Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA) – A Briefing

Context

Improving health and wellbeing and addressing inequalities is a significant focus within Welsh Government policy. This is influenced through legislation, supporting guidance and the use of tools such as Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and its relation Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment (MWIA). The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act (2015) has a focus on economic, environmental and social wellbeing and requires all Public Bodies to demonstrate how they will meet a range of common goals including a Healthier Wales and a more Equal Wales to improve wellbeing. Similarly, promoting the personal wellbeing of people using social care services and those who care for them is at the heart of the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (2014). This Act states a broad but specific definition of wellbeing, which includes physical, mental and emotional wellbeing, social relationships, control over day to day life as well as the social and economic wellbeing of individuals and communities.

These policy developments will require a range of statutory and non statutory organisations to develop an understanding of how their policies, plans and services impact on physical and mental wellbeing and how they measure and improve their impact on these in their broadest sense. This briefing paper focuses on mental wellbeing and how to strengthen and support a consideration of it as part of planning and delivering strategies, plans and services.

Introduction to Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment

MWIA is a useful tool for anyone who is looking for a systematic and evidence based approach to assessing, improving and measuring impact on mental wellbeing. MWIA is a useful tool for achieving the integration of mental wellbeing action and outcomes across systems and has significant potential in services and organisation undergoing change and redesign.

MWIA provides a structured framework for engaging service users, communities and partner organisations in identifying the specific impacts on mental wellbeing of developments, programmes, services, policies and organisations and creating an action plan to maximise positive impacts and minimise or mitigate potential negative impacts. The assessment framework in MWIA is based on the evidence on what we know promotes and protects mental wellbeing. The assessment is focused on four key protective factors:

- Enhancing a sense of control
- Building emotional resilience and community assets, including social relationships and networks
Facilitating participation and inclusion, including a sense of belonging, having a valued role, and practical support to participate.

Wider socio economic factors linked to mental wellbeing including income, employment, environment, housing, education, and tackling discrimination

These factors are associated with improved wellbeing and reducing health inequalities. MWIA also has a health equity perspective. The method considers which populations will be impacted on by a proposal, and has a focus on groups that are more at risk of mental health problems. This enables programmes to assess if they are reaching those most in need of beneficial actions and also ensuring that potential adverse effects on vulnerable group’s mental wellbeing are identified and prevented or mitigated.

The mental wellbeing checklist provides an overview of the criteria used in MWIA to make an assessment of impact.

Opportunities for MWIA

MWIA can be applied to any development or service where there is an opportunity to improve wellbeing, influence change, and a commitment to the process. MWIA has been applied to hundreds of programmes globally including:

- Health and social care services
- Community and third sector projects and services
- Arts and environmental projects
- Green space and public realm developments
- Libraries and education
- Workplaces
- Commissioning
- Health improvement programmes
- Housing and Regeneration

Benefits of the MWIA process include:

- Creating better responses to improving mental well-being
- Developing shared understandings of mental well-being with a range of stakeholders
- Ensuring policies, programmes and projects have a positive impact on mental well-being
- Actively engaging all partners in service development and fostering co-production of mental well-being
- Developing meaningful local wellbeing indicators.

(Cooke and Stansfield 2009).
The **MWIA: A Toolkit for Wellbeing** (Cooke et al. 2011) provides a complete guide to undertaking an MWIA including a literature review of the evidence of what factors promote and protect mental wellbeing by Dr Lynne Friedli. The methodology follows the structure of Health Impact Assessment:

1. Screening - an initial assessment
2. Scoping – planning the MWIA, agreeing the boundaries and focus of the assessment, selecting the evidence to be collected and stakeholders to be engaged.
3. Evidence gathering and Appraisal - identifying impacts. See diagram below for more details
4. Recommendations, action plan and report
5. Developing local indicators of mental wellbeing

**Evidence used in MWIA**

![Diagram](image)

**Background to MWIA**

MWIA was first developed with regeneration programmes in South East London in 2003 by South London and Maudsley NHS Trust and Inukshuk consultancy. The North West of England also carried out a significant programme of regional development work in MWIA at this time and a number of capacity building programmes have been carried out across the regions in England. The second edition of the MWIA Toolkit was developed and published by a National MWIA Collaborative (England) including the Local Government Improvement and Development Agency, New Economics Foundation, and University of Liverpool in 2011 and this was funded by the National Mental Health Development Unit/Department of Health in England.

The MWIA framework was developed based on a review of the evidence of what promotes and protects mental wellbeing by Dr Lynne Friedli and it draws on her report for the World Health Organisation on Mental Health, Resilience and Inequalities (Friedli, 2009).
The MWIA methodology has been developed and refined through work on hundreds of MWIAs in a wide range of settings. MWIA has also been integrated into a number of large scale programmes including:

- Liverpool Capital of Culture
- Well London community health programme funded by the Big Lottery
- Happier@work workplace wellbeing programme in Kings Health Partners, London

Internationally, the MWIA Toolkit has been translated into Spanish and is being used extensively in Chile, Australia and within Europe.

In Wales MWIA has been used to undertake an Equality Impact Assessment to inform the development of the North Wales Gender Identity Disorder Referral and Management Pathway.

The Welsh Government Together for Mental Health action plans aims to increase the number of impact assessments that include mental health and using MWIA can enable this to be achieved.

Next Steps

In 2015/16 WHIASU aims to carry out two MWIAs in partnership with organisations in Wales in order to develop case studies of MWIAs in a range of sectors in Wales. This will be complementary to WHIASU’s HIA work. If you are interested in this work, would like to book a briefing or short training session for your organisation or collaborate on an MWIA please contact:

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www.whiasu.wales.nhs.uk

References, case studies and further reading on MWIA


Cooke A and Snowden L (2010) Mental Wellbeing Impact Assessment: a way for people to contribute to decision making – web based article


Friedli F (2009) Mental Health, Resilience and Inequalities, WHO Europe

Local Government Improvement and Development (2010) The role of local government in promoting wellbeing

King S (2014) How effective is Mental Well-being Impact Assessment? An evaluation by the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations

A wide range of reports on completed MWIAs on a variety of topics and projects can be downloaded from the HIA Gateway www.hiagateway.org.uk

WHIASU

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