



HEALTH EQUITY NETWORK

Third National Conference 2025 Report
October 9th 2025, Liverpool



FOREWORD

“Inspired, energised, hopeful, motivated”.

No, this was not Obama’s 2008 Presidential campaign. It was HEN Liverpool 2025. Participants were asked how they felt at the end of the conference. These four words emerged most prominently from the word cloud. I couldn’t get the words out at all so moved was I by the inspiration, energy, hope and motivation that lay behind these words.

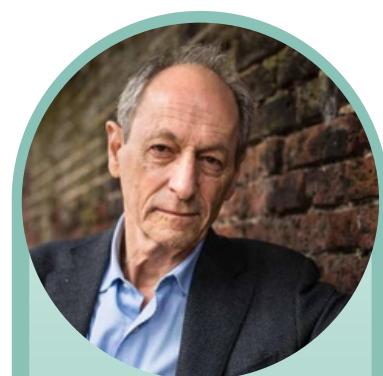
It is in stark contrast to the grimness of the daily news. Bad news is everywhere. Violent conflicts, new trade wars, climate crisis at global level; the consequences of a dozen years of austerity and depressing economic news and political in-fighting at national level; deep poverty and poor health at local level.

The tone of the day was set by our two host politicians. Louise Gittins is chair of the Local Government Association in addition to her leadership in Cheshire West and Chester. Steve Rotheram is Mayor of Metro Liverpool. Their messages conveyed inspiration, energy, hope and motivation. The problems may be deep but we can, we will, solve them to achieve greater health equity. We can add ambition to the four key words: to make their areas the best places to live.

Local government, health and care, the voluntary and community sector, business, politics are all partners in the efforts to secure health equity in local areas in England, Wales and Scotland. They were all amply represented in the conference.

When, in 2008, we published the report of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health, Closing the Gap in a Generation, we said we wanted to create a social movement for health equity through action on social determinants of health. If the mood of this conference is anything to go by, we are on the way there.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot CH
Director, UCL Institute of Health Equity





A REFLECTION

Even as we were welcoming people into the opening session of the Health Equity Network Conference in Liverpool on 9th October it felt different. Huge amounts of energy and excitement in the room. Impatience to get on and change things. All of this was tangible!

A first for this year's annual conference was to invite Ella Otomewo, a Manchester based poet, to respond to what had been said at the conference. This was a most moving and celebratory end to the conference and something of this kind must be a feature in future conferences. Finally, Sir Michael Marmot, closed the conference and highlighted truth, speaking truth to power, justice, that animates everything that we do and hope as a vital part of what is needed to make a difference.

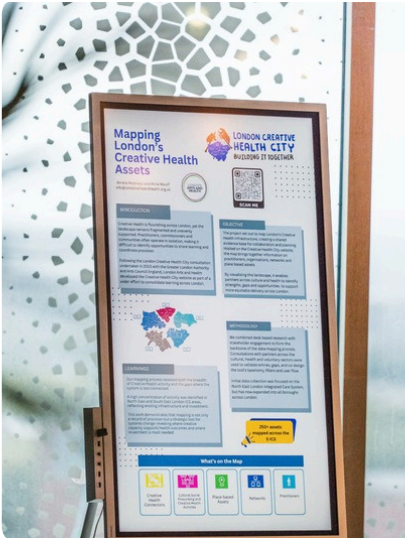
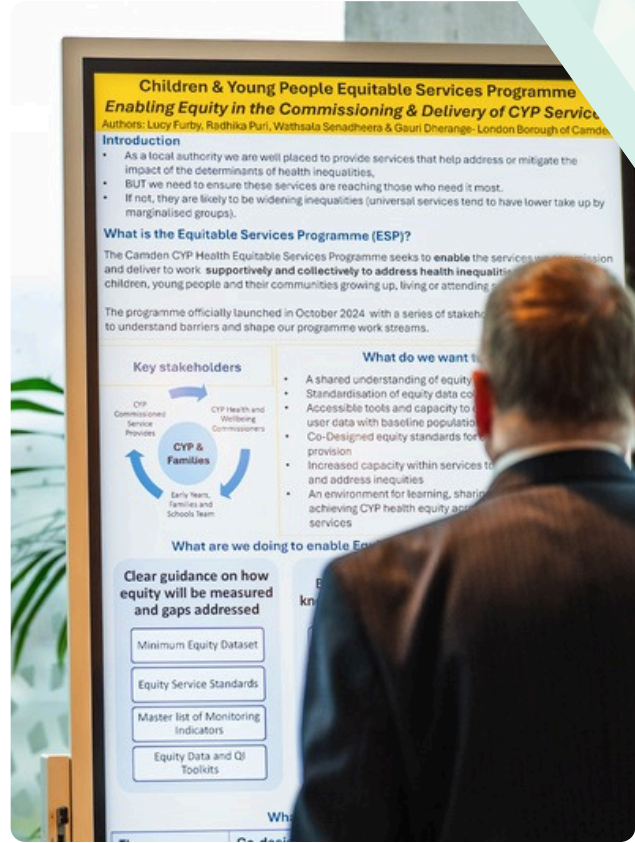
After the conference many people took to social media to express their feelings about the conference. People talked of feeling inspired and motivated, feeling passion and energy to make real change happen.

