

MEAM submission to HMT – Spending Review 2024

About MEAM

Making Every Adult Matter (MEAM) is a coalition of national charities – Clinks, Collective Voice, Homeless Link and Mind. Together MEAM represents over 1,300 frontline organisations across England. Since 2009, we have supported more than 50 local areas across the country to develop effective, coordinated services that directly improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage and used learning from this work to shape local and national policy.

Why should Government continue to act on 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.

Estimates for the number of people facing multiple disadvantage vary depending on how the term is defined¹. However, as an example, it is estimated that the cost of public spending on the 58,000 people in England with overlapping problems of homelessness, substance misuse and contact with the criminal justice system is between £1.1bn and £2.1bn a year.² In addition, the recently published NHSE framework for action on inclusion health³ highlights the high needs and significant costs associated with people in inclusion health groups, despite this population being relatively small. Because services often fail to meet the needs of people facing multiple disadvantage, significant resources are used on emergency and unplanned interventions, without people receiving the coordinated support they need to improve their lives.

Long-term independent evaluation evidence from areas who have adopted the MEAM Approach shows that local areas which take a more coordinated approach can reduce rough sleeping by 89% and achieve statistically significant reductions in A&E attendance (37%), non-elective acute hospital admissions (50%), arrests (32%) and nights in prison (37%).⁴

Previous Labour governments have recognised the issue of multiple disadvantage through work on social exclusion and with pilot schemes such as the Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion programme⁵. The recent Conservative Government invested in tackling multiple disadvantage through the £77m Changing Futures Programme⁶, which has invested in delivering person-

¹ <https://meam.org.uk/multiple-needs-and-exclusions/>

² <https://meam.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Individuals-with-multiple-needs-the-case-for-a-national-focus.pdf>

³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/a-national-framework-for-nhs-action-on-inclusion-health/>

⁴ <https://meam.org.uk/2022/10/20/a-step-change-in-the-evidence-base/>

⁵ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a795968ed915d0422067ad1/1925475.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/changing-futures>

centred intensive support for people experiencing multiple disadvantage and bolstering strategic partnerships in 15 areas in England.

Tackling multiple disadvantage is key to the new Labour Government achieving its plans for mission government. We are delighted to see the mission-driven commitments the Labour Government has made to end homelessness, take a whole government approach to mental health, relieve pressure on the criminal justice system, and halve violence against women and girls within a decade. However, to fully achieve these commitments, Labour will need to consider and address the thread which connects them all – the experience of multiple disadvantage. Currently, multiple disadvantage is not referenced in Labour’s missions, but it is relevant to all of them. Labour’s spending commitments and reforms will need to change services and systems both locally and nationally, so that they work for everyone, including people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

How could Spending Review 2024 show a clear commitment to multiple disadvantage?

There is scope for Spending Review 2024 to show a clear commitment to tackling multiple disadvantage and unlock benefits for the Government’s mission-driven plans, in the following three ways:

1. Commit to continued financial investment from government to focus on multiple disadvantage.
2. Continue to invest in services across all sectors that support people experiencing multiple disadvantage.
3. Continue to make structural changes to the way funding is allocated from the top of Government for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.

1. Commit to continued financial investment from Government to focus on multiple disadvantage

The Changing Futures programme has operated since 2021. It is currently funded until March 2025. It funds work in 15 local areas across England and aims to deliver improvements at the individual, service and system level to:

- Stabilise and then improve the life situation of adults who face multiple disadvantage
- Transform local services to provide a person-centred approach and to reduce crisis demand
- Test a different approach to funding, accountability and engagement between local commissioners and services, and between central government and local areas.

Interim evaluation⁷ of the programme has shown positive improvements for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. Page 71 states, “There are early indicators of progress towards outcomes, with small but statistically significant reductions in homelessness, rough sleeping, and being a victim of non-violent crime...There are also encouraging signs from qualitative and quantitative data that people feel safer, more connected and more hopeful about their future prospects.” Further evaluation data is available to MHCLG but as yet unpublished.

⁷https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/660ffeda63b7f8001fde1932/Evaluation_of_the_Changing_Futures_programme_-_interim_report.pdf

We would like Spending Review 2024 to:

- Commit to a further year of support (2025-2026) for the 15 Changing Futures areas, allowing them to continue to improve the lives of people facing multiple disadvantage, relieve pressure on a range of frontline services, and embed systemic change across their local public service systems.
- Use the learning being created by this unique programme within Government to build the case for an expansion of the Changing Futures programme to a larger number of local areas on a national scale from 2026-2027 onwards.

If Changing Futures is extended, this is likely to:

- Improve a broad set of outcomes for people experiencing multiple disadvantage.
- Function as a lightning rod for and supercharge other specialised funding pots that are aimed at resolving particular challenges associated with multiple disadvantage (e.g., the Rough Sleeping Initiative, Rough Sleeper Drug and Alcohol Grant, Prison Leaver Project, RECONNECT) by making connections between these programmes, reducing duplication, sharing learning and improving system-wide understanding of the quality and impact of multiple interacting interventions.
- Support and add value to statutory and voluntary services interventions, often by supporting innovative and creative support for people deemed “too high-risk” or “too entrenched in particular behaviour” by mainstream services (particularly for adult social care, homelessness and drug and alcohol use services).
- Contribute to a long-term reduction in pressure for acute services, including A&E, community mental health teams and police response as people’s lives are stabilised. This is also likely to reduce the long-term demand for prison space.
- Depending on local priorities for this work, it could support more people to the labour market, reducing the spend on benefits for people experiencing multiple disadvantage and increasing payroll contributions.

2. Continue to invest in services across all sectors that support people experiencing multiple disadvantage

We are under no illusions of the tightness of the current spending envelopes that the Government has inherited from the previous administration.

However, services across sectors are facing increasing demand and increasing complexity of need. Spending Review 2024 should ensure that funding levels for statutory and voluntary services that support people facing multiple disadvantage continue to be funded at 2024-25 levels with an inflation-linked uprating to ensure purchasing power for services to maintain a similar quality of service provision as currently.

There are several relevant and time-limited funding streams that are due to come to an end in March 2025. The activities that these programmes fund are often coordinated together locally to create a service offer for people experiencing multiple disadvantage. While these may appear to be distinct programmes of funding, they form interlocking parts of a complex fabric of support which will start to fray if key elements of it are no longer funded.

In particular, the Rough Sleeping Initiative will come to an end in March 2025. It is an integral part of many areas’ response to homelessness and allows much of the extra capacity to provide Housing First and other models of support for people experiencing homelessness.

Within criminal justice, further support for probation services and charities that work in the criminal justice system to support the temporarily larger numbers of people leaving the secure estate as part of the SDS40 policy during Autumn 2024 and beyond will be necessary. Without longer-term support, we should expect to see large numbers of people recalled to prison and / or homelessness figures increasing.

Similarly, for substance use services, there is concern about the Supplementary Substance Misuse Treatment and Recovery (SSMTR) grant, which forms the majority of the funding stream for the drugs strategy, and can account for a third of an area's substance misuse treatment funding. This will currently come to an end in March 2025.

In addition, the Rough Sleeper Drug and Alcohol Treatment Grant (RSDATG) funding comes to an end at the same time. Without it we will see less tailored support for people who are rough sleeping and with no dedicated resource, longer waits for in-patient detox services, and more complex issues for staff who are conducting homelessness outreach.

We refer you to the Spending Review submissions from our partners Clinks, Collective Voice, Homeless Link and Mind for more detail on these issues.

3. Continue to make structural changes to the way funding is allocated from the top of Government for people experiencing multiple disadvantage

In 2022, MEAM published two reports^{8 9} exploring the way that funding for multiple disadvantage is conceived at the central Government level and delivered at the local level. The reports highlighted the way in which current funding streams can duplicate across departments and make it complicated for local areas to knit-together service responses for people facing multiple disadvantage. One commissioner reported having to draw together more than 13 streams of funding (many of them on a competitive basis) to provide individuals the support they need.

A number of challenges were identified in the reports:

- There is a lot of short-term programmatic funding, meaning no opportunity to focus on systemic change and causing large amounts of staff turnover.
- Many bids have to cover a population larger than those experiencing multiple disadvantage, meaning opportunities for truly targeted work can be lost.
- Overly restrictive funding requirements which constrain innovative operational practice, or require particular clients to progress at the speed of the programme (e.g., a client has X weeks and is then expected to move on), rather than funding which allows flexible provision.
- Duplicated funding streams across departments, which focus on people with similar needs, all of which have separate data collection/submission and reporting requirements.
- Competitive allocation rather than allocation to areas by need, which means areas with the best bid writers get more money.

⁸ <https://meam.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Making-funding-work-for-Multiple-Disadvantage.pdf>

⁹ <https://meam.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Making-funding-work-report-2-Aug2022.pdf>

- The default mode is for local areas to have to knit together a number of funding streams to create a service offer, rather than there being fewer, larger streams of funding that can be used more flexibly.

The report made a range of key recommendations, including:

- A general reduction in the use of competitive funding allocation, instead focussing on increasing departmental use of data to more appropriately allocate funds to areas and projects that are best placed to benefit.
- Reducing the programmatic funding activity from central government that is duplicative, overlapping or short-term and results from poor cross-departmental planning. Instead, departments need closer collaboration to ensure funding is coherent, aware of and responsive to the local funding environment; provides flexibility to local areas and is clear about the links to other government funding streams.
- Lengthen programmatic funding from short-term initiatives to longer timescales.
- Further funding for multiple disadvantage which goes beyond programmatic delivery funding to support areas' efforts around systems change and fund the time needed for bringing people together locally to drive long-term sustainable change.
- Dedicated funding for multiple disadvantage which may reprofile existing smaller funding pots into more coherent, larger funding streams. This would reduce the significant administration involved in application, oversight and reporting; data collection and management; and give local areas greater ability to design and deliver services as they see fit.

As part of Spending Review 2024, we ask HMT to consider its role in making some of these recommendations happen across government, for example, through providing advice to government departments, or interventions when clearly duplicative activity is being proposed.

Conclusion and contacts

We thank HMT for the opportunity to comment on the spending review and hope our submission has been useful.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss further, please contact:

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