

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

14th Meeting, 2022 (Session 6), Wednesday  
26 October 2022

PE1942: Encourage peer support  
programmes in public sector organisations

Note by the Clerk

<b>Petitioner</b>	Fiona MacRae
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to promote the use of peer support programmes such as TRIM and STRAW in public sector workplaces to promote better mental health
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1942">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1942</a>

## Introduction

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 27 June 2022.
2. The petition seeks to promote the use of peer support programmes, designed to support the mental health of employees, in public sector workplaces. The petitioner suggests this would help reduce absences from work and enable early intervention to detect and prevent occupational mental health issues. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. While not a formal requirement, petitioners have the option to collect signatures on their petition. On this occasion, the petitioner elected to collect this information. 15 signatures have been received.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered. A response has been received from the Scottish Government and is included at **Annexe C** of this paper.

6. A submission has been provided by the Petitioner. This is included at **Annexe D**.

## Action

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take on this petition.

**Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

### PE1942: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations

#### Petitioner

Fiona MacAulay

#### Date Lodged:

27 June 2022

#### Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to promote the use of peer support programmes such as TRIM and STRAW in public sector workplaces to promote better mental health.

#### Previous action

I have spoken to Edward Mountain MSP who is backing the petition. I have also lodged a petition with over 400 signatures.

#### Background information

TRIM is a trauma-focused peer support system designed to support the mental health of employees.

STRAW is a Sustaining Resilience at Work peer support system which is designed to detect and prevent occupational mental health issues and boost an organisation's psychological resilience. STRAW is based on up-to-date scientific research.

TRIM and STRAW practitioners could help create psychological safety at work by encouraging employees to complete an incident report when they experience or witness any behaviour(s) that may affect the mental health of employees. The TRIM and STRAW processes do not interfere with any formal investigations.

The Laura Hyde Foundation has reported 226 nurses across all settings had attempted suicide between 1 April 2020 and 31 April 2021.

Furthermore, it was reported in the Nursing Times in June 2021 that in just 6 years between 2011 and 2017, at least 307 NHS nurses took their own lives (figures released by the ONS);

Mental health problems are a major contributor to absences from work, poorer productivity with huge financial and health consequences, both to the employee and the employer.

Early intervention could reduce suffering and costs to organisations and help create a safer more positive culture.

## Annexe B

The logo for SPICe is a purple rounded rectangle with a gradient. The text 'SPICe' is written in white, bold, sans-serif font.

**The Information Centre**  
An t-Ionad Fiosrachaidh

### Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition PE1942: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations, lodged by Fiona MacAulay

#### Brief overview of issues raised by the petition

A key challenge in addressing mental health at work is recognising and disclosing distress to others. For many, deciding whether to tell employers and colleagues about a mental health problem is difficult or different from disclosing physical health concerns. However, spotting signs of mental ill-health at an early stage and its disclosure can mean the problem is dealt with before it escalates into a crisis. A [survey](#) by the Mental Health Foundation found that:

'many people choose not to disclose their mental health problems for fear of jeopardising their career progression, being victimised as a direct result of a mental health issue and having a lack of clearly established protocols and procedures for managers to follow if staff experience mental ill health.'

Research shows that approximately [1 in 4 people experience a mental health problem](#) at some point in their lifetime, and at any one time, approximately 1 in 6 people have a mental health problem.

This petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to promote, using two peer support programmes in public sector workplaces, better mental health support. Sustaining Resilience at work ([StRaW](#)) and Trauma Risk

Management ([TRiM](#)) are workplace peer support programmes to support employee mental health.

StRaW aims to detect and prevent occupational mental health issues and boost psychological resilience. TRiM seeks to aid with managing situations and prevent the development of further difficulties after staff member/s witness or are affected by a traumatic event or repeated exposure within their working environment.

### [The Stevenson-Farmer review of mental health and employers](#)

published in 2017 considers how employees might be better supported and is relevant to all types of organisations. However, the report is particularly relevant to organisations that deliver care/support to other people as their primary function, including those working in the public sector. Their report presents three challenges to employers, which are:

- Assisting employees to thrive at work
- Supporting staff who are struggling
- Enabling people who are ill to recover and return to work.

Overall, the report indicates that the human cost of mental health problems is enormous, with poor mental health impacting the lives of many people and those around them both at work and home.