The need for a social movement kept coming up at the conference. Social movements tend to arise from a sense of injustice that draws people together and empowers action for change. Another of the prominent words in the Mentimeter exercise was frustration and several people mentioned their anger at the injustice of inequality in health.

Conferences, such as this one in Liverpool, can provide the conditions for people to come together, to find energy and passion in each other's voices, to share what is making them angry about health inequity and gather power to make change. We will take this on over the next 12 months and renew energy again at the 2026 conference.

This year's conference was a great success owing to the speakers, workshop facilitators and most of all the people who attended and brought their experience and energy to Liverpool.

Alan Higgins
Health Equity Network Lead



OPENING SESSION

This year's conference was opened by Sir Michael Marmot and got off to a great start with welcoming speeches and commitments made by Louise Gittins, Leader of Chester West and Chester Council and current Chair of the Local Government Association, and Mayor Steve Rotheram of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. Both highlighted their commitment to improving health equity in Cheshire and Merseyside.

[Watch Sir Michael Marmot's opening speech here.](#)

[Watch Cllr Louise Gittins' opening speech here.](#)

[Watch Mayor Steve Rotheram's opening speech here.](#)





PANEL DISCUSSIONS

This year's panel discussions brought together inspiring speakers addressing the conference's central themes: child poverty, health equity in Marmot Places, and the need for a social movement on health equity. Together, they highlighted how national action and local leadership can tackle the root causes of inequality and improve health outcomes across the UK.



CHILD POVERTY & HEALTH

Sir Michael Marmot and Lord John Bird spoke on the lifelong impact of child poverty and the urgent need for policies protecting children and families. Their talks emphasised systemic change to break the cycle of deprivation and build healthier futures.



[Watch the discussion here.](#)

HEALTH EQUITY IN MARMOT PLACES

This session was introduced by Dr Jessica Allen, Deputy Director of the Institute of Health Equity, who highlighted the growing network of more than 60 local authorities—covering 43% of the UK population—now working as Marmot Places.

The discussion brought together Dr Martin Reeves from Oxfordshire County Council, Dr Natalie Daley from Barnardo's, and Pete Gladwell from Legal & General, who explored how local partnerships and organisational change can drive practical action on health equity. Drawing on examples from their own work, the speakers showed how collaboration across sectors is helping to turn the principles of equity into real progress in communities across the UK.

[Watch the discussion here](#) and view [Natalie's slides here](#).





