

School for Public Health Research

## Public Health Evidence Briefing

Building the evidence for cost-effective public health practice

### How do Citizens Advice services improve people's health?

- Welfare advice services improve people's financial position; however, understanding their potential health impact is more difficult.
- A realist evaluation, including scoping of the literature and interviews with Citizens Advice staff, will explore the potential health impacts of Citizens Advice services in Gateshead.
- Initial theories around how Citizen Advice services may lead to health outcomes will be tested and refined in the next stage of research.



Citizens Advice provide people with free advice on issues related to debt, benefits, employment, housing and discrimination. Therefore, they address the social determinants of health, which can affect health inequalities.

### Key issues

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- Citizens Advice provide support that is highly tailored to the needs of individuals and therefore has the potential to lead to very different health impacts depending on the individual circumstances of the client.
- Due to this variation, establishing evidence on the effectiveness of Citizens Advice services in improving health has been challenging.
- Research is needed to unpick the different kinds of support offered by Citizens Advice, how this may trigger changes in health, and the contexts in which health improvements are most likely to happen.

### What we did

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A realist evaluation of intensive Citizen Advice services in Gateshead was undertaken to understand how, when and for whom these services lead to health improvements. SPHR researchers undertook a scoping review of the literature and interviewed Citizens Advice staff to identify initial theories on how Citizens Advice services may lead to changes in people's health.

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### Findings and Implications

Initial theories on how Citizens Advice services affect health:

- Support from Citizen Advice with financial concerns reduces people's stress and anxiety, helping them to feel more in control and able to make healthy lifestyle changes.
- The impartial and non-judgmental nature of Citizens Advice helps clients who are mistrustful of state services feel supported in navigating the welfare system, resulting in greater confidence to take action.
- People with an existing health condition are more likely to use income to support healthy decisions than those who see health consequences as very distant.

These theories were developed in collaborative team meetings.

### What next?

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The next phase of the research will test and refine these theories in further interviews with service staff, as well as questionnaires and interviews with Citizen Advice clients. The theories will be used to develop a package of data collection measures to incorporate into Citizen Advice routine practice helping them capture longer term health impacts.

### References:

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[www.fuse.ac.uk/research/briefs/How%20do%20Citizens%20Advice%20Bureau%20services%20improve%20people's%20health.pdf](http://www.fuse.ac.uk/research/briefs/How%20do%20Citizens%20Advice%20Bureau%20services%20improve%20people's%20health.pdf)  
<http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/6/1/e009887.full.pdf+html>

### SPHR Contact/Find out more about this study at:

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[www.fuse.ac.uk/nihrsphr/widerdeterminants/howdocitizensadvicebureauservicesimprovepeopleshealth.html](http://www.fuse.ac.uk/nihrsphr/widerdeterminants/howdocitizensadvicebureauservicesimprovepeopleshealth.html)