

What can Voluntary and Community Organisations offer to GP Commissioning Consortia?

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) in the South East consists of almost 45,000 organisations delivering a vast array of services for local communities - from information, advice and guidance to training, advocacy and emotional and physical support¹. This paper explains the different roles that organisations within the VCS have and what they can offer GP Commissioning Consortia in the way of community based health and social care services.

Service delivery

A large number of VCS organisations currently deliver health related outcomes. Some of these services are funded from within the health system, mainly through Primary Care Trusts, but levels of commissioning vary widely and the voluntary sector has traditionally found it hard to engage with commissioners. GP Commissioning Consortia and the Any Qualified Provider initiative in the NHS present a new opportunity for voluntary and community organisations to increase their role in delivering health related outcomes and health services in a cost effective and targeted way².

In the past Primary Care Trusts and other health partners have found it difficult to work with the vast array of VCS providers and have struggled to understand the sector's capacity to deliver health related outcomes and services. Supporting GP Commissioning Consortia to understand the sector's current delivery of health services and its potential to help deliver health related outcomes will improve healthcare commissioning practice and deliver better outcomes for local populations.

Identifying local need and feeding into the commissioning cycle

As well as its service delivery role, the VCS makes a vital contribution to processes such as the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) which help to identify the health and well being needs of a local area³. The VCS is especially well placed to identify the needs of marginalised and harder-to-reach groups and those with complex needs and conditions, who may not regularly access health or GP services, and who may otherwise fall under the radar of healthcare commissioners. Engaging VCS organisations early in the commissioning cycle to identify and plan provision, or help in the development of care pathways, would ensure the needs of the whole community and especially those with complex needs and conditions are met.

¹ Hidden Asset: A report to demonstrate the value of the Voluntary and Community Sector in the South East (RAISE, 2009)

² You can find examples of cost effective models of service provision in Gain without Pain (VODG, 2010)

³ You can find examples and further information on voluntary and community sector involvement in the development of local health priorities and services through JSNA at www.vodg.org.uk/JSNA-Resources.html

The diversity of the local voluntary and community sector

In many local areas there will be branches of national charities such as Age Concern, Mind, Mencap and Headway, as well as registered care providers, which will have an understanding of local priorities and the specific needs of their client groups. There will also be a wealth of small, local voluntary and community groups and forums that provide targeted services to support specific areas of health and social care, such as healthy eating, teenage pregnancy or alcohol misuse; as well as organisations which provide a voice for particular groups in local decision-making, such as Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) which provide a voice for patients and the public. There may also be national and local VCS umbrella bodies, such as NCF and VODG, representing and supporting frontline charities working in particular service areas e.g. dementia and learning disability, as well as organisations with specialist experience of supporting people with long term conditions, such as epilepsy and stroke survivors.

How you can speak to your local voluntary and community sector

In most local authority areas there is an organisation that provides generic support, guidance and representation to voluntary and community groups and providers. These may be called a Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), Voluntary Action, Community Action or similar e.g. Southampton Voluntary Services and Surrey Community Action. Although their remit, funding and capacity will vary in different areas, these organisations provide a bridge between local commissioners and communities by helping to co-ordinate the involvement of voluntary organisations and community groups in discussions about local need and how these can best be met. There may also be local provider forums which represent organisations currently delivering health and social care services in partnership with local authority and healthcare commissioners. These organisations can act as a conduit or route into the local VCS, providing GP Commissioning Consortia with a mechanism to tap into the sector's valuable knowledge and understanding of the needs of its local population.

How to find out more

RAISE

RAISE is the network for voluntary and community organisations in the South East. If you want to find out more about the voluntary and community sector in your local area or how the sector can support your GP Commissioning Consortium, please contact Abby Lee, Senior Policy Officer at RAISE at abigail@raise-networks.org.uk or call 01483 608342.

The National Care Forum (NCF) and Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG)

The NCF and VODG are national umbrella bodies providing support to voluntary sector providers of health and social care services to older and disabled people. To find out more please visit www.nationalcareforum.org.uk and www.vodg.org.uk.

RAISE, NCF and VODG are partners with the **Department of Health Voluntary Sector Strategic Partnership Programme**. The Programme brings together 16 partners from the voluntary and community sector working in health and social care across the UK to represent and build capacity in the sector, and input into Department of Health policy and practice. Collectively it has a reach of over 300,000 voluntary and community sector organisations. To find out more about the programme please contact Jenny Harlock, Strategic Partnership Programme Manager, at jenny.harlock@nationalcareforum.org.uk or call 07825 837740.