

Key Message

Recovery is possible when people receive compassionate, person-centred, and coordinated support. Understanding the impact of trauma and addressing interconnected needs can improve outcomes and help individuals build healthier, safer, and more stable lives.

Advice for Staff

Take a trauma-informed approach; build trust and relationships; listen without judgement; focus on strengths as well as needs; consider the whole person rather than a single issue; work collaboratively with partner agencies; avoid re-traumatisation by reducing repeated storytelling; and empower individuals to make informed choices.

How People Can Get Help

Support may be available through GPs, mental health services, adult social care, housing and homelessness services, domestic abuse services, substance misuse support, community organisations, and voluntary sector agencies. Effective support is usually coordinated across multiple services.

Understanding Multiple Disadvantage 7-Minute Briefing

Introduction

Multiple disadvantage refers to the experience of facing two or more serious and interconnected challenges at the same time, including domestic abuse, mental ill health, substance misuse, homelessness, poverty, offending behaviour, and social exclusion. These issues often overlap and reinforce one another, creating complex barriers that are difficult to overcome without coordinated support.

Who Is Affected?

Multiple disadvantage can affect anyone, but is more common among people who have experienced trauma, adverse childhood experiences, poverty, domestic abuse, mental health difficulties, homelessness, discrimination, or involvement with the criminal justice system.

Why It Becomes Complex

The challenges people experience are usually linked. For example, domestic abuse may lead to poor mental health, financial hardship, homelessness, and substance misuse. Each issue can make the others worse, trapping people in a cycle of disadvantage.

Impact on Individuals

People experiencing multiple disadvantage may face poor physical and mental health, social isolation, unemployment, debt, housing instability, exploitation, reduced confidence, and difficulty engaging with services.