

SIAA Response

Socio-Economic Duty

4th September 2017

Introduction

1. In principle, we think that Socio-Economic Duty is a positive initiative but how it will be implemented and work in practice, remains very unclear.
2. We think that the Duty could be strengthened by having clear accessible definitions, examples (and case studies) of how it will work in practice and clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
3. We think that it is essential for the guidance and the plans of the Public Authorities to be informed by strong community engagement and public participation and partnership.
4. We would strongly recommend consulting on the draft guidance that will support the implementation of the Socio-Economic Duty.

Defining the key terms of the Duty

5. The definition of 'Socio-economic disadvantage' could be strengthened by drawing upon the relationship between the nature of socio-economic disadvantage and how that is experienced by the people it affects. This could be represented through the provision of case studies that could be used to convey the inequality aspect.

In addition, it is important to note that socio-economic disadvantage is not necessarily a fixed state, circumstances can change. As a result, we feel that public authorities should ensure that the actions taken should have a focus on preventing socio-economic disadvantage as well as tackling it.

We feel that the definition of socio-economic disadvantage should clearly reflect those individuals with mental health issues as research demonstrates a strong correlation between poverty, inequality and mental health issues.

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6. We believe that 'inequalities of outcome' could also be strengthened through the provision of case studies in order to convey a clearer picture of the inequalities faced and the underlying causes. It is important to note the impact that the plans undertaken by public authorities will have on the communities and to be mindful of the possibility that even the most positive interventions can further widen and exacerbate inequality. It is therefore vital that authorities collaborate with service users and the general public in order to gain lived experience and understanding on how to mitigate barriers and tackle the issues.
7. We believe that 'Decisions of a strategic nature' needs to incorporate a variety of examples of what this definition can look like. With such a variety of public authorities implementing the Duty, this definition can be interpreted differently by individual authorities. Providing examples would be useful in working to identify the range of issues faced by authorities, the strategies taken and the impact these have.
We believe that a Logic Model Approach would be a really useful approach in highlighting the nature of socio-economic disadvantage, the impact upon communities and positive strategic decisions. An interactive approach involving both community and logic modelling experts would be a positive collaboration to inform guidance and to undertake research into the relationship between socio-economic disadvantage, strategic decisions and any resulting inequalities of outcome that may arise.
8. We believe that 'Due Regard' is much too vague and open to interpretation. We believe that there needs to be examples provided of what this will look like in practice, and that it is vital for there to be a transparent, accessible plan taking into account communities that may have multiple socio-economic disadvantages. We also believe that it is not sufficient for public authorities to simply be 'mindful' of socio-economic inequalities, the Duty should be a statutory responsibility, held accountable through law.
In terms of transparency, we believe that a clear audit trail would be a positive method of reducing inequalities of outcome as well as a level of accountability and monitoring for public authorities.

Public Authorities

9. We believe that the Duty should apply to all special Health boards, not solely NHS Scotland. For all special Health Boards to be included would ensure a much larger impact on reducing health inequalities caused by socio-economic disadvantage, addressing mental health issues and producing valuable knowledge that could as a result contribute to strategic decisions and best practice.

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Meeting the requirements of the Duty

10. We believe that it is imperative that the community be involved in the development plans and that their insights and lived experiences of the culture, the strengths and the issues in the community that they are part of should be used to inform strategic decisions in a positive, supportive and empowering manner. Development should be led at the local level as much as is possible. A good example is 'Our Voice' that facilitates this for Health and Social Care services. Allowing people to contribute to decisions that affect them can have a significant effect on improving services and in turn reducing disadvantage and inequality – The Place Standard is an excellent example of this.
11. We believe that Collective Advocacy should be prioritised by NHS, LA and IJB in order to ensure that communities are supported throughout the process. Collective Advocacy would facilitate the sharing of expertise of people with direct experience of socio-economic disadvantage; enabling people to share their experiences, identify the main issues and barriers and develop positive strategies for a way forward.
12. We believe that monitoring and evaluation methods could consist of both quantitative and qualitative approaches as this would support a strategy that focuses on analysis of lived experiences as well as generating statistical data.
The use of external consultants in undertaking research could be beneficial in showing transparency and accountability. The setting up of an independent statutory body or commission with powers of scrutiny and accountability would also help to ensure that authorities meet the requirements of the duty.
13. We believe that an organisation such as Audit Scotland could assist public authorities in reporting so as to take better account of inequalities related to socio-economic disadvantage. As a result, public authorities would have to be transparent with funding amounts and sources enabling opportunities for improved budgetary analysis.
14. Training, cross-party working groups and roundtable discussions would all be useful tools in providing guidance and support for public authorities. The recent roundtable discussion that SIAA attended proved really useful in gaining insight and knowledge from organisations with extensive service user experience, obtaining information that could help to strengthen public services and shaping future research and training.
15. While the existing frameworks are helpful in contributing to future strategy, they will need to be updated and amended as appropriate in line with the communities and the protected groups that they may apply to.
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Links between Socio-Economic Duty and Other Duties

16. It is essential that an integrated approach is applied to the Duty. It is a responsibility that should be upheld and shared in all strategies, policies and legislation. An independent body or commission could help to facilitate collaboration between the duties and respective authorities.
17. We believe that independent advocacy presents an excellent example of taking an integrated approach to issues such as poverty, equality and human rights as it ensures that people know and understand their rights, people's voices are heard, their perspectives and wishes are considered and that they are supported to access the services they require, thus going some way to reducing disadvantage.
18. SIAA believes the socio-economic duty should use the PANEL principles¹ which have already informed and shaped a variety of strategies including the new Mental Health strategy and the updated Health and Social Care standards. This principles are also applied across sectors.

¹ <http://careaboutrights.scottishhumanrights.com/whatisahumanrightsbasedapproach.html>

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