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# BUILDING ON SUCCESS

A strategy for the  
MEAM coalition  
2021–2025

# INTRODUCTION

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a unique coalition of national charities – Clinks, Collective Voice, Homeless Link and Mind.

Since 2009, we have built a strong collaboration across our organisations and played a leading role in transforming services, systems and policy for people facing multiple disadvantage.

Working with a wide range of partners, we have helped to create a step-change in how local areas recognise and respond to people facing multiple disadvantage. We have built the MEAM Approach network and helped shape the Fulfilling Lives network, providing direct support to more than 50 local areas.

The evidence and learning from these networks is also having an impact at a national level – helping to inspire new programmes across government, expanding funding opportunities for local areas, and beginning to create a more informed national policy environment.

Despite good progress, there remains much more to do.

In this strategy we set out how we will build on our success to date, supporting government and local areas so that by 2025 every area of the country will have a partnership approach

to multiple disadvantage in place and be taking practical steps to transform services and systems for people facing multiple disadvantage.

Three strategic aims will help us achieve this goal:

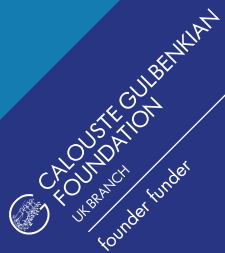
- Aim 1**  
**Involvement and inclusion**
- Aim 2**  
**Partnerships and systems**
- Aim 3**  
**Policy and influence**

The long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the drivers and prevalence of multiple disadvantage will make this work more important than ever.

While many local areas and national policymakers will rise to the challenge of tackling multiple disadvantage, we know it will be those which take a truly system-wide approach that will be most equipped to succeed.

Working alongside our funders and partners, we look forward to leading, supporting and encouraging this activity in the years ahead.

With thanks to our funders:



Lankelly Chase



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## WHAT IS MULTIPLE DISADVANTAGE?

People facing multiple disadvantage experience a combination of problems. For many, their current circumstances are shaped by long-term experiences of poverty, deprivation, trauma, abuse and neglect. Many also face racism, sexism and homophobia.

These structural inequalities intersect in different ways, manifesting in a combination of experiences including homelessness, substance

misuse, domestic violence, contact with the criminal justice system and mental ill health.

Multiple disadvantage is a systemic, not an individual issue. People facing multiple disadvantage live in every area of the country. They are often failed by services and systems that focus on singular issues. This makes it harder for individuals to address their problems, lead fulfilling lives and contribute fully to their communities.

## WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This status quo remains unacceptable. Evidence has shown that better coordinated interventions from statutory and voluntary agencies can improve people's lives and reduce the use and cost of crisis services. Many local areas are now making progress on better support for people facing multiple disadvantage and the long-term sustainable changes to local systems that make this possible, but it is not yet happening across the country.

Over the period of this strategy we want to build on our work to date, ensuring that every area of the country has a strong partnership approach to multiple disadvantage in place and is taking practical steps to transform services and local systems for people facing multiple disadvantage.

“People facing multiple disadvantage live in every area of the country.”

# VISION, MISSION AND APPROACH

Our vision is that everyone experiencing multiple disadvantage can reach their potential and contribute fully to their communities.

Working together as a coalition, we support local areas across England to develop effective, coordinated services that directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage and to make long-term sustainable changes to local systems. We use our shared knowledge and practical experience from this work to influence policy at a national and local level.

Our work is shaped by our unique approach:

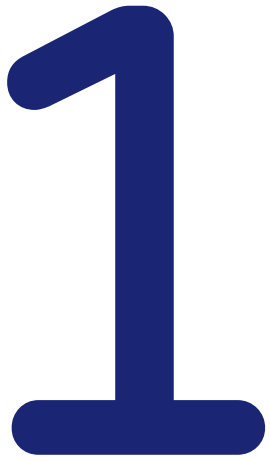
- **Collaborative:** Tackling multiple disadvantage requires a collective and collaborative approach. As a coalition, we model the collaboration we want to see from local services and national government. We work closely with a wide range of local and national partners, while also valuing our independence and unique position. We are open, honest and reflective in everything we do.
- **Supportive and practical, yet ambitious:** We work with local areas and national policymakers who want to improve the lives

of people facing multiple disadvantage. We are ambitious about the change we want to see at individual, service, system and policy levels. At the same time, we recognise the constraints that people are working within and that things do not change overnight. We take a supportive and practical approach, starting where people are at while also encouraging them to be ambitious. Our work is both iterative and transformative.

- **Inclusive and guided by experience:** Our ultimate aim is to improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage. We will ensure that this does not get lost among the necessary work on services and systems. We recognise that meaningful change must be based on a new balance of power between people with experience of multiple disadvantage, the people who support them, and the people who make decisions that affect them. We are committed to meaningfully coproducing our work and being guided by the views of everyone we work with. We use our unique position to bridge the gap between national and local policymakers and the experiences of services and individuals, ensuring that everyone benefits from each other's expertise.

“We take a supportive and practical approach, starting where people are at while also encouraging them to be ambitious.”

AIM



INVOLVEMENT  
AND INCLUSION

## Our ultimate focus is on people.

We will coproduce our work with people facing multiple disadvantage and support local areas to do the same. We will help to ensure that services and systems are trauma-informed and focused on people's strengths. Our work will be inclusive and representative, paying particular attention to how intersecting forms of discrimination impact on people's likelihood and experience of multiple disadvantage.

We will enable the voice and individual experience of everyone facing multiple disadvantage, and those supporting them, to be at the heart of change.