HEALTH INEQUITY: A PERSISTENT ISSUE THAT DEMANDS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

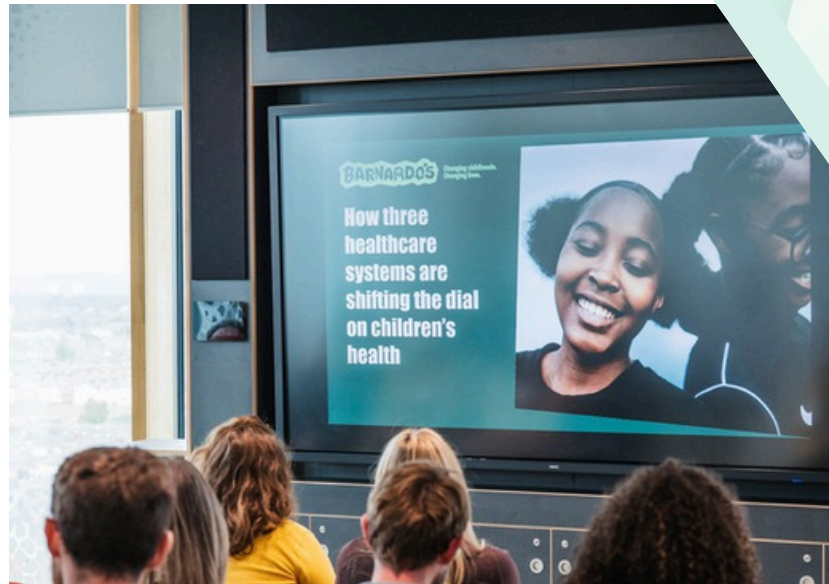
This panel, led by Professor Rob Noonan from the University of Chester and Dr Gemma Edwards from the University of Manchester, explored how social movements can drive long-term change in health equity. Professor Noonan emphasised the importance of hope and storytelling in building momentum for change, while Dr Edwards drew on insights from historical and contemporary movements to show how collective action can reshape systems and sustain progress over time.

**[Watch the discussion here.](#) [View Rob's slides here](#)
[and Gemma's slides here.](#)**

Building on this conversation, we're planning a HEN webinar in early 2026 to continue exploring these ideas.

We have set up a forum on social movements on the platform, where we invite you to share what you're doing. Our aim is to map the action and strengthen connections, so that together we can build a more powerful, coordinated social movement for health equity.





WORKSHOPS

Workshops are a core part of the conference, offering participants opportunities to explore key issues and share practical learning. This year, 47 high-quality proposals competed for ten workshop slots, demonstrating the strength and diversity of Network members' work. Participants were able to attend two workshops each, covering themes from community wellbeing to data-driven policy and place-based approaches.

A description of each workshop, facilitator details, photographs, slide links, and summary notes (where available) are included in Annexes A and B.





HEALTH EQUITY FUND

The Health Equity Fund is a £3 million partnership between Legal & General and the UCL Institute of Health Equity, offering grants of up to £75,000 for local projects addressing social determinants of health, including housing, work, and education. Following a £1 million pilot in the North East, the fund has expanded UK-wide, with 43 organisations receiving support this autumn from over 1,500 applications.

This session was led by Julia Goldsworthy, Head of Social Impact Investment at Legal & General, who spoke on how business can help reduce health inequalities through long-term, place-based investment. Updates on funded projects over the next 12 months will be shared via the Health Equity Network platform.

[Watch Julia's speech here](#) and view the [slides here](#).



ALL TOGETHER INSPIRED

Mid-afternoon, just as energy might have been flagging, the conference was reinvigorated by a takeover from the Cheshire and Merseyside Public Health Collaborative (CHAMPS). The All Together Inspired session was led by Professor Matthew Ashton, Director of Public Health for Liverpool City Council and Honorary Professor at the University of Liverpool.

Professor Ashton shared insights into the work being done in Cheshire and Merseyside as part of the Marmot programme, All Together Fairer, and then guided participants through an interactive Mentimeter call-and-response session.

When asked “How are you feeling after today’s conference?”, the most common words captured were:

- **Inspired**
- **Energised**
- **Hopeful**
- **Motivated**



In response to the question “What one thing have you learned from today?”, participants offered a wide range of answers (including the memorable note: “It’s ok to swear in conference presentations”). Several recurring themes emerged:

- **We need a social movement**

Delegates emphasised the power and hope of a social movement, highlighting the importance of taking social action. Many noted that while we are already part of a movement, there is more to do collectively to drive change.

