

HIGHLAND USERS GROUP.

RESPONSE TO THE SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE CONSULTATION:

SMOKING IN PUBLIC PLACES.

WHAT IS THE HIGHLAND USERS GROUP (HUG)?

HUG is an organisation of people who have experienced mental illness. It has approximately 320 members across the Highland area and tries to speak out on their behalf as well as challenging stigma and increasing awareness about the lives of people with mental health problems.

A large number of people with a mental illness smoke and many of the facilities that they use provide smoking areas in acknowledgment of the importance that smoking plays in peoples lives.

It was for this reason that we asked our different groups what they thought of the proposed measures to reduce exposure to second hand smoke.

We have provided a response for each branch we consulted.

It should be noted that we carried out our consultation in facilities that provide for smokers. We are aware of a very small number of members of HUG who do not use such places purely because they are smoky and they do not wish to be exposed to this smoke. They had less of a chance to contribute to this consultation

This response can be seen as a response from Highland Users Group as a whole or as a response from each branch. In total 85 people participated in the meetings.

THE VIEWS OF OUR BRANCHES

CAITHNESS, THURSO BRANCH

Stopping passive smoking is very easy for those that don't smoke but very hard for those that do.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ No.
- ◆ That would be ridiculous we can't do this.
- ◆ It is very hard to change engrained habits.
- ◆ It would take away the choices that smokers can make.
- ◆ Smoking helps many people with mental health problems.
- ◆ The hub of conversation (in drop in centres) both for smokers and non smokers is in smoking areas.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ Yes.
- ◆ In places such as drop in centres there should be local decision making where managers staff and users agree together in whether to permit smoking or to ban it.
- ◆ Drop in centres and psychiatric hospitals should be exempt.
- ◆ There is a worry that some people wouldn't attend such services if they couldn't smoke there.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Better ventilation and grants to provide it.
- ◆ Invent a 'de-smokifier'.

CAITHNESS, WICK BRANCH

People who smoke are ostracised now and seen as scapegoats, however as smokers we do need to take responsibility for the effect we have on others.

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Yes.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ No.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ Yes.
- ◆ Mental health facilities.
- ◆ Many people with a mental illness smoke – it's a way of calming down and dealing with stress and occupying ourselves. Not being able to smoke in a drop in centre may harm some people and may stop some people from using such facilities.
- ◆ Some people are put off by the smoke but not to the extent that they don't want to use a drop in service.
- ◆ However we need to take some responsibility and segregated smoking and non smoking areas might be acceptable. Unfortunately one of the main benefits of a drop in centre is the company and socialisation. (As we want to be with each other, a separate non smoking room probably wouldn't be used. Alternatively a smoking room would be crowded and impractical.)
- ◆ In psychiatric hospitals there is a desperate need to keep smoking rooms. Not having them would be dangerous and people would just ignore the rules. A cigarette is often one of the only pleasures when in hospital.

What could businesses do?

- ◆ Provide separate smoking rooms and better ventilation.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

See above.

EAST SUTHERLAND BRANCH

Smoking gives pleasure to many people and helps many people with mental health problems it reduces stress and is vital, for some, when in crisis.

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Yes.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ No - we need smoking areas in most facilities.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ Yes, especially mental health facilities such as drop in centres and hospitals.
- ◆ Smoking is widespread in the mental health community – not being able to smoke could be very hard.
- ◆ Any facility where a person is there compulsorily should have provision to permit smoking.

What could businesses do?

- ◆ Provide smoking rooms
- ◆ Sponsor the use of patches

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Improved ventilation.

EAST ROSS BRANCH

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ No – it should be up to the people themselves although there should be separate smoking and non smoking areas.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ No.
- ◆ It's relaxing. It helps the conversation flow and reduces stress.
- ◆ There should be no smoking in places where food is being eaten.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ Everywhere should allow smoking except restaurants.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Provide smoking rooms and non smoking rooms so that we have a choice about our environment.

MID ROSS BRANCH

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ Some people need to relax with a cigarette as it “keeps them going” – having to go outside to have a cigarette would not be relaxing.
- ◆ Many people with a mental illness smoke. It is both calming and is rumoured to help with the side effects of medication.
- ◆ We need legislation that allows for the fact that people with mental health problems can be very vulnerable and that smoking helps them and yet we also need to acknowledge the need for smoke free places.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ Mental health facilities- as long as they have smoke free areas too. It is particularly important that psychiatric hospitals have smoking areas.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ There will be no solutions that will suit everyone. We need to accept that there is a need to provide smoke free areas and we need to recognise that those of us that smoke can adapt.

WEST ROSS BRANCH

Anti smoking policies seem to be going too far and seeing staff having to leave hospital grounds and gather around the gates to smoke seems silly.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ Yes

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ There should be no smoking in areas where food is served.
- ◆ Other facilities should have provision made for smokers.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Provide grants to improve ventilation.

INVERNESS

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Some people are strongly in favour of reducing second hand smoke and others have strong feelings in the opposite direction.
- ◆ Smokers need to be more aware and better educated about their actions. They need to take responsibility for what they are doing but shouldn't be forced into any particular direction.
- ◆ However there are groups of people who are vulnerable to second hand smoke and they need to have their rights respected too.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ Yes and no.
- ◆ Ideally the decision should be made by the individual.
- ◆ We need to balance freedom of choice with the damage this can cause and the need to respect the well being of those around us.
- ◆ We need to wake up to the harm tobacco causes and follow the lead from other countries. If they are genuinely successful then we need to learn from them.
- ◆ We should be wary of laws that may drive such activities underground.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

We veered towards agreeing to the idea that there shouldn't be exemptions, however:

- ◆ Some people with mental health problems may have a particular need to smoke when ill or in crisis. Not being able to smoke could be damaging.
- ◆ Maybe the exemptions should be aimed at those in crisis who have a real need for access to cigarettes.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ We need well-ventilated open environments accessible to those who smoke and away from non smokers. If we have to smoke outside then we need areas protected from the weather.
- ◆ Some of us thought that we should stop the sale of cigarettes altogether whilst others didn't like this idea at all.

NEW CRAIGS PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Yes.
- ◆ Everyone should have the option to be in a smoke free space.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

We couldn't decide. We thought both yes and no.

- ◆ Some of us hate being exposed to smoke.
- ◆ Restaurants should all be non smoking.
- ◆ Generally we need access to a choice of environment and measures to reduce smoke such as good ventilation.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

We couldn't decide but:

- ◆ There should be the provision of pleasant well ventilated smoking areas, although some people felt that if smoking areas were really unpleasant it might encourage us to give up.
- ◆ Psychiatric hospitals need to have smoking areas.

What could businesses do?

- ◆ Make sure there are designated smoking areas, or make all businesses non smoking.
- ◆ They could play a part in helping their employees to give up.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Put smokers at their ease.
- ◆ Deal with stress – if people were less stressed they would smoke less.
- ◆ Provide healthy stress breaks in work and in hospitals as alternatives or additions to smoke breaks at work.

NAIRN

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ We need access to smoke free areas but equally we need access to areas for smokers to smoke in.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ No – we need areas set aside for people to smoke in.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ Drop in centres and other mental health facilities.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ We need to be aware that people with mental health problems often need to smoke to keep calm or to calm down.

They help people feel occupied – people do need to stop smoking but only when they are ready to, not when other people decide they should. People also need help to stop smoking.

BADENOCH AND STRATHSPEY BRANCH

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Yes.
- ◆ It's got to come and ultimately would benefit us all. We should follow the example of Ireland. However we need to appreciate the plight of people who may be desperate for a calming cigarette and unable to have one.
- ◆ Ideally there should be smoking and non smoking rooms, though smoking outside shouldn't be too much of a hardship.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ Yes – we need to do something about smoke.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

We had mixed views.

- ◆ Just go for the ban but then how would it work in bars?
- ◆ If there was really good smoke extraction wouldn't that work?

- ◆ What about psychiatric hospitals? They need to have smoking spaces. A lot of people need cigarettes when in hospital. It is a stressful place and although it is healthy not to smoke it is also unhealthy when mentally ill to get too stressed.
- ◆ Overall the emphasis should be on respecting non smokers.
- ◆ We need to acknowledge that we can all adapt.
- ◆ What about locked wards where people have no choice about where they are? They should be able to smoke if they wish.

LOCHABER BRANCH

Having to go to non smoking areas is no problem.

In fact the presence of smoke free areas may help us to smoke less.

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Yes.
- ◆ However what is being done to reduce the abuse of alcohol which may be equally damaging?

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ Yes, but there need to be exemptions

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ We need to be able to continue to smoke in drop in centres and psychiatric hospitals. In drop in centres, if we are stressed and unwell, we need to be able to smoke (as long as there are non smoking areas too) and in a psychiatric hospital the first thing many of us want on admission is a cigarette.
- ◆ Ideally there would be really good ventilation in any place that permits smoking.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ It is really unpleasant seeing or being workers who have to smoke outside premises that are non smoking.
- ◆ There should be more non smoking healthy breaks for non smokers as well as smoke breaks.
- ◆ There should be more support to help us stop smoking.
- ◆ The taxes for smoking should go into the health service and especially into cancer research.
- ◆ Smoking areas will still need to be provided.
- ◆ We need to have pleasant, attractive, clean, modern, airy facilities to go to. This doesn't go with smoky buildings they are often unpleasant to enter even for smokers.
- ◆ We should consider stopping selling cigarettes.
- ◆ We need to invest more money into ways of stopping smoking.
- ◆ We need help to give up.
- ◆ Provide funding for better extractor fans.
- ◆ Make smoke rooms pleasant. Most are disgusting. Although on the other hand, if they are unpleasant it may encourage us to give up.
- ◆ We need to recognise the scale of the addiction that smoking represents.
- ◆ Increasing the cost of cigarettes just makes us look for cheaper tobacco.

SKYE AND LOCHALSH. BRANCH

Many people with mental health problems are more likely to smoke, it is a coping mechanism and almost a form of self help. However we need assistance to help us give up smoking.

Do we need further action to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ Yes.
- ◆ There is however a need to provide facilities for smokers.
- ◆ Children should always be protected from second hand smoke.

Would we support a law that would make enclosed public places smoke-free?

- ◆ Yes, as long as there are exemptions.

If a law was introduced, should there be any exemptions?

- ◆ Yes.
- ◆ Drop in centres. A main public area for smokers in drop in centres can be an attractive area but this may not be fair on non smokers. We need a balance on areas that foster communication, relaxation and socialisation which we find at present, but with a recognition that non smokers have an equal right to be catered for.
- ◆ A separate smoking room may be the solution but may mean that people miss out on the purpose of a drop in centre. If there have to be smoke rooms they should be attractive and clean and well ventilated.

What else could be done to reduce exposure to second hand smoke?

- ◆ As smokers we need to accept that we will have to adapt to some extent to the need to reduce smoke.
- ◆ There should be a ban on all cigarette advertising.
- ◆ We should also have fresh air breaks or healthy breaks for non smokers.

RESPONDEE INFORMATION FROM:

GRAHAM MORGAN
HIGHLAND USERS GROUP
HIGHLAND COMMUNITY CARE FORUM
HIGHLAND HOUSE
20 LONGMAN ROAD
INVERNESS
IV1 1RY

CONSULTATION TITLE – SMOKING IN PUBLIC PLACES

We are happy for our response to be made public in the Scottish Executive library or website.

