

AdviceUK Submission to the 10-Year NHS Workforce Plan Call for Evidence

Introduction

AdviceUK is the UK's largest network of independent advice services. We represent almost 700 member organisations across England, Scotland, and Wales who deliver vital, free and independent social welfare advice in their communities. Our membership includes 59 specialist health and disability advice centres. AdviceUK's Member Survey Report 2025 finds that 498,239 clients were assisted by advice agencies using AdvicePro, a case management software, between 2024-25.¹ Welfare rights/benefits was the most common issue advised upon with over 190,000 cases.² Housing advice was the next common with almost 70,000 cases and debt advice was the third most common issue with over 67,000 cases.³ Drawing on broader data provided by our members, it is estimated that approximately 2.8 million people are supported by advice agencies annually.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the development of the NHS 10-Year Workforce Plan. We strongly believe that achieving a sustainable, community-focused NHS will require integrating social welfare advice services into the fabric of healthcare delivery. Therefore, we welcome the Government's ambition to co-locate advice on debt and other welfare issues with broader healthcare services in Neighbourhood Health Centres. It is crucial that health and welfare issues are dealt with holistically. Indeed, our members tell us that case complexity is increasing. AdvicePro data shows that, within welfare rights/benefits cases, 56% include at least one recorded health condition.⁴ By embedding social welfare advice provision in Neighbourhood Health Centres, the NHS can better address the wider determinants of health, reduce hospital pressures, and improve patient outcomes.

Our submission draws on evidence from AdviceUK members and partners, including, AdviceUK member, Bromley by Bow Centre's landmark study on health inequalities, to demonstrate how funded advice services can support a shift from hospital-based care to community care, expand preventative care and enrich the NHS workforce with new roles and skills. We urge the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to invest in existing advice services as a core component of integrated Neighbourhood Health Service teams, thereby strengthening primary care and community health systems.

We have responded to the relevant 'shifts,' as referenced in the call for evidence. If you would like to discuss our submission further, please contact willem.vandeven@adviceuk.org.uk.

Shifting from Hospital-Based Care to Community Care and Delivering Preventative Care Services

AdviceUK has seen first-hand how shifting care into the community, with advice agencies embedded alongside clinical services, can alleviate pressure on hospitals. For example, an innovative social prescribing welfare advice pilot in East London, led by the Bromley by Bow Centre, achieved a 35% reduction in GP appointments by tackling patients' underlying social problems before they escalated.⁵ By co-locating welfare rights advisors in GP practices, the

¹ AdviceUK, [Member Survey Report](#), 2025.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ AdviceUK, [AdviceWorks: Building a skilled advice sector workforce](#), 2025.

⁵ Bromley by Bow Centre, [Reducing health inequities in London by improving access to social welfare advice through greater collaboration between the healthcare, local authority and advice sectors](#), 2023.

pilot addressed root causes of ill health, such as unsafe housing, debt, and unemployment, which in turn reduced repeat visits to GPs and avoidable hospital attendances.⁶ This community-based approach freed up clinicians' time for patients with acute medical needs and demonstrated the potential for multidisciplinary, preventive healthcare to save NHS resources in the long run.⁷

Evidence from a Legal Education Foundation study further underscores the value of integrating welfare advice. Their study in 2015 found that, embedding welfare advice in GP surgeries, led to a 25% reduction in emergency hospital admissions for respiratory conditions after advisers intervened to fix damp housing that was triggering patients' asthma.⁸ By resolving non-medical factors early in the community, welfare advice helped prevent deterioration that might otherwise have required hospital care. Community-based Health-Justice Partnerships (HJPs) offer another promising shift. HJPs embed legal advisors within healthcare settings to tackle problems like evictions or benefit denials that directly impact health. For instance, in South London, a maternity clinic partnered with housing legal advisers to support pregnant women at risk of eviction; this immediate advice intervention secured stable housing and reduced risks of low birthweight and preterm birth for vulnerable mothers.⁹

These examples illustrate the real-world impact of moving support out of hospitals and into community and neighbourhood hubs, where holistic care can be provided. Indeed, many of our members are already providing social welfare advice to clients who have health issues. AdviceUK urges that the Workforce Plan facilitate scaling up these community-based models to alleviate pressure on the NHS.

Critical Professions, Roles and Skills for Implementation and Barriers to Ensuring the Right Professions, Roles and Skills are Involved

As we have shown, integrating social welfare advice into healthcare settings is crucial so that patients can get help with these underlying issues. Co-locating welfare and legal advice services in health centres has been shown to improve access to support and lead to measurable gains in mental well-being and other outcomes. However, making this vision a reality will require significant government investment in the advice sector.

