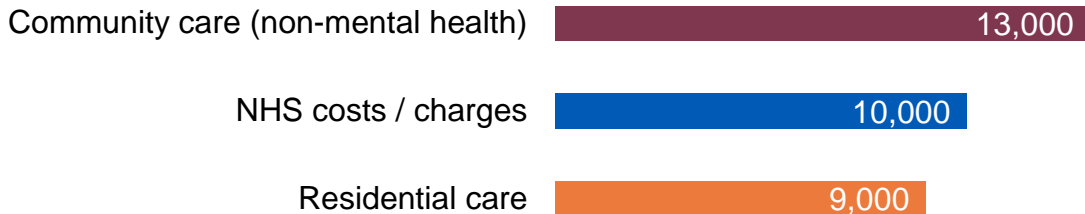


The impact of health and care advice



In 2012/13, the Citizens Advice service dealt with over 73,000 health and community care problems.

Top 3 health problems in 2012/13



Why is health and care advice needed?

Problems with health and care services include those related to availability of care/treatment, residential care charges and NHS charges such as dental charges or prescriptions. Problems in these areas can create serious difficulties for individuals, families and others who support people experiencing ill-health.

Evidence shows that there is a direct correlation between debt and poor mental health. People with debt problems are twice as likely to develop major depression¹ and people with existing mental health problems are nearly three times more likely to be in debt².

Health inequalities are a major concern for communities across England and Wales. The Marmot Review, '[Fair Society, Healthy Lives](#)', illustrates that people in lower socioeconomic groups have less chance of leading a healthy life than those in higher socioeconomic groups³. Areas of inequality include: mortality, morbidity, self-reported health, mental health, and injury from accidents and violence.

One of the key messages of the Marmot review is that health inequalities result from social inequalities. In addition to adequate provision of health services, tackling health inequalities requires action to improve the social determinants of health.

How can we help?

Citizens Advice contributes to improving our clients' health and wellbeing in two ways:

- Providing information and advice on health and community care problems
- Addressing the social determinants of health by resolving problems in areas such as welfare benefits, debt and housing.

Citizens Advice provides free, independent and confidential information and advice on health and community care, offered over the phone and face-to-face. In 2012/13, bureaux helped more than 73,000 clients with health and care problems.

Through adviceguide.org.uk, we also provide extensive self-help information online. In 2012/13 there were around 328,000 views of health content pages.

Our information and advice on problems such as welfare benefits, debt and housing can also bring about changes for clients that have a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. Many bureaux work alongside the NHS and other healthcare providers. In 2012/13, Citizens Advice Bureaux held 742 outreaches in health settings such as GP surgeries and hospitals.

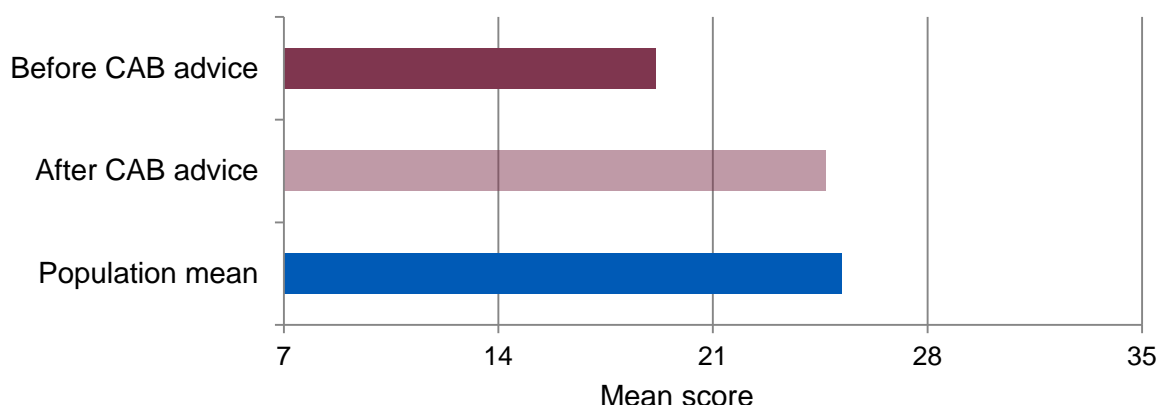
A review of evidence by Health and Social Care in the Community has explored the complex relationships between advice provision and health and wellbeing⁴. The review suggests that positive financial outcomes can have a secondary impact on mental health in particular.

What have we achieved?

In 2012/13, Citizens Advice piloted a scale used by the NHS to measure mental wellbeing⁵. The aim was to assess changes in clients' mental wellbeing before and after receiving advice on different topics (e.g. debt). On this particular scale, the minimum possible score is 7, and the maximum 35. The results showed:

- Before advice: the average mental wellbeing score was 19.14 - six points below the UK population mean
- After advice: four to six weeks later, the average mental wellbeing score was 24.67 – just short of the UK population mean

Mean mental wellbeing scores before and after CAB advice



These results suggest a potential 'knock-on impact' of general advice on mental wellbeing. This is likely to have been additional to any outcomes specific to the topic of advice (these were also recorded as part of the research):

- 1 in 3 clients achieved a tangible outcome, such as debt written off or rescheduled
- 2 in 3 clients reported that their financial capability had improved

These are findings from a small scale, pilot research project. Through future research, we intend to investigate the links between advice and mental wellbeing further.

¹ Skapinakis et al. (2006). [Socio-economic position and common mental disorders: longitudinal study in the general population in the UK](#).

² Jenkins, R. (2009). [Mental disorder in people with debt in the general population](#).

³ The Marmot Review (2010). [Fair Society, Healthy Lives](#).

⁴ Health and Social Care in the Community (2012). [Assessing the health benefits of advice services: using research evidence and logic model methods to explore complex pathways](#)

⁵ [Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale](#) (SWEMWBS) © NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2007, all rights reserved.