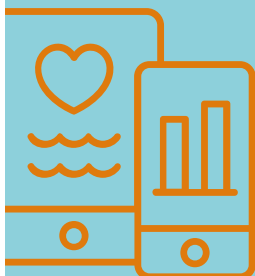
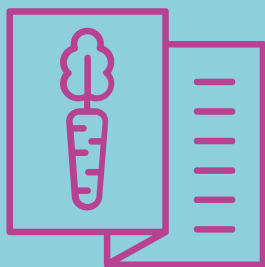


# HEALTH ON THE SHELF

Health and Wellbeing in Public Libraries in Scotland



SLiC  
Scottish Library &  
Information Council

# INTRODUCTION



This summary has been produced as a short appendage to the research report, 'Health on the Shelf: Health and Wellbeing in Public Libraries in Scotland'.

It has been designed to provide an overview of the main areas of content and to act as a quick reference guide for librarians and library staff at public libraries.

In this summary, we have included the following sections from the full research report:

- Executive summary
- A to Z of health and wellbeing services in libraries
- Recommendations
- Conclusion
- Glossary of terms

For further reading, including research results, case studies and appendices, please see the full research report, which can be found on the SLIC website at [www.scottishlibraries.org](http://www.scottishlibraries.org)

The [full report](#) includes:

- Executive summary
- Introduction
- Scottish context

- Health and wellbeing services in libraries
- Views of the public and marketing of services
- Evidence of impact
- Libraries as trusted community spaces
- Health (information) literacy
- Financial benefits from library use
- Service design and delivery
- Universal health offers in libraries
- Best practice and scaling up
- Recommendations
- Conclusions
- Appendices  
(survey of library managers; interviews with stakeholder organisations; population survey; baseline picture of health and wellbeing services in public libraries in Scotland – summer/autumn 2019)

This research was undertaken by Dr Alyson Tyler, independent researcher [www.alysontyler-research.uk](http://www.alysontyler-research.uk)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Public libraries provide a population-scale platform for population-scale public health issues. With 50% of people in Scotland using public libraries, they provide substantial reach through their core services, such as books and computers, as well as through tailored health and wellbeing services. Their impact on people's wellbeing, mental health, social isolation or feelings of loneliness means they play an important part in contributing towards improving the health and wellbeing of the Scottish population.

This research report investigates the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries in Scotland and uncovers the large scale of services and activities that are available. Many schemes have been developed in partnership between libraries and health services, although there is scope to create stronger links particularly in some regions. Availability of specific initiatives varies locally but a common definition of the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries encapsulates the broad approach:

*Libraries and library staff contribute towards improving people's health and wellbeing through provision of health-related information in a range of formats; signposting people to other relevant information and organisations; providing health-related activities, services and groups based at the library; and by helping people with their (digital) health information literacy skills so that they have the confidence to find appropriate information for themselves, all within a trusted and welcoming community space with friendly knowledgeable staff.*

The health and wellbeing offer from public libraries complements medical provision and is part of the whole system approach to health and wellbeing, having a particular beneficial impact on people's feelings of wellbeing, confidence and ability to self-manage. Published literature and research undertaken as part of this study highlights:

- the incredible range of the library health and wellbeing offer;
- the contribution such services make towards mental health, loneliness, social isolation, cancer and dementia in particular;
- the personal wellbeing benefits for participants, which are often immeasurable;
- the contribution towards improved health literacy, particularly digital skills;
- the importance of the library space and social interactions with staff and others in the library; and
- the financial savings for NHS Scotland as a result of people using libraries and having better health outcomes.

People's health and wellbeing is affected by a range of factors, and improvements may result from a number of different interventions and actions. Libraries contribute to this multiple-system environment and *"[a] considerable – and growing – body of rich and compelling evidence already exists, in the UK and internationally"* which shows the impact the arts (including literature and libraries) have on health and wellbeing, particularly in terms of prevention, recovery, and self-management of long-term conditions.

The contribution libraries make is noted in current Scottish policy documents such as Making it Easier and A Connected Scotland. New strategic partnerships are also being established which will strengthen the work in this area, such as the collaborative strategic action plan, A Collective Force for Health & Wellbeing, launched in autumn 2019. Although capacity is an issue for library and health services, joint working can bring greater impact and effectiveness, particularly if additional resources are made available. The research found that 47% of people surveyed would be interested in health and wellbeing services from public libraries – let's capitalise on that.

This report outlines a number of recommendations for appropriate stakeholders which could help bring greater benefits to the people of Scotland. These include improved promotion of the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries, a stronger evidence base particularly around evaluation and impact, and improved collaboration built upon stronger local, regional and national connections and partnerships. It is hoped this report will also contribute towards greater awareness of the value and diversity of the health and wellbeing offer from libraries and will be relevant to a wide range of people, including health care professionals, policy holders and library staff.

## A TO Z OF HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES IN LIBRARIES

What does this broad definition look like in public libraries? Evidence gathered from a survey of Scotland's public library service managers and their websites indicates that the health and wellbeing offer from public libraries is incredibly extensive: it is a cornucopia of activities, resources and groups, as can be seen in the A-Z list below. Some of these may be universal, others may only be available in one or two branches. Many are small-scale and low intensity-interventions.

**A**

**AUTISM** friendly – spaces, staff, activities

**B**

**BIBLIOTHERAPY** (therapeutic reading)

**BOARDGAME** sessions/groups (for socialising and brain training)

**BOOKS** on prescription (formal or informal recommended healthy reading lists)

**C**

**CARERS'** collection / carer's support group

**CHATTY CAFES** or similar, e.g. 'Blether bench', 'Book blether' group

**COLOURING** groups (for mindfulness)

**D**

**DEMENTIA** friendly – spaces, staff, activities and resources

**E**

**E-BOOKS** on health and wellbeing topics

**F**

**FERRULES** for walking sticks

**FESTIVAL** – week or longer on health and wellbeing

**FILM CLUBS** for dementia, autism, or families

**FOOD** and nutrition information

**G**

**GUIDES** and leaflets on health topics

**H**

**HEALTH** literacy skills

**HEARING** aid batteries and repairs

**I**

**INFORMATION** on healthy behaviours (exercise, diet, smoking, drinking etc.)

**J**

**JIGSAW** clubs (for social inclusion and brain training)

**JOINT** working

**K**

**KNIT** & natter groups

**L**

**LITERACY** skills (digital, health, reading)

**M**

**MACMILLAN** Cancer Information and Support services

**MAKE** Every Opportunity Count conversations

**MEMORY** bags/boxes

**MENOPAUSE** groups

**MENTAL** health activities and groups

**MINDFULNESS** activities

**MUSIC** for dementia (Playlist for Life)

**N**

**NEW** things to try

**NHS** Scotland links and partnerships

**O**

**OLDER** people groups

**P**

**PERIOD** products (free)

**PROMOTIONS** based around health awareness days/weeks, e.g. Stress Awareness Week

**PUBLIC** health promotion activities, e.g. blood pressure tests, health checks

**Q**

**QUIET** place to relax or study

**R**

**READING** groups with health or social focus

**REMINISCENCE** groups, activities and resources

**S**

**SIGNPOSTING**

**SING-ALONG** sessions (children and older adult groups, often with refreshments)

**SMOKING** cessation groups

**SPACE** for hire by local health groups/organisations/charities

**SPECIALIST** software, e.g. Boardmaker

**T**

**TAI CHI**

**TEEN** café

**THERAPETS**

**TRAINING**, e.g. digital skills

**U**

**UNIVERSAL** – open to all

**V**

**VOLUNTEER** opportunities

**W**

**WALKING** groups (including walk & talk book groups)

**WELLBEING** collections

**WOMEN'S** health group

**X**

**EXERCISE** and fitness classes/activities

**Y**

**YOGA**, including chair and baby yoga

**Z**

**ZONES** for health and wellbeing  
Most of these activities and groups are delivered by library staff within

# RECOMMENDATIONS



The recommendations below are a mixture of short, medium and longer term options, including some practical actions for library services as well as strategic discussion areas for relevant stakeholders. Capacity issues in library and health services may limit what can be achieved from this list of suggestions and it may be necessary to prioritise what could be taken forward or to rule out suggestions that are not felt to be the best use of resources. The new partnership behind [A Collective Force](#) may be an appropriate place for initial discussions.

**Recommendation 1:** Library services to include links to ALISS and NHS Inform/Scotland's Service Directory on their websites and to include their relevant health events in the ALISS directory.

**Recommendation 2:** If the HGIOP framework is reviewed in the future, consideration could be given to expanding the indicator relating to health and wellbeing.