Furthermore, it highlights that rates of poor mental health and suicide are higher for employees in certain work settings, such as the NHS.

[Data](#) from the ONS and the Laura Hyde Foundation support service partner show that public sector staff are at approximately 40% higher risk of suicide than the general public. However, 53% of staff are 'very uncomfortable' taking up employer-based support services.

The Scottish Government has a [10-year mental health strategy](#) with 40 Actions. Concerning creating mentally healthy workplaces, the Scottish Government's ambitions are that people who develop poor mental health are supported to stay at work just as they would be with physical health issues and reflected through Action 36 and Action 37:

'Action 36: Work with employers on how they can act to protect and improve mental health and support employees experiencing poor mental health.

Action 37: Explore with others innovative ways of connecting mental health, disability, and employment support in Scotland.'

The pandemic's impact on a societal level has meant that mental health has been brought to the fore. As a result, the Scottish Government published a [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): mental health – transition and recovery plan](#). This details what the Government is doing to address mental health challenges and create mentally healthy workplaces in Scotland and outlines its commitments and next steps.

**John Kamoto**  
**Researcher**  
[21/06/2022]

The purpose of this briefing is to provide a brief overview of issues raised by the petition. SPICe research specialists are not able to discuss the content of petition briefings with petitioners or other members of the public. However, if you have any comments on any petition briefing you can email us at [spice@parliament.scot](mailto:spice@parliament.scot)

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in petition briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

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## Annexe C

### Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care submission of 7 July 2022

#### PE1942/A: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations

I am writing in response to the petition; *'Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to promote the use of peer support programmes such as TRIM and STRAW in public sector workplaces to promote better mental health.'*

The petition covers a range of issues relating to the use of peer support programmes in public sector workplaces and mental health. I hope it is helpful if I outline some of the relevant work that the Scottish Government is taking forward to ensure we have a mental health system where the right help is available, in the right place, at the right time. This is especially critical given that we know the mental health impacts of the pandemic will continue to emerge and evolve over time. The help and support available, including in workplaces, must be similarly flexible and innovative to respond appropriately.

The petition contains a number of key themes relating to the provision of mental health support in the workplace, the key role of our NHS workforce, the wellbeing of our workforce, and the general benefits of peer support. I will lay out our approach to each of these issues in turn, which I trust will be useful to the Committee.

#### **Mental Health Support in the Workplace**

Early intervention and prevention are key priorities for the Scottish Government in taking forward our approach to mental health and wellbeing. Our aim is to support people to positively engage with their mental health at an early stage, promoting and supporting the conditions for good mental health and wellbeing at a population level.

We know that creating workplaces which support and promote good mental health benefit both individuals and employers. That is why, in our Mental Health Transition and Recovery Plan, we committed to working closely with stakeholders, including trade unions and employer groups,



to promote mentally healthy workplaces where mental health and wellbeing is meaningfully discussed, supported, and where stigma and discrimination are addressed.

Working with these partners, we are developing an online platform for employers that streamlines access to a wide range of free and reputable mental health and wellbeing resources. We know that all organisations are different and are likely to be at different stages in creating a mentally healthy workplace. We are working to ensure that all employers have the support they need to promote the conditions that enable good mental health at work.

### **Trauma Training**

Experience of trauma and adversity are more common than is often assumed and can bring significant additional challenges for employees in the workplace. Historical or current experiences such as childhood abuse or neglect, homelessness, domestic abuse, death of a loved one, or other circumstances exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic can affect how people feel about themselves, their environment and can interfere with their ability to do their jobs well. The Scottish Government has invested over £5 million since 2018 in a [National Trauma Training Programme](#). This programme is progressing a joint Scottish Government and COSLA ambition to develop trauma-informed workforces and services across Scotland. The Programme provides freely available, evidence-based [trauma training resources](#). NHS Education for Scotland (NES) have developed these resources to support all sectors of the workforce to understand the impacts of trauma, and respond in ways which support people's resilience and avoids further harm.

### **Workforce Wellbeing**

The petition mentions findings relating to the mental health and wellbeing of nursing staff in our NHS.

