Sets across two local authorities and community based participatory research.

Fiona McHardy then explored some of the findings of this research, and concluded that the current system does not adequately reflect the 'messier reality' of people's

lives in the implementation of services. She further advocated for a model that recognises implementation as a key stage of service design, with a need for learning loops that reflect implementation and community experiences. It was also reflected that a focus on crisis displaces and undermines prevention, and ambitions around prevention must be rooted in actual capacity and resource.

3) Helene van der Ploeg, Grassmarket Community Project (GCP)

Helene shared information about the services provided by GCP to address poverty, homelessness, mental health issues, and social isolation and loneliness in Edinburgh. She provided moving testimony from GCP beneficiaries about the impact GCP had on their lives and health. Most GCP members experience considerable barriers, with 42% having nobody to give as an emergency contact and 82% having nothing to go to besides GCP.

Helene shared information about their person-centred approach, creating both group and individual opportunities for support. This has a significant impact on the health outcomes of GCP beneficiaries, as well as important wider social outcomes. In a cost benefit analysis, GCP estimate that they save the NHS and wider public sector over £17,000 per person.

GCP experience significant challenges, with increased complexity of beneficiary needs, the need to sustain strong local partnerships, funding sustainability and managing their social enterprise arm.

4) Q&A and Discussion – Sarah Latto, VHS

Sarah invited attendees to share comments or ask questions.

Roisin Hurst from VHS highlighted the vital role of Community Link Workers as a lifeline for many people.

Susan Hunter from Befriending Networks reflected on the funding environment for third sector organisations being unsustainable, and often pushing them away from prevention into crisis response roles.

Alan Eagleson from Terrence Higgins Trust spoke about the need to protect successful prevention work, such as the halving of HIV transmission since 2019, and ensuring that it is not defunded just as it is starting to make a difference.

Tejesh Mistry asked about the need to balance the mechanics of prevention with the importance of relationships in successfully implementing prevention. Lewis responded by saying that both are important and that the mechanics are required to facilitate those relationships and vice versa. Helene shared how positive it is that the Prevention Unit have been formed, particularly in building capacity for third sector and community organisations to inform decision-making about prevention. Katherine Smith added that it is vital to ensure that prevention work is adequately and

sustainably resourced, as well as breaking down silos to facilitate the sharing of information about what works. Fiona further reflected on the dual importance of technical and relational elements for prevention, and the importance of learning from the success stories.

Tejesh further asked for MSP inputs on the issues raised. Heather Anderson MSP reflected that there is a key role of organisations like VHS in ensuring that the third sector experience is represented in decision-making given the complexity of the sector. She also spoke about the need for bold ambition to create a prevention-focussed nation.

Helen McDade MSP spoke about the importance of prevention for those at risk of developing specific health conditions and ensuring that this is reflected in ongoing efforts around prevention.

Paul McLennan MSP spoke about the importance of the CPG being proactive in nature, and taking active steps to maximise impact, such as inviting Ministers to attend.

Roisin Hurst spoke about the complexity of third sector funding and the administrative burden that this generates. She also shared an example of person-centred decision-making in Clackmannanshire.

Finally, Dr Sarah Curtis from the Royal Society of Edinburgh offered the RSE as a potential conduit for broader discussions on these themes.

Heather suggested that the next CPG meeting in January could continue some of the themes that emerged in this meeting, with a focus on Public Service Reform and the Scottish Budget. She further suggested that we should write to the Cabinet Secretary for Public Service Reform with some of the issues raised, and invite him to attend the next meeting.

Sarah closed the discussion.

Agenda item 6: Any Other Business

Heather invited contributions for AOB. Ewan McLeod shared details about the CPG on Volunteering that would be meeting on the 3rd November.

Tejesh shared that VHS is in the middle of rebranding so there will be a visible change to the secretariat in the months to come.

Heather confirmed that the date of the next meeting will be the 21st January, 10-11.30am.

Heather thanked the speakers and attendees and closed the meeting.