**Recommendation 3:** SLIC and APLS could discuss the value of collecting a standardised dataset of some health and wellbeing information and evidence.

**Recommendation 4:** The public library services which currently do not offer the free Access to Research service to be encouraged to sign up and list it on their website to improve access for the public to quality health research.

**Recommendation 5:** Library events and other information online should be up-to-date. Where possible, most library websites could include more information about the health and wellbeing services available.

**Recommendation 6:** Commissioned research found that most people use doctor, dentist and community health clinics to find health

and wellbeing information. There could be potential for a national 'advert' for TV screens in health clinic reception areas about health and wellbeing services from libraries, or local versions which could be more specific. Locally, library services could provide posters and leaflets about relevant health and wellbeing activities that are available in the library.

**Recommendation 7:** Connections could be strengthened to improve the awareness of people working in health and social care of the range of health and wellbeing services available in the public libraries. For example, social prescribing link professionals could signpost people to a number of the activities in the local library if they knew what was available.

**Recommendation 8:** Where local book prescription or recommended healthy reading schemes exist, a presentation and leaflets could be given to the local social prescribing link team. At a strategic level there could be general communication about the schemes and their benefits, in regional areas where such schemes exist.

**Recommendation 9:** Strategic partners such as Scottish Book Trust, Creative Scotland, Publishing Scotland, NHS Scotland and SLIC could consider the potential for developing a 'Quick Reads' style set of health books which would be more appropriate for people with lower literacy levels, along with digital and audio versions of these books.

**Recommendation 10:** SLIC and other partners to consider project funding to create a toolkit/resource/champions network for library services to support the introduction of creative bibliotherapy schemes in libraries as there are currently very few in operation.

**Recommendation 11:** Library services which have reminiscence boxes/memory bags could include the Playlist for Life music leaflets, particularly if music is featured during the reminiscence sessions, to introduce people to the idea of creating their own personal playlist. If the library also has a free digital music service it could offer sessions on creating a playlist using its free subscription.

**Recommendation 12:** SLIC and other partners to consider how the varied health and wellbeing activities could be evaluated and if there is scope to create a standardised set of evaluation guidelines for library staff.

**Recommendation 13:** Improve the online library health offer locally with more information about available activities and services, links to trusted health information, and investigate if there is a demand for some degree of social interaction online combining libraries and health and wellbeing services.

**Recommendation 14:** Where capacity exists, library services could create autism-friendly guides for each branch and make them available online, using the Renfrewshire documents as best practice.

**Recommendation 15:** Public (and academic) libraries could partner with health libraries in Scotland to support Health Literacy Week 2020 (in July) and Health Literacy Month 2020 (October).

**Recommendation 16:** Investigate the potential for partnership working between relevant organisations and community groups to identify people with poor health literacy and co-design a health literacy skills training programme with them and for them based in public libraries. A linked national project could look at the potential for a national searchable database which shows local/regional levels of health literacy.

**Recommendation 17:** Training and knowledge-sharing about co-production and how to implement it may be useful for library staff.

**Recommendation 18:** SLIC, APLS, COSLA, the ALLIANCE, NHS Scotland and the Scottish Government to consider options for a Scottish health and wellbeing offer from public libraries.

**Recommendation 19:** SLIC and APLS to consider if there are some key activities which might either lend themselves to being scaled up across Scotland or would be useful for each service to offer, and a toolkit developed with key steps for implementation, and possibly champions identified for each activity.

## CONCLUSION



**This research has found that the health and wellbeing offer in public libraries in Scotland is extensive and varied, and beneficial to those who engage with the activities. The wellbeing benefits brought about through reading and participating in health events in the library help contribute towards people feeling more confident about their health, and needing health services less, leading to savings for the health service. Many of the low-cost low-intensity activities delivered by libraries help people avoid reaching crisis point. Recognition of this contribution is growing and new strategic partnerships will hopefully strengthen this.**

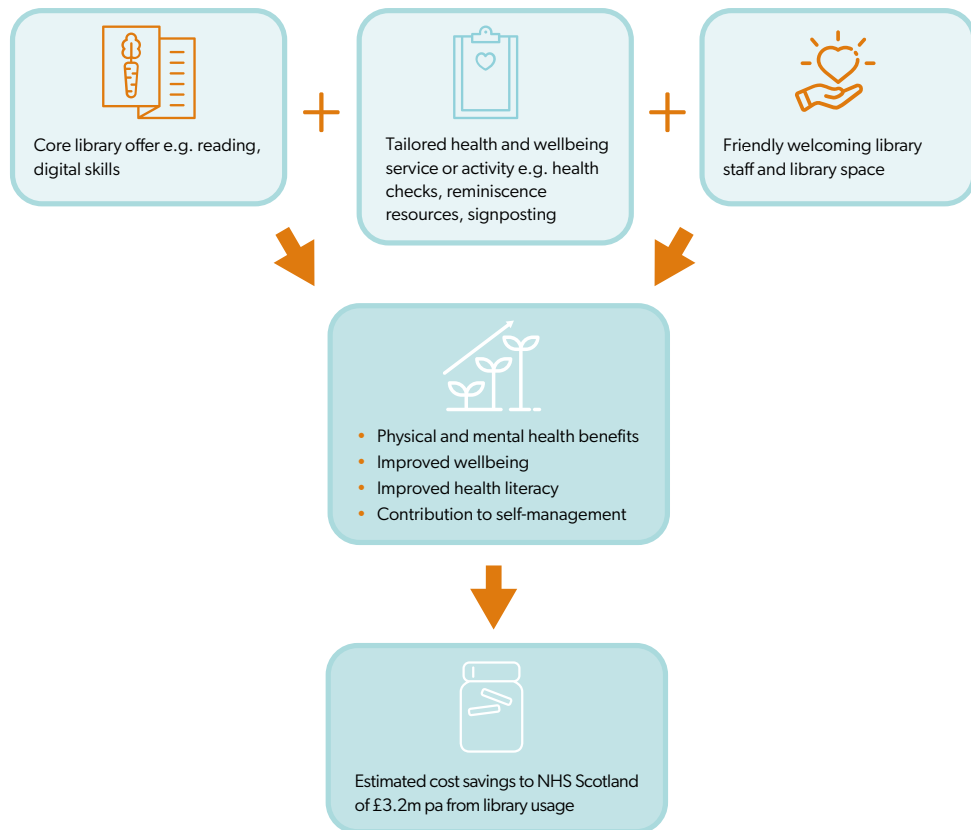
The key features of public library health and wellbeing services are:

- simple interventions which bring significant benefits
- beneficial impacts to people's mental and physical wellbeing

Another feature of the health and wellbeing offer in libraries is that it is relatively unknown. Both the public and health care professionals are often unaware of what's available in local libraries. Indeed, one stakeholder said that libraries contribute towards health and wellbeing 'by stealth'. This is an acknowledgement not only

- social engagement and interaction with others
- friendly, welcoming, inclusive, non-clinical local spaces
- friendly and supportive knowledgeable staff.

of the core services which have an impact (such as reading), but also that simple conversations with a caring member of the library staff may have significant impact on someone's wellbeing in a way that is rarely captured, measured or recognised. It also recognises that it is difficult for libraries to promote this contribution.



There is scope for library services to increase awareness of all that they do in this area so that more people can benefit, and so that health professionals are aware of what is available locally. There is also potential for library services to work with researchers and health professionals to gather appropriate evidence of the beneficial impacts of the library services on people’s health and wellbeing.

These developments, along with new strategic partnerships such as *A collective force for health and wellbeing*, will strengthen the role public libraries play in improving the wellbeing of people and communities in Scotland.