- **Show me the money**

Responses also highlighted the critical role of resources in achieving impact. Comments such as “If you can get money you can make social change” and “We need to be besties with rich folk” underscored the need to collaborate with those who hold resources and make them work for social good.

- **We are not on our own**

The importance of collaboration was a key theme, with participants recognising that working together—across sectors, regions, and organisational boundaries—is essential to achieving meaningful and sustained improvements in health equity.

Finally, Professor Ashton invited the conference to rank the eight recommendations put forward by our panel speakers on actions to improve health equity across the UK. The top three recommendations voted by delegates were:

1. **Tackle the inheritance of poverty**
2. **Apply the Marmot principles**
3. **Adopt a well-being economy**

The session successfully combined reflection, engagement, and forward-looking action, leaving participants energised and ready to apply the day’s learning in their own work.

See the [CHAMPS slide set here](#) and the [CHAMPS takeover session here](#) and the [mentimeter results here](#).

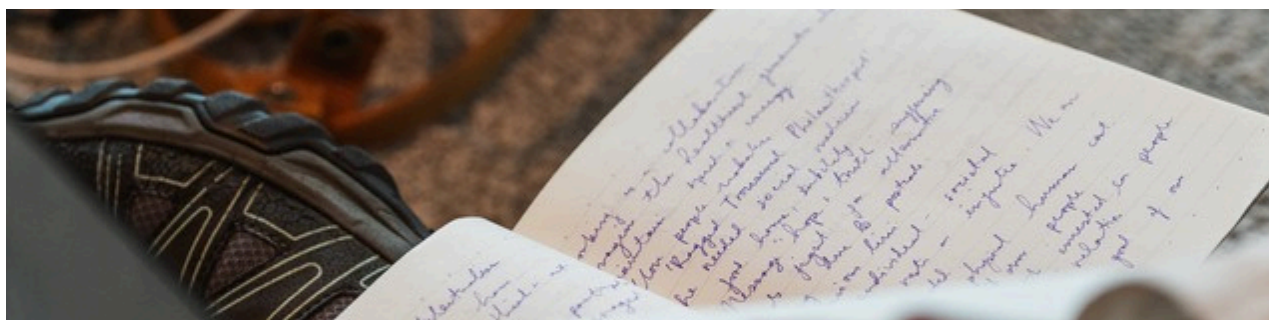


POETRY PERFORMANCE

A first for this year's conference was a live performance by Ella Otomewo, a Manchester-based poet, artist, and educator, responding creatively to the day's discussions. Ella is New Writing Co-ordinator at Cultureword and holds an MA in Creative Writing from Manchester Metropolitan University. Her work explores social justice, identity, and connection, and she has performed across the UK and Europe.

Her poem, "Change", was written during the Health Equity Network Third Annual National Conference 2025 as a response to the day's discussions and collective calls to action.

[Watch Ella's performance here.](#)



CHANGE

BY ELLA OTOMEWO

*We should be angry, we should drive change,
we should be hopeful; expanding our range
and broadening the minds of those who think small.
When people trust in each other, they answer the call.*

*When we keep it human, and nuanced and true,
we cocreate a solution completely different and new.
Forget the perfect language, and the spreadsheets and the stats.
Let's build somewhere safe, with relationships that last.*

*Because none of this is inevitable. It's been created by greed.
And collectively, we all see the need.
A need for change, for reprogramming, for transformation.
It takes a movement of people: bold and blazon.*

*Poverty
is the closing down
of the wonderful things
that make us human.*

*We see the precarious lives of our fellow humans
are slipping through the cracks, unnoticed and buried.
For too long now, we've been chasing that horse,
but it takes social action to keep us on course.*

*We can speak to people's fear; we've seen it been done.
Fighting on the streets for liberation.
Demanding solutions: progressive and clear.
These are the movements that drive out that fear.*

*For too long, people have resigned to their fate.
Felt it's individual failing, that we're simply too late.
But we know collaboration can bring about a new way
because the people in this room fight for it every day.*

*We should be angry, we should drive change,
we should be hopeful; expanding our range
and broadening the minds of those who think small.
When people trust in each other, they answer the call.*



CLOSING SPEECH

The conference closed with Sir Michael Marmot, who reflected on truth, justice, and hope as vital elements in driving health equity. His closing remarks highlighted the importance of speaking truth to power and reinforced the ongoing commitment required to make a difference.

