

Integration Authority Chief Officers

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Health Board Chief Executives
Local Authority Chief Executives
Chairs of Health Boards
Chairs of Integration Joint Boards
COSLA
SOLACE
ADP Chairs
Mental Health Leads

Dear Integration Authority Chief Officer

Ensuring that people with co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions can access high quality care is central to both the National Drugs Mission and the new Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

Earlier this year, the previous Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy [set out how we will achieve](#) a joined-up healthcare system where people with co-occurring conditions get timely access to the help they need. Of course, we cannot do that alone – sustained change can only be achieved with the support of service users, practitioners, managers, and senior leaders.

We are setting out a plan to improve mental health and substance use services, working across disciplines to ensure that other initiatives and policy areas are aligned to support this work.

The plan has three broad objectives which are to 1) ensure mental health and substance use services know how they should work together; 2) empower the workforce to deliver high-quality care; and 3) embed clear lines of accountability so that we know services are delivering better care for people on the ground.

Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS) have been commissioned to produce an exemplar interface protocol which sets out how these services should work together. The interface protocol will build on existing protocols which are already in operation, but also help deliver the relevant MAT standards, and the recommendations from both our [rapid review](#) into mental health and substance use services, and those from the Mental Welfare Commission's report, [Ending the exclusion](#).

As we mentioned above, we want to work with you and support you to deliver better care. We will, therefore, be in touch with our engagement plan which will ensure that local areas and services can help shape the exemplar protocol.

Once this protocol is available, Scottish Government officials will meet with you to discuss your current status against the exemplar protocol and agree timelines for implementation. HIS will stay involved to support all local areas to adapt the protocol to their local circumstances and to implement it. They will do this by providing strategic change management support and sharing best practice.

One of the key elements of the plan is accountability. We would therefore like each IJB to nominate a senior leader who will be responsible for the delivery of this plan in your local area. This person should be able to oversee progress in both mental health and substance use services – this cannot sit with Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships. Please send details of the nominated person to mhsu@gov.scot by **17 November 2023**.

We look forward to working with you all to achieve our vision and deliver better care for people with co-occurring mental health and substance use conditions.



ELENA WHITHAM MSP
Minister for Drugs and Alcohol Policy



MAREE TODD MSP
Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport

Annex A – key timings

Task	Timings
Share engagement plan	Oct-23
Responsible person for all areas collated	Oct-23
Exemplar template protocol produced	Feb-24
Local areas test and implement the exemplar protocol	Feb-24 to Dec-24
Local areas learn from best practice and iterate the exemplar protocol	Oct-24 to Sep-25
All areas green for MAT standards 6 & 9	Apr-25
Mainstreaming of protocol and strategic planning supported by HIS	Sep-25 to Mar-26