We recognise that the pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on public health, NHS services and on the NHS workforce. The Scottish Government is hugely grateful for the efforts of all NHS workers as they have risen to the challenge of responding to the pandemic. We are committed to improving mental health and wellbeing, including that of nurses and other employees, and to ensuring that all employees are supported in an inclusive and fair workplace.

Our Mental Health Transition and Recovery Plan set out our response to the mental health effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, backed by an additional £120 million. As we work with Boards and other partners to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Scotland, we know that this can only be achieved with the right workforce capacity and capability – and with the wellbeing of staff at its heart.

It is critical that staff wellbeing is prioritised; and that staff are able to take the rest breaks and leave to which they are entitled, as well as being given time to access national and local wellbeing resources at work. In the financial year 2021/22, we made £12m available to support the wellbeing of the health and social care workforce. This includes £8m from the NHS Recovery Plan, alongside an additional £4m allocated to address winter pressures by providing practical support to aid their rest and recuperation. The wellbeing of our health and social care workforce will remain a key priority and we will overcome the challenges ahead if we look after this most valuable asset. Throughout the pandemic, we have emphasised to Boards, Health and Social Care Partners and Local Authorities the on-going need to promote the physical and the psychological wellbeing of everyone working in health and social care.

To complement the help available at a local level, we also have a range of resources including the National Wellbeing Hub, a 24/7 National Wellbeing Helpline, confidential mental health treatment through the Workforce Specialist Service and funding for additional local psychological support.

We are also mindful of the pressure on our other emergency responders. Lifelines Scotland is a project which supports the wellbeing – and recovery - of emergency responders in the “blue light” services (professional, voluntary and retired – and their families) who have had challenging or distressing experiences in the course of their work. We have provided support funding to Lifelines in recent years, complementing the funding they receive from Police Scotland, Scottish Ambulance Service, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and the Fire Fighters Charity. Although based at NHS Lothian, the project provides support to emergency responders from across Scotland.

More generally, in May 2022 the Scottish Government also announced the launch of Mind to Mind, Scotland’s mental wellbeing website. Mind to Mind uses advice from people with lived experience of mental health challenges to highlight the practical things people from all walks of life

can do to help them improve their mental wellbeing and resilience. The campaign focuses on five themes: anxiety and panic, sleep, stress, grief and loss and low mood.

### **Suicide Prevention**

The petition also references attempted suicides within the workforce.

Suicide prevention is a key priority for this Government. In August 2018, we published the Suicide Prevention Action Plan "[Every Life Matters](#)" and set up a National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group (NSPLG) - to harness the expertise, insight and contributions from Scotland's key suicide prevention partners, academic community, public sector organisations, clinicians - and most importantly people with lived experience.

Looking to the future, the Scottish Government and COSLA will publish a new Suicide Prevention Strategy in September 2022, accompanied by an initial Action Plan. This Strategy will build on the learning from the current Action Plan, and will be outcomes-focussed. The development of the strategy is being directed by the voices of people with lived experience as well as data and evidence of what works. The Scottish Government has also committed to doubling the annual funding for suicide prevention by the end of this Parliamentary term, from £1.4m per annum to £2.8m per annum.

### **Scottish Recovery Network and Peer support**

I commend the focus of the petition on peer support, and recognise the positive impact that this can have on the mental health and wellbeing of people across Scotland – both in the workplace, and beyond.

As part of the wider picture of promoting the concept of recovery from mental health problems, valuing lived experience and promoting peer support, the Scottish Government is responsible for funding and overseeing policy relating to the Scottish Recovery Network (SRN), an organisation that seeks to make mental health recovery a reality for everyone in Scotland. The work of SRN makes a valuable contribution to improving Scotland's mental health in promoting a positive messages on recovery and peer support across communities in Scotland. SRN has established a Peer Recovery Hub where people, communities and organisations seeking mental health support can connect with peer support as part of their recovery journey when and where they need it.

Through the peer recovery hub, people with lived experience have gained the skills and knowledge to positively impact outcomes for people experiencing mental health challenges. This initiative has also made learning and development opportunities available for Peer Supporters in different organisations across Scotland. SRN has developed the Peer2Peer Development Programme which brings together 12 organisations seeking to develop peer support opportunities and roles. The 12 organisations include small community groups as well as large national service providers. The Peer2Peer Development Programme offers individual support from the Scottish Recovery Network team and monthly sessions for participants to share experiences and learning.

