

Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults

Guidance (Rounds 5 & 6, 1 March 2026 to 28 February 2028)

Introduction

The Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults was established in October 2021 and to date has invested £81 million to community initiatives supporting mental health and wellbeing across Scotland, just over £325,000 of which has supported projects and activities in Orkney. With a further £15 million committed next year as part of the Scottish Government's Fairer Funding Pilot, that takes the investment through the Fund to £96 million over six years.

This is the first time that the Communities Fund has been awarded on a multi-year basis. We have flexibility to award a mixture of one and two year grants to eligible projects. The expectation is that between 60 and 80% of the total Fund will be awarded to two year projects, leaving 20 to 40% available for one year projects in each of the next two years.

VAO has just over £73,000 to disburse in each of the next two years.

One year projects need to take place between 1 March 2026 and 28 February 2027.

Two year projects need to take place between 1 March 2026 and 28 February 2028.

The Fund will re-open in September 2026 for one year projects to be held between 1 March 2027 and 28 February 2028, when we expect approximately £14,500 to £29,000 to be available, depending on the amount allocated to two year projects.

The maximum grant level that organisations can apply for is £7,500 per year. So, if an organisation wants to apply for a two year grant then they can apply for a maximum of £7,500 in each year, with an overall maximum total of £15,000. A maximum of £5,000 each year can be requested towards capital items, therefore, a two year grant application can request £5,000 for capital items in year one and a further maximum of £5,000 for capital items in year two. There is no minimum level that organisations can apply for, and in previous rounds the smallest grants allocated have been around £400.

For further information and an application form please contact the Community Development Team at development@vaorkney.org.uk or phone 01856 872897.

Fund Aims

The overarching aim of the Fund is to support community-based initiatives that promote and develop good mental health and wellbeing and/or mitigate and protect against the impact of distress and mental ill health within the adult population, with a particular focus on:

- Tackling **mental health inequalities** through supporting a range of 'at risk' groups
- Addressing priority issues of **social isolation and loneliness, suicide prevention and poverty and inequality** with a particular emphasis on responding to the cost of living crisis and support to those facing socio-economic disadvantage
- Supporting **small 'grass roots' community groups** and organisations to deliver activities
- Providing **opportunities for people to connect** with each other, build trusted relationships and revitalise communities

At Risk Groups

Evidence shows that the Covid pandemic and the Cost of Living Crisis exacerbated existing mental health inequalities and had a disproportionate impact on the mental wