

## **Voluntary Health Scotland – Stakeholder Survey**

### **Summary**

Voluntary Health Scotland (VHS) was set up in 2000 with the support of Scottish Government and NHS Health Scotland. Its purpose is to maximise the impact of the voluntary sector on health improvement and health care in Scotland.

VHS has 206 organisational and individual members, with further identifiable stakeholders numbering up to 730. Services provided by VHS focus on information retrieval, analysis and dissemination and include a website, news bulletins, policy analysis and development and research.

In 2009, Voluntary Health Scotland undertook a major survey of its members and stakeholders, to ascertain the uptake of and satisfaction with the range of services provided and to seek the views of stakeholders on the future direction of the organisation.

A short questionnaire was e-mailed or forwarded to up to 5,000 individuals and organisations across both voluntary and statutory sectors (cross-posting was assumed) and VHS received 402 responses, representing an 8% response rate.

Results showed that VHS has a generally effective reach and that there is good awareness of the VHS profile, with the website and e-news being effective means of communication. However, reach and awareness could be improved by more active marketing with statutory sector managers and with directors and policy officers within the voluntary sector. Awareness of VHS within the NHS is highest where there is statutory requirement to engage with the voluntary sector (public involvement, volunteering) and within the voluntary sector in health improvement areas.

Awareness and take-up of VHS services is higher within the voluntary sector than it is within the statutory sector, with the website, e-news, seminars and access to government policy making opportunities being the most valued services.

Most VHS services were rated as excellent or very good by at least half of those responding to this question, with e-news dissemination, access to policy making opportunities and research carried out by VHS being the most highly rated.

The voluntary sector indicated that improvements to existing VHS services should focus on further awareness-raising of VHS services across Scotland, particularly with the NHS; and on advocating for the interests of the independent voluntary sector.

Individual organisations which had sought help from VHS were largely satisfied with the help they received, although some dissatisfaction was expressed by local organisations seeking very specific help with capacity building and local engagement.

To complete the survey, VHS asked respondents what future developments its members and stakeholders would like to see the organisation pursuing. There was some divergence of views between the sectors. Although both voluntary and statutory organisations were keen to see VHS continue as a representative body for the voluntary health sector, the statutory sector expressed a preference for VHS to act as an information channel, offer a route for voluntary organisations to contribute to health policy making, support the development and capacity of the voluntary sector and play a key role in tackling health inequalities.

In contrast, the voluntary sector placed a high priority on VHS acting as a policy and research agency, advocating for the independent role of the voluntary sector as it addressed health inequalities and health improvement.

Some respondents took the view that VHS should act as supporter of small or local organisations within the voluntary sector. This might not be realistic within the current resources of VHS.

Finally, the Survey enabled VHS to identify ten actions which it would take to improve the reach of the organisation, refine and market its services and clarify with members and stakeholders across sectors where its strengths are best directed in future, as Scotland's key national voluntary sector intermediary body operating strategically in the arena of health.