

# Healthcare in Prison

Prisoners should have the same access to healthcare services as everyone else. This factsheet looks at what health services you can get if you are in prison and what to do if you are not getting the help you need.

 KEY POINTS

- You might go into prison because you have committed a crime and been sentenced for a crime, or because you are waiting for a court hearing ('on remand')
- If you have a mental illness or think you might have a mental illness, there are services that can help you while you are in prison.
- You have the same right to healthcare services as everyone else. Some prisons have a healthcare wing, like a hospital. You might go there if your health is very bad.
- If you are too unwell to stay in prison, you could be transferred to hospital for specialist care under the Mental Health Act 1983.
- Most prisons have 'Listeners'. You could talk to them if you need support.
- There are services that can help you if you have problems with drugs or alcohol.
- It is important that you get support when you are released from prison. The prison should help with this.

## **This factsheet covers:**

1. [How common is mental illness in prisons?](#)
2. [What happens when I go into prison for the first time?](#)
3. [What help can I get?](#)
4. [Does the Care Programme Approach \(CPA\) apply in prison?](#)
5. [What other support is there for mental illness?](#)
6. [Can I get support if I use drugs?](#)
7. [What can I do if I'm not getting the help that I need?](#)
8. [What happens when I am released from prison?](#)

### **1. How common is mental illness in prisons?**

A lot of people going into prison already have a mental illness. People's mental health can also get worse in prison.

A lot of people have a mental illness and use drugs or other substances. You may hear this being called 'dual diagnosis'.

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### **2. What happens when I go into prison for the first time?**

You will speak to someone at reception. They will ask you questions, including questions about your health. The prison staff might call this 'health screening'.

This is a good time to let them know about any health problems you have. This could include problems with physical health, mental health, alcohol, drugs or self-harm. Staff can ask a doctor to see you if they have concerns about you. The prison should give you the help you need as soon as possible.

You may have been getting care and support in the community, such as help with cooking, dressing and paying bills. The local authority where the prison is in is responsible for continuing this care.<sup>1</sup> Prison managers or the health service can contact a local authority to get information about your needs.<sup>2</sup>

Once you are settled in prison, you will have a full medical assessment. They may ask you how you are settling in and about your health in general. It is a good time for you to share any worries you have and ask for information.

After the assessment, staff will make a new medical record for you. They should try to get information from your doctor or other services that were helping you outside prison.<sup>3</sup> This helps to make sure that you get the right care in prison. The prison staff will normally only contact your doctor or other health professionals if you agree to this.

The prison can pass on your medical record to your new doctor if you are moved to another prison, hospital or if you are released from prison.

### **Medication**

Unfortunately, you cannot take medication into prison with you. You can tell staff about any medication you take when you first go into prison. You can take your medication to reception to show the staff exactly what you are taking.

The prison doctor can arrange a new prescription for you. You should get your new medication as soon as possible.

The healthcare staff will decide if you can keep your medication in your cell and take it yourself or if you need to be supervised. This will depend on the sort of medication you take and the type of illness you have.

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## **3. What help can I get?**

You should get the same healthcare as people outside prison.

### **What services are there for my physical health?**

Your prison will have a healthcare team. You should have access to a doctor, nurse, dentist and an optician.

Some prisons have healthcare or hospital wings. Prisoners who have bad physical or mental health can stay here if they are not well enough to be in the main part of the prison. However, most prisoners with health problems will stay on the standard wings.

If you have a more serious condition then the healthcare team might ask a specialist to come into the prison to help you. They could transfer you out of prison to see a specialist or to get treatment in hospital. You would have a prison escort, such as a prison officer, and stay in the custody of the Prison Service.

### **What services are there for mental health?**

#### Primary services

Primary services are for people who have less severe mental illnesses such as mild or moderate anxiety or depression.

You can ask to see a doctor at any time by making a 'general application'. You may need to fill in a form first.

The doctor may be able to arrange therapy or counselling for you. This is called a 'referral'.

## Secondary services

Secondary services are for people who have more severe or long term mental illnesses. Your doctor might arrange for you to get help from 'secondary services' if you have a diagnosis of severe depression, severe anxiety disorder, schizophrenia or bipolar disorder.