## Key priorities

### **Coproduction**

We will continue to actively involve people with lived experience in our work, in the work of local areas, and in shaping national policy. We will further expand our coproduction network and ensure that local areas have the skills, confidence and relationships to involve people with experience from the very start of their work and throughout. We will measure our success, be honest about our failures, and help build the evidence base for the benefits of coproduction and how to do it well.

### **Trauma-informed and strengths-based systems**

We will develop a programme of work that supports whole systems (funders, commissioners and policymakers, as well as services) to be trauma-informed and focused on people's strengths. This will include work with organisations and services that may not traditionally have this depth of understanding of people's past experiences. We will challenge negative attitudes where

we find them. Through this work we will begin to address the stigma and discrimination experienced by people facing multiple disadvantage when engaging with some services.

### **Racism and multiple disadvantage**

We will take an intersectional approach to our work, recognising how people's social and political identities and the discrimination linked to these intersect to create unique experiences of multiple disadvantage. In the initial period of the strategy we will have a particular focus on racism, seeking to understand how structural racism and white privilege impact on people's likelihood and experience of multiple disadvantage. We will use our learning to challenge ourselves and others, and to change how services and systems respond. We will take an actively anti-racist approach to all our work.

AIM



PARTNERSHIPS  
AND SYSTEMS

Change happens when services, commissioners, policymakers and communities take a system-wide approach.

We will build on our expertise of supporting local cross-sector partnerships that have the vision, power and commitment to transform the way services, policies and systems work for people facing multiple disadvantage. We will offer bespoke support, learning and training opportunities to help partnerships create systems where values, cultures, perceptions, policies, funding and commissioning processes support better outcomes for people facing multiple disadvantage.

## Key priorities

### Network support

Our Local Networks and Policy teams will support MEAM Approach and Fulfilling Lives areas (including those with Changing Futures investment) to develop effective local partnerships focused on individual, service and system-level change for people facing multiple disadvantage. We will support these partnerships to be committed, focused, nimble and adaptable, with the membership, vision, power and commitment to make long-term changes to local services, systems and policies.

We will develop and expand the offer we make to network areas to learn and share from each other. We intend to run regular events and conferences and build on the opportunities arising from remote working to bring local areas together.

We will support the evaluation activity across the network areas, which is collating the evidence necessary for a full national roll-out.

### System support

We will provide bespoke support, learning and training offers for local areas which want to make specific changes to their local systems.

We will develop a model to guide this work and offer specific practical support on a consultancy basis.

### Workforce support

We plan to expand our training offer for local areas, helping to ensure that people and organisations across local systems have the knowledge, skills and culture to support people facing multiple disadvantage.

### Widening the conversation

We will reach out to specific parts of the system that are currently less connected to local partnerships and where change could have a significant impact on individuals. Our initial priority will be to explore deeper engagement with statutory health and mental health services as they progress with current reforms. In all the local areas we support, we will seek to ensure a greater involvement of community and grassroots organisations in the local partnerships, recognising the unique role that they can play in tackling multiple disadvantage.

# AIM



# POLICY AND INFLUENCE

## Policy is ultimately about its impact on people.

A supportive national policy environment can incentivise local action and help to ensure that people facing multiple disadvantage get the right support at the right time.

We will work to reframe the way that policy is made and implemented, encouraging policymakers to involve people with lived experience directly in the policy process and to understand the challenges that they, and the services supporting them, face. We will challenge narratives that stigmatise people facing multiple disadvantage and continue to use learning and evidence from local areas to inform our influencing work.

## Key priorities

### How policy is made

We will work to ensure that people with experience of multiple disadvantage and frontline practitioners are involved in the policy process, able to make their voices heard and have their ideas acted upon. We will create opportunities to involve people in policy decisions and offer policymakers regular opportunities to engage directly with work in local areas.

### Linking the local and national

We will use our unique position between government and local services to create a two-way communication around policy issues. We will help people in local areas to better understand policy developments and their relevance to their daily life/work. We will also help local areas to consider challenges around policy implementation and provide feedback to government so that national policymakers can better understand local concerns.

### A cross-sector view

Through MEAM, Clinks, Collective Voice, Homeless Link and Mind will continue to work together to rapidly influence policy and government decisions which impact on people facing multiple disadvantage. We will use our unique

ability to work as a coalition to offer policymakers a cross-sector view on the challenges they are seeking to address.

### Shaping the future

We will work with wider partners and civil servants to promote an ambitious vision for future government policy and investment on multiple disadvantage. We will engage a wide range of departments, seeking to ensure that the learning and evidence from current cross-government programmes related to multiple disadvantage can be connected and translated into a coherent and coordinated cross-government approach for the next full Spending Round.

### Tackling stigma

We will work to ensure that policy does not stigmatise people facing multiple disadvantage and challenge constructively when this is the case. We will use our own communications to promote the work happening in local areas, using this to tackle stigma among the general public at the local and national level.



“We are committed to measuring our progress and the impact that we make.”

## EVALUATING OUR WORK

We take an open, collaborative and transparent approach to learning.

We are committed to measuring our progress and the impact that we make, and to sharing this widely with national and international audiences.

We commission regular external evaluations of our work and publish the findings to support a growing evidence base.

As with all our work, we ensure that people with experience of multiple disadvantage are closely involved in our evaluation activities.

## WORKING WITH YOU

Significant progress has been made on tackling multiple disadvantage, but there is still much more work to do.

We hope that the plans we have set out in this strategy encourage you in your work to tackle multiple disadvantage. Everyone has a unique role to play.

We are always looking to work with people and organisations who share our values and passion for change. Please do get in touch if we can work together.



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