In addition to the Peer2Peer Development Programme, SRN are working with a number of organisations to support them to adapt and deliver Peer2Peer for their particular needs. This includes ICU Steps who are developing a peer support project across Scotland.

### **Conclusion**

I hope that this summary of our ongoing work reassures the Committee that this Government is committed to promoting and supporting good mental health. This includes ongoing work in respect of good mental health and wellbeing in the workplace (both in our public sector and beyond), in terms of the steps we are taking to build our health and social care workforce and ensure their wellbeing, and in terms of how peer support can have a central role in the help available to anyone who needs it.

We want to see a mental health system which responds appropriately whenever anyone asks for help – whether that involves clinical services, support at work, peer support, or community support.

Embedded within this must be a focus on early intervention to ensure that issues do not escalate into mental ill-health wherever possible. Employers across Scotland have a central role to play in this, and peer support can be an invaluable tool.

I hope this reply is helpful to the Committee.

## Annexe D

### Petitioner submission of 14 September 2022

#### PE1942/B: Encourage peer support programmes in public sector organisations

Peer support is an important component in the future of mental health prevention and recovery. **We all know the phrases “a problem shared is a problem halved” or “it’s good to talk”**. When we are in a difficult situation, we lose our problem-solving abilities. Social and emotional support are vital to manage wellbeing.

**TRIM** is a peer support system that enables practitioners to assess their colleagues for symptoms of psychological distress following critical incidents and signpost for early intervention.

**STRAW** sits alongside TRIM and is about the **detection of workplace stress**, spotting the signs of psychological distress that might otherwise go unnoticed. This can promote resilience, keep staff at work and reduce harm.

In June 2018, **the Williams Review** into Gross Negligence Manslaughter in Healthcare stated: *‘A **just culture** considers wider systemic issues where things go wrong, enabling professionals and those operating within the system to learn without fear of retribution’*.

In order to change public sector culture from shame and blame to a “just culture” **TRIM and STRAW practitioners** would need to be available on every ward, department, and office within public organisations. TRIM and STRAW do not interfere with any legal or internal investigations and supports individuals’ mental health resiliency during these processes.

Cognitive psychologists working at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia, have published research and information on “Just Cultures”. Their research suggests that many public sector organizations understand and acknowledge the value of creating a “just culture”, but struggle when it comes to developing it. How should they and their managers respond to incidents, errors and failures that happen? There is nothing in place in many public sector organisations to ensure employees resilience is maximised during and after critical incidents,

including bullying. Often employee's mental health has broken down and they are referred to HR or occupational Health.

As the former lead trauma therapist of NHS Highland occupational health department, I have first-hand experience of seeing that many of the mental health problems and traumas were avoidable as they were caused by human factors. (The breakdown of interpersonal relationships). Deterioration in mental health not only effects the Individual but their family. There are also significant costs to the organisation such as investigations, staff sickness and staff cover.

One cognitive psychologist highlights that doing the 'right thing' really depends on one's viewpoint, and that there is not one 'true story' but several. This naturally leads into the key issue of how justice is established inside organizations and the practical efforts needed to sustain it. This psychologist also reflects upon why we tend to blame individual people for systemic failures when in fact we bear collective responsibility.

The **STRAW** package has been developed by leading mental health professionals, including an occupational, academic and forensic psychiatrist. Unlike many other psychological first aid packages, STRAW is based on up-to-date scientific research, including the growing evidence base around peer support.

STRAW not only focuses specifically on mental health conditions and issues that are likely to affect the working population but is also unique in being designed as a comprehensive peer support system for use within high pressure organisations. STRAW aims not only to educate/inform but also enables those involved to take action in order to bolster resilience.

We propose that current arrangements are not sufficient. We need a safe, accountable system of support which maintains humanity and compassion. This system would need to be linked into policy to ensure accountability, early detection, and timely interventions to keep people well and at work.

Whilst interpersonal factors may cause the problems it is interpersonal relationships such as peer support that build resilience (as suggested by [Harvard research](#)).

With that in mind, I recommend to the Members of the Public Petitions Committee to seek the views of the Scottish Government and its

associated public agencies on their consideration for introducing TRIM and STRAW into public sector workplaces.