This could mean that you get help from a prison mental health team. These are often called 'in-reach teams'. This team is similar to a 'Community Mental Health Team' but it is just for prisoners. The role of the mental health in-reach team is to offer:<sup>4</sup>

- Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
- Help with stress and anxiety
- Help with self-harm
- Help with suicidal thoughts or feelings
- Medication
- Help with your symptoms
- Help to prevent you from becoming unwell ('relapse prevention')
- Help for your carers.

In most prisons, a psychiatrist will visit at least once a week. The psychiatrist can monitor your health and medication. The psychiatrist can assess you under the Mental Health Act 1983 if your mental illness is very bad and you might need to be in hospital.

## Other healthcare services

Your prison will have a 'Safer Custody Team' (SCT). The SCT help to manage self-harm and suicide in prison.<sup>5</sup> If staff think you are at risk of self-harm or suicide, you will get help under the 'ACCT' process. This stands for 'Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork'. Any member of prison staff who is worried about you might record their concerns on a form. The prison will then plan how they can keep you safe.

There are many reasons why someone may self-harm in prison. For some people it is a way to deal with anger and cope with being in prison. You can find more information about '**Self-harm – for prisoners**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Call 0121 522 7007 or write to us at the address at the end of this factsheet and ask us to send you a copy. You can ask staff, friend or relative to get this information for you too.

## **Can I be moved to hospital?**

It is important that you get the care you need while you are in prison. Sometimes, this may involve you being moved. A prison can support most prisoners with a mental illness.<sup>6</sup> If you are too unwell to be treated in prison, you can be moved to a hospital. This is sometimes called 'transfer to hospital' using the Mental Health Act 1983.

A psychiatrist will assess you to decide if this needs to happen. If you have been sentenced, you could be moved under section 47 of the Mental

Health Act 1983. If you get better in hospital, you could be transferred back to prison to serve the rest of your sentence.

If you are on remand, you could be transferred to hospital under section 48 of the Mental Health Act 1983.

You can find more information about '**Section 47**' and '**Section 48**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Call 0121 522 7007 or write to us at the address at the end of this factsheet and ask us to send you a copy. You can ask staff, friend or relative to get this information for you too.

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#### **4. Does the Care Programme Approach (CPA) apply in prison?**

You will be under the Care Programme Approach (CPA) if you see mental health services, such as Community Mental Health Team (CMHT).

If you are already on CPA when you go into prison, the prison should contact your care co-ordinator to talk about your care plan. This will help them to plan your care in prison. A member of prison staff may become your care coordinator.<sup>7</sup> Prison staff on your wing may manage your care plan. If you have a more severe mental illness, then prison staff and the mental health team might work together on your care plan. Drug workers can also be part of your care plan if you have problems with alcohol or drugs.

You can find more information about '**Care Programme Approach**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Call 0121 522 7007 or write to us at the address at the end of this factsheet and ask us to send you a copy. You can ask staff, friend or relative to get this information for you too.

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#### **5. What other support is there for mental illness?**

Health services are not the only option if you want support. Prisons often have 'peer support schemes'. This means that you could talk to another prisoner about problems you are having and how you feel.

##### **Listeners**

The Samaritans train some prisoners as 'Listeners'. This means that they can give you emotional support. They cannot offer you counselling but they can provide a 'listening ear'. It is completely confidential and so they would not normally tell anyone about what you say. Listeners are expected to follow the same rules as other Samaritans volunteers.<sup>8</sup> They wear special t-shirts so they are easy to spot. Or ask staff if you would like to see a Listener.

## **Insiders**

Some prisoners train as 'Insiders'. They give basic information and support to new prisoners. The first few days in prison can be very difficult and Insiders can help you feel better.

## **Samaritans**

Samaritans give confidential emotional support and can listen to your problems and worries. You can phone their helpline from prison for free 24 hours a day or you can ask them to visit you.

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## **6. Can I get support if I use drugs?**

In every prison there is a team that helps people with drug and alcohol issues (known as substance misuse). They are often known as the 'CARAT' team. This stands for 'Counselling, Assessment, Referral and Throughcare'. They give information, one-to-one counselling and group work if you want to stop using drugs. They can involve other services for more support if you need it.

If you have a mental illness and also have problems with using drugs or too much alcohol, doctors call this 'dual diagnosis'. Some prisons have specialist dual diagnosis teams. However, not all prisons do. If there is no dual diagnosis team, the mental health team and the substance misuse team should work together to help you if you have dual diagnosis.<sup>9</sup> You may also be able to get help from specialist teams that are not based in the prison. Workers will be allowed in to see you if you need this.

## **Drug withdrawal and replacement**

### 'Opiates' – heroin, morphine

If you are addicted to drugs like heroin and morphine then you should be stabilised for at least two weeks when you go into prison.<sup>10</sup> This means that you could be given a replacement drug such as methadone or buprenorphine. The prison may reduce the dosage of the replacement drug over a number of days, but this should not be rushed.<sup>11</sup> If you have serious mental health problems, your doctors may decide to use a replacement drug for longer.<sup>12</sup>

### Benzodiazepines – diazepam, lorazepam

If you are addicted to benzodiazepines, such as diazepam (Valium) and lorazepam, the prison will normally give you these for at least two weeks to make sure that your health is stable. They will reduce the dosage of the drug over time.

### Alcohol

The healthcare team and CARAT workers should offer you support if you drink too much alcohol. They may offer you therapy. They will not normally give you drugs unless you have severe withdrawal symptoms. If you have

agreed a plan to stop using alcohol, you may be offered certain drugs to help you stay alcohol-free.<sup>13</sup>

### Stimulants – crack, cocaine, mephedrone

If you are addicted to a stimulant like crack, cocaine or mephedrone then you may feel very depressed for weeks or even months when you stop taking it. Make sure you tell someone if you are feeling down. You might find it helpful to speak to a doctor or a Listener.

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## **7. What can I do if I'm not getting the help that I need?**

First of all, try to speak to someone in healthcare about your situation. You can see what help they can offer or tell them if you are not happy with the care you are getting.

You might be able to get help from an advocate if you find it difficult to get your problems across to staff. Advocates are independent people from charities or the local authority who can help you to get your opinions across. Some advocacy services help people in prison.

If you still have problems, you could make a complaint. You can find more information on [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) about:

- **Complaints about prison**
- **Complaining: NHS and Social Services**
- **Advocacy**

Call 0121 522 7007 or write to us at the address at the end of this factsheet and ask us to send you a copy. You can ask staff, friend or relative to get this information for you too.

If you are a relative or friend of someone in prison and you have concerns about their health, you can contact the prison by phone or letter to explain your concerns. The best person to contact would be the Healthcare Manager or the Governor.

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## **8. What happens when I am released from prison?**

It is important that you get support when you are released from prison. Prison staff should help you register with a doctor in the area that you will be living if you aren't registered already. Some prisons will put you in touch with community mental health services, and other services such as housing or drug organisations. They may ask you for your permission to do this.<sup>14</sup>

### **What if I am on CPA?**

If you are on CPA, the services you see should all come together to plan your care. This should look at all of your needs. For example, your mental

and physical health, if you need help with daily living such as cooking and dressing, housing, money, education and finding a job.

If you have been in hospital under certain sections of the Mental Health Act 1983 then you might be able to get 'section 117' aftercare. This means that you could get some support, such as with housing, for free.

You can find more information about '**Section 117 Aftercare**' at [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org). Call 0121 522 7007 or write to us at the address at the end of this factsheet and ask us to send you a copy. You can ask staff, friend or relative to get this information for you too.

### **Which local authority will support me?**

Generally, the local authority (council) where you are 'ordinarily resident' will be responsible for your housing and social care needs. 'Ordinarily resident' means where you normally live. If you don't always live in the same place, it is not always easy to work this out.

When you are released, services will assume that you are 'ordinarily resident' in the area where you lived before you went into prison. However, you might not go back to this area.

If you are going to live in a new area, this local authority should try and assess you before you are released from prison. If this is not possible, the new local authority should continue to meet your needs until they can do their own assessment. Prison managers and healthcare providers can ask the local authority to assess you, or you can do this yourself.

If it is not clear which local authority should assess you, the local authority for the area that you plan to move to should do this.<sup>15</sup>

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You can find more information on [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) about:

- **Advocacy**
- **Care Programme Approach (CPA)**
- **Complaints about Prison**
- **Complaints: NHS and Social Services**
- **Prison - Going in**
- **Prison - What happens while I am in prison**
- **Prison – Planning for release**
- **Dual Diagnosis**
- **Section 117 Aftercare**

Call 0121 522 7007 or write to us at the address at the end of this factsheet and ask us to send you a copy. You can ask staff, friend or relative to get this information for you too.





USEFUL  
CONTACTS

### POhWER

POhWER deliver advocacy in some prisons. If you have an NHS complaint, they might be able to help.

**Telephone:** 0300 456 4214

**Address:** PO Box 14043, Birmingham, B6 9BL

**Email:** [pohwer@pohwer.net](mailto:pohwer@pohwer.net)

**Website:** [www.pohwer.net](http://www.pohwer.net)

### Rehabilitation of Addicted Prisoners Trust (RAPt)

RAPt provides a drug programmes in a number of prisons and in the community. They also help with alcohol dependence. These treatment programmes offer advice, counselling, group work and can work with prisoners' families.

**Telephone:** 020 3752 5560

**Address:** The Foundry, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, 17 Oval Way, London, SE11 5RR

**Email:** [info@rapt.org.uk](mailto:info@rapt.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.rapt.org.uk](http://www.rapt.org.uk)

### SEAP

SEAP deliver advocacy in some prisons.

**Telephone:** 0330 440 9000

**Address:** Upper Ground Floor, Aquila House, Breeds Place, Hastings, East Sussex, TN34 3UY

**Email:** [info@seap.org.uk](mailto:info@seap.org.uk)

**Website:** [www.seap.org.uk](http://www.seap.org.uk)



REFERENCES

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health, *Care and Support Statutory Guidance Issues under the Care Act 2014*. Para 17.22

<sup>2</sup> As note 3, para 17.23

<sup>3</sup> HM Prison Service (2006). Prison service order 3050 continuity of healthcare for prisoners

<sup>4</sup> Department of Health (2005) Offender Mental Health Care Pathway

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Justice (2012). Management of prisoners at risk of harm to self, to others and from others (Safer Custody) PSI 64/2011 at pg 9

<sup>6</sup> Senior J, Shaw J. Mental healthcare in prisons. In: Soothill K, Rogers P, Dolan M (eds.) *Handbook of forensic mental health*. Devon: Wilan Publishing; 2008. p175-195.

<sup>7</sup> As note 2, at pg 8

<sup>8</sup> Samaritans. *The listener scheme*. Available from <http://www.samaritans.org/your-community/our-work-prisons/listener-scheme> (accessed 5th October 2015).

<sup>9</sup> This is well established guidance and is raised in 'The Bradley Report' Department of Health (COI) (2009) as well as the 'Guide to the Management of Dual Diagnosis in Prisons', Department of Health (2009)

<sup>10</sup> As note 2, at pg 14

<sup>11</sup> As note 2, at pg 21

<sup>12</sup> As note 2, at pgs 14-15

<sup>13</sup> 'Alcohol dependence and harmful alcohol use' NICE clinical guideline CG115, Feb 2011

<sup>14</sup> As note 5, at pg 15

<sup>15</sup> As note 3, para 17.57.

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## Rethink Mental Illness Advice Service

Phone 0300 5000 927

Monday to Friday, 9:30am to 4pm  
(excluding bank holidays)

Email [advice@rethink.org](mailto:advice@rethink.org)

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### Did this help?

We'd love to know if this information helped you.

Drop us a line at: [feedback@rethink.org](mailto:feedback@rethink.org)

or write to us at Rethink Mental Illness:

RAIS  
PO Box 17106  
Birmingham B9 9LL

or call us on 0300 5000 927.

We're open 9:30am to 4pm  
Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays)



Leading the way to a better quality of life for everyone affected by severe mental illness.

For further information on Rethink Mental Illness  
Phone 0121 522 7007  
Email [info@rethink.org](mailto:info@rethink.org)

 [facebook.com/rethinkcharity](https://www.facebook.com/rethinkcharity)

 [twitter.com/rethink\\_](https://twitter.com/rethink_)

 [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

### Need more help?

Go to [www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org) for information on symptoms, treatments, money and benefits and your rights.

### Don't have access to the web?

Call us on 0121 522 7007. We are open Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and we will send you the information you need in the post.

### Need to talk to an adviser?

If you need practical advice, call us on 0300 5000 927 between 9:30am to 4pm, Monday to Friday. Our specialist advisers can help you with queries like how to apply for benefits, get access to care or make a complaint.

### Can you help us to keep going?

We can only help people because of donations from people like you. If you can donate please go to [www.rethink.org/donate](http://www.rethink.org/donate) or call 0121 522 7007 to make a gift. We are very grateful for all our donors' generous support.