[Watch Sir Michael Marmot's closing speech here.](#)



AFTERWORD

The 2025 Health Equity Network Conference in Liverpool was a great success. We have been delighted with the feedback from people who were there telling us that they were inspired and motivated to do more in their work on health equity. That's our main goal for the conference. Our job is to get the right environment together, the right speakers and selection of workshops and then it is the participants who turn it into a great day.

We want to acknowledge the support of many people and specifically the following people who were key to making the event a success.

- Matt Ashton, Director of Public Health in Liverpool, for providing financial support to the conference and to the running of a session on the day and for ideas and encouragement.
- Gavin Flatt, Public Health Team Liverpool City Council, for support in finding the venue, ideas for the programme and practical help at all points.
- Pete Gladwell and Julia Goldsworthy from Legal and General for providing financial and professional support to the Network over the last four years and for speaking at the conference.
- All workshop facilitators.
- The staff at The Spine who, in addition to being thoroughly professional, were keen to help in every way we asked and provided additional support on the day.

The conference went very well but there is still much that we can improve on for next year. We are already looking forward to and planning the 4th annual Health Equity Network conference in 2026. We hope to see you there again to stoke the fires of the movement for health equity.

Alan Higgins and Jamaica Noferini



ANNEX A AM WORKSHOPS

GREAT PROBLEMS AND GREAT IDEAS

A Natural Health Service: bringing about
sustainable places to live and work

Healthier Wealthier Families in East London

Bridging Systems, Building Trust: The VCSE
Role in Advancing Health Equity

Poverty Awareness and the Common Barriers
to Access in Health Care Settings

Across Borders and Birth: Tackling Child
Poverty through Equitable Maternal Journeys

A Natural Health Service: bringing about sustainable places to live and work

Dom Higgins – Head of Health and Education, The Wildlife Trusts

Economic analysis in 2023 showed that Wildlife Trusts health and well-being programmes save the NHS money and cut reliance on their resources. Furthermore, it showed much greater cost savings if these programmes were delivered at scale across the UK. Professor Sir Michael Marmot said of the research:

"If Wildlife Trusts programmes like those described in this research were made available to more people in more places, they could help prevent unnecessary ill-health and reduce the number of people requiring NHS services. A 'Natural Health Service' alongside the creation of natural spaces in communities across the country will help bring about healthy, sustainable places to live and work".

View the [workshop slides](#) [here](#) and the [notes here](#).



Healthier Wealthier Families in East London

Laura Austin Croft – Director of Population Health, East London NHS Foundation Trust

Catherine Harris – Senior Research Fellow, University College London



The Healthier Wealthier Families (HWF) workshop explores a way of working to address deep-rooted financial inequalities impacting families—particularly those with young and/or disabled children—in Newham and Tower Hamlets, East London. With child poverty rates exceeding 48% and £23 billion in unclaimed welfare benefits across the UK, HWF integrates welfare benefits advice into specialist children's healthcare and community settings to improve both financial and health outcomes. It began as a pilot in 2023 as part of East London NHS Foundation Trust's ambition to become a 'Marmot Trust' alongside UCL ActEarly research and is evolving into a sustained, evidence-backed intervention through a large-scale UCL run research project, funded by the NIHR and shaped by the local community. It is now also informing similar initiatives in other regions.



View the [workshop slides](#) here and [the notes here](#).

Bridging Systems, Building Trust: The VCSE Role in Advancing Health Equity

Laura Whitaker – Operations Director Children, Young People and Family services, Barca Leeds

Eloise Pearson – Pathway Development Manager, West Yorkshire ICB – Leeds

Health and social systems can often feel overwhelming, fragmented, or inaccessible—especially for individuals facing multiple barriers linked to the social determinants of health. Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations are uniquely placed to respond when people feel excluded or unsupported. Through trusted relationships, deep community insight, and flexible approaches, VCSE groups help individuals navigate complex systems and access the support they need.

This workshop explores how VCSE organisations contribute to health equity by connecting people across services—health, social care, education—and help in creating inclusive, person-centred pathways. Using Leeds as a case study, we'll share practical examples including:

- A social prescribing service for children, young people, and families which was rooted in a mental health hub linking early help, education, and primary care
- A community wellbeing approach that sought creative solutions to bring public health into everyday spaces

These initiatives show how trust, collaboration, and adaptability can improve outcomes—both for communities and individuals—through strengths-based, person first models.

View the [workshop slides here](#) and the [notes here](#).



Poverty Awareness and the common barriers to access in health care

Raphaella Davies – Poverty Proofing© Health Care Coordinator
Emma Brownrigg – Poverty Proofing© Health Care Team Manager



At Children North East, we understand that breaking the link between a family or individual's home resources and their ability to access health care is key to living longer, healthier lives. Creating an awareness and understanding of the challenges families are facing is vital so health care providers can provide the extra support and compassion that a lot of patients require.



The session will introduce the Poverty Proofing© methodology and ethos, providing insight into the diverse experiences of children, young people, and families living in poverty. It will support participants to begin developing a contextual understanding of poverty in the UK, share learning and common themes from other services, and facilitate informed discussions on how we may unintentionally promote stigma or limit access to opportunities. Together, we will begin to workshop potential barriers to start you off on your Poverty Proofing© journey.



View the [workshop slides here.](#)

Across Borders and Birth: Tackling Child Poverty through Equitable Maternal Journeys

Professor Faye Ruddock DL – Chair, Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN); Director, Health Equity, Social Justice & Partnerships, University of Greater Manchester
Dr Albert Lawrence Kwansa – Research Coordinator, CAHN

This workshop explores how maternal health systems can better support Black Caribbean and African women, particularly those facing immigration-related exclusion and poverty during the first 1,000 days of life. Participants will engage in collaborative activities to map perinatal risks, trace a fictional migrant mother's care journey, and identify service pinch-points. The session will prompt discussion on culturally responsive, proportionate universal interventions that local systems can adopt to reduce poverty and improve maternal and child outcomes.

View the [workshop slides here](#) and the [notes here](#).





ANNEX B

PM WORKSHOPS

GREAT PROBLEMS AND GREAT IDEAS

Creativity and Health Equity: Mapping
Creative Health

How three healthcare systems are shifting the
dial on children's health

Community-led approaches to address
missingness and health inequity

Power, Privilege & Intersectionality:
Understanding Our Roles in Health Equity

Regional approaches to promoting health
equity: the opportunity of Health in All Policies
in Combined Authorities

Creativity and Health Equity: Mapping Creative Health

Dr Simon Parry – Lecturer in Drama & Arts Management, University of Manchester

Dr Hannah Waterson – Research Associate in Knowledge Mobilisation (Creative Health) University of Manchester

Amalia Restrepo – Research Lead, London Arts and Health

Anna Woolf – CEO, London Arts and Health

In this workshop participants will explore the different ways in which the arts, creativity and culture can help to mitigate health inequalities. Drawing on examples from work taking place across London and Greater Manchester, participants will discuss how creativity and culture can support the principles of Marmot Places and interact with the social determinants of health.

Participants will be supported to recognise creative and cultural assets in their communities and identify practical steps they could take within their own organisations to help embed Creative Health and ensure its benefits are available to everyone.

View the [workshop slides here](#).



How three healthcare systems are shifting the dial on children's health

Dr Natalie Daley – Public Health Consultant, Barnardo's

Dr Jessica Allen – Deputy Director, Institute of Health Equity

Prof. Doug Simkiss – ICS Senior Responsible Officer for the CHEC,
Birmingham and Solihull ICS

Nicola Ennis – Children and Young People's Alliance Programme Director,
South Yorkshire ICS

Dr Liz Crabtree – Programme Director, Beyond Programme, Cheshire and
Merseyside ICS

Nel Summerhayes – Health Equity Champion, CHEC, Cheshire and
Merseyside ICS

Natalie Woods – Programme Manager, Health Inequalities, Barnardo's

This session will focus on the work of the Children and Young People's Health Equity Collaborative (CHEC), a partnership between Barnardo's, the Institute of Health Equity, and three Integrated Care Systems (Birmingham and Solihull, Cheshire and Merseyside, and South Yorkshire).

We will share the 'why' behind CHEC; our Child Health Equity Framework, shaped by children and young people's priorities; the difference CHEC has made; and the lasting impact we aim to leave. You will also hear directly from Health Equity Champions about their experiences.

ICS leads will outline the vision of this collaborative and the role of young people in shaping its programme. We will also highlight interventions in each area addressing social determinants of health to improve wellbeing and reduce inequalities among children and young people.

[View the workshop slides here.](#)



Community-led approaches to address missingness and health inequity

Sarah Boath – Head of Programme, Scottish Community Development Centre

Claire Finlayson – Health Improvement Manager Place Team, Public Health Scotland

Roisin Hurst, Project Manager – Scottish Community Link Worker Network, Voluntary Health Scotland

Sarah Latta – Policy and Public Affairs Lead, Voluntary Health Scotland

In Scotland, nearly one in five people miss multiple GP appointments over a three-year period – often those facing complex health challenges, high treatment burdens, and difficult social circumstances. This “missingness” highlights not only individual experiences but also systemic gaps in how health and wellbeing are supported. Tackling it requires both community-led approaches and strategic systems change to ensure services are inclusive, preventative, and responsive to needs.

In this interactive session from CHEX, Public Health Scotland, and Voluntary Health Scotland, participants will explore the concept of missingness through a hands-on activity, hear examples of community-led solutions such as community link working and social prescribing, and consider how national policy and strategic systems can better align with local action. Together, we’ll reflect on opportunities for collaboration, shared responsibility, and the role of communities in supporting equitable systems change.

View the [workshop slides](#) here and [the notes](#) here.



Power, Privilege & Intersectionality: Understanding Our Roles in Health Equity

Melissa Simmonds – Health Equity Community Network Leader for Patients, Carers and Service Users, Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust (SHSC)

Idil Ibrahim – Quality Improvement Manager, Sheffield Health and Social Care NHS Foundation Trust (SHSC)

Gambinga Gambinga – Equity Officer for Race and Mental Health, Sheffield African Caribbean Mental Health Association (SACHMA)



This interactive and reflective workshop invites participants to explore how power, privilege and intersecting identities shape both access to healthcare and the experiences of those who use and work within it. Grounded in real-world practice and co-production, we will examine how our individual and organisational positions can either reinforce or challenge structural inequities – and how we can respond meaningfully within our spheres of influence.



Participants will be introduced to accessible visual tools and guided through activities that help them critically reflect on their own identities, social positions, and lived/professional experiences. Delegates will gain insight into how their unique combinations of privilege and marginalisation influence the way they lead, advocate, collaborate, and deliver services.



View the [workshop slides](#) [here](#).

Regional Approaches to Promoting Health Equity: The Opportunity of Health in All Policies in Combined Authorities

Dawn Jenkin – Public Health Consultant, Mayoral Regions Programme (MRP)

Grace Scrivens – Senior Policy Officer, MRP

Jennifer Connolly – Associate Director, Population Health, West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) & Integrated Care Board

Rachel Westbourne – Specialty Registrar in Public Health, WYCA

Sulia Celebi – Specialty Registrar in Public Health, WYCA

With the increasing devolution of powers, Combined Authorities (CAs) are uniquely placed to influence the wider determinants of health—such as transport, housing, employment, economic growth, and culture. The forthcoming statutory duty for CAs to improve health and reduce inequalities presents a timely opportunity to embed Health in All Policies (HiAP) approaches into regional governance and strategy.

This workshop will explore how CAs can systematically integrate health equity into their core functions, using the MRP HiAP Toolkit and drawing on real-world examples from West Yorkshire.

View the [workshop slides here](#) and the [notes here](#).