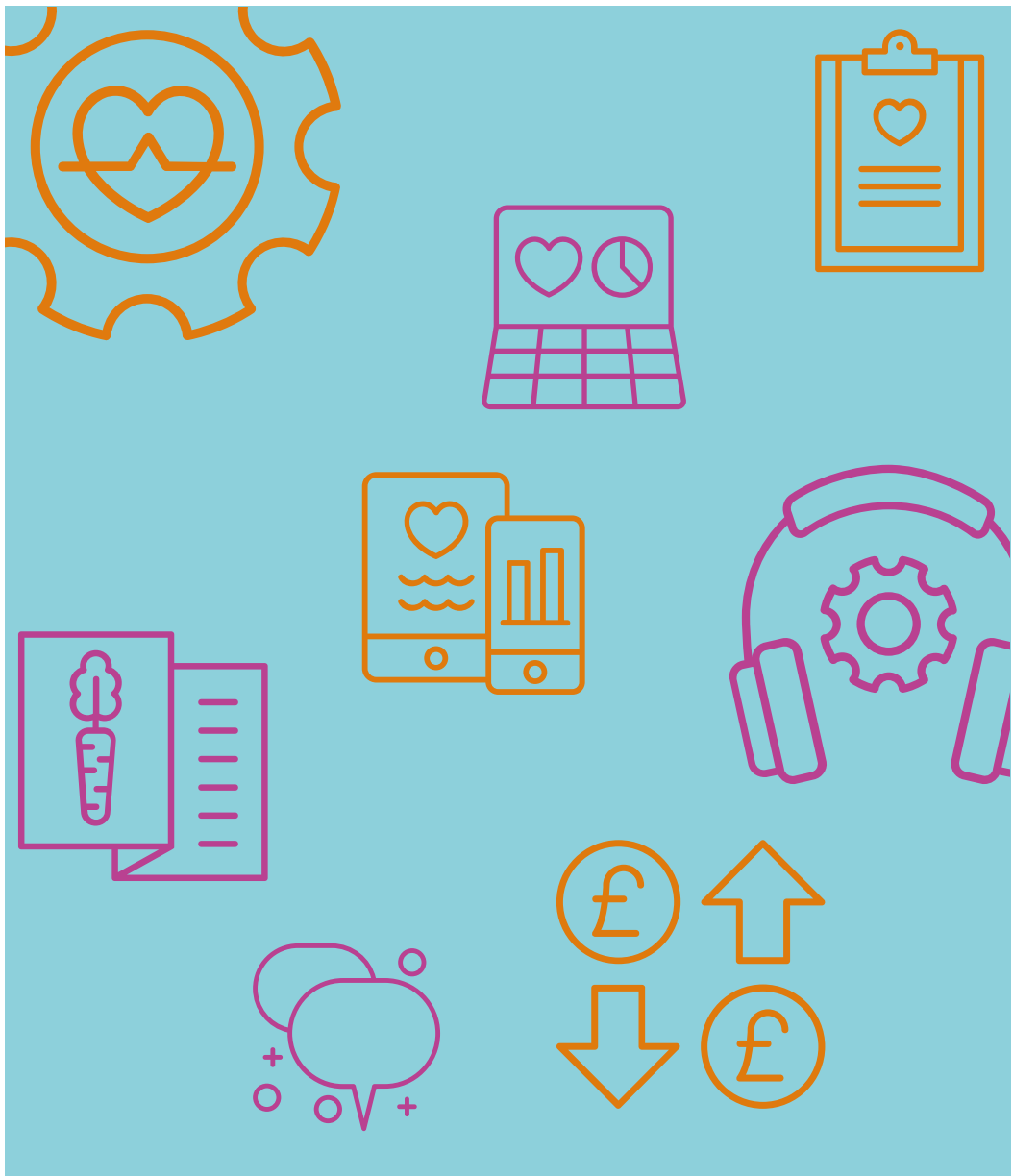
## GLOSSARY



|                |                                                                          |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>ALISS</b>   | A Local Information System for Scotland                                  |
| <b>APLS</b>    | The Association of Public Libraries Scotland                             |
| <b>APPG</b>    | All-Party Parliamentary Group                                            |
| <b>CILIP</b>   | Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals             |
| <b>CILIPS</b>  | Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in Scotland |
| <b>COSLA</b>   | Convention of Scottish Local Authorities                                 |
| <b>HGIOPLS</b> | How Good Is Our Public Library Service                                   |
| <b>HSCP</b>    | Health and Social Care Partnership                                       |
| <b>LOIPs</b>   | Local Outcome Improvement Plans                                          |
| <b>MLA</b>     | Museums Libraries & Archive Council                                      |
| <b>NICE</b>    | National Institute for Health and Care Excellence                        |
| <b>ONS</b>     | Office for National Statistics                                           |
| <b>SLIC</b>    | Scottish Library and Information Council                                 |
| <b>SSD</b>     | Scotland’s Service Directory                                             |







**SLiC** Scottish Library & Information Council

**Scottish Library and Information Council**  
Suite 5.5, Turnberry House,  
175 West George Street, Glasgow, G2 2LB

✉ [info@scottishlibraries.org](mailto:info@scottishlibraries.org)  
🌐 [www.scottishlibraries.org](http://www.scottishlibraries.org)  
☎ 0141 202 2999



Registered company number: 129889



09/20