Existing free advice services, which help millions each year with welfare benefits, housing, debt, immigration and more, are already overstretched and underfunded.¹⁰ Independent agencies provide a "lifeline" to people in crisis yet demand for their help has surged 40% above pre-2022 levels.¹¹ Chronic funding shortages mean most advice agencies rely on fragile, short-term grants from local authorities or charitable foundations. The result is a severe capacity crunch: 88% of advice providers report major difficulties recruiting or retaining staff, and the average agency needs three additional advisers to meet current demand.¹² Our members tell us that they are losing key staff to burnout or better-paid jobs elsewhere. Worryingly, only 1 in 10 services feel confident they have the resources to keep operating next year.¹³

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ The Legal Education Foundation, [The Role of Advice Services in Health Outcomes](#), 2015.

⁹ UCL, [Health of the Public: Health Justice Partnerships](#), 2024.

¹⁰ AdviceUK, [AdviceWorks: Building a skilled advice sector workforce](#), 2025.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² [AdviceUK, Advice Saves Lives Report, 2024.](#)

¹³ Ibid.

This fragile state of the advice sector threatens any plan to embed advisers in GP surgeries or neighbourhood health centres. Without more funding, there simply won't be enough qualified advisers to staff these initiatives. Indeed, Bromley by Bow Centre has found that funding for health-based advice projects should “supplement NHS England funding for link workers to enable social welfare legal advice services to meet demands”, noting that current advice funding is insufficient.¹⁴ Government must step up with sustainable funding to support existing advice agencies to partner with the NHS. This could include dedicated grants or contracts that enable community advice organisations to station advisers in health settings, working alongside GPs and social prescribers. Investing in these trusted local agencies, rather than creating new services from scratch or hiring advisers directly into the NHS, makes sense because they already have the expertise and community connections to deliver quality advice. This will be more cost-effective than creating new services. With proper funding, advice agencies can expand their capacity and integrate seamlessly into neighbourhood healthcare teams, bringing vital expertise in welfare, housing and debt issues that often lie at the heart of patients' troubles.

Equally important is tackling the overarching advice workforce crisis so that these services have the skilled personnel to deliver on this integration. As our Advice Works report (2025) makes clear, the advice sector is facing a severe and growing workforce crisis.¹⁵ Low pay, insecure funding and a lack of clear career paths have made it hard to attract and keep advisers. Many agencies are forced to offer short-term contracts due to year-to-year funding, which drives talented people away to more stable, better-paid roles. Frontline advisers, who require specialised knowledge of complex welfare law and strong people skills, are leaving faster than they can be replaced.

This is why AdviceUK, and our partners in the advice sector, are urging the Government to implement a National Advice Workforce Strategy. Without concerted action, there is no guarantee that advice services will have the staff or resources to be part of important government initiatives. We are calling for a cross-government strategy, led by employment and skills directorates in DWP in partnership with DHSC, the MoJ, MHCLG and co-designed with the advice sector, to secure the future of the workforce. Such a strategy would create clear entry routes into the advice profession, develop apprenticeships and training programs, and raise the profile of advice work as a valued career. It should also include measures to improve pay and funding stability, so that advisers can build long-term careers helping the public. For instance, the sector has proposed dedicated apprenticeships and work placements to bring in new trainees, better coordination of training opportunities, and small grants to help charities invest in staff development. By improving the professionalisation of the field and making it an attractive career, these steps would help recruit the next generation of advisers and prevent experienced staff from burning out.

Integrating social welfare advice with healthcare, for example, by embedding advisers in Neighbourhood Health Centres, could be transformative for patients and communities. It would ensure that someone like a struggling patient facing eviction or benefits problems can get help on the spot, rather than being bounced between agencies. But to achieve this, the Government must invest in the existing advice service infrastructure and support a robust workforce. That means providing long-term funding to advice organisations so they can co-

¹⁴ Bromley by Bow Centre, [How Social Welfare Legal Advice and Social Prescribing can work collaboratively in healthcare settings](#), 2021.

¹⁵ Ibid.

locate with health services and meet rising demand and enacting a national Advice Workforce Strategy to address staffing shortages.

Conclusion

AdviceUK strongly advocates for the 10-Year NHS Workforce Plan to embrace integrated social welfare advice services as a fundamental element of community healthcare delivery. We have provided evidence of how existing shifts to community and preventative care, through welfare advisers in GP practices, health-justice partnerships, and social prescribing, are already making a difference in patient outcomes and system efficiency.

To build on this, DHSC should fund and scale up these models, ensuring every neighbourhood health system has the skilled advice workforce it needs to support patients holistically. Government should fund existing advice agencies to deliver social welfare advice in Neighbourhood Health Centres as their local and community knowledge will be an asset and will be more cost-effective than setting up new agencies or training NHS staff. As part of these efforts, we call on DHSC to work across government, and with national partners in Scotland and Wales, to implement a National Advice Workforce Strategy. Such a strategy could provide advice agencies with the resources and staff to successfully participate in Neighbourhood Health Centres.

Our recommendations directly support the 10 Year Plan's aims of reducing hospital burden, improving prevention and restoring joy and productivity to the workforce. AdviceUK and our members stand ready to partner with the NHS in designing and delivering this vision. By investing in advice, the NHS invests in healthier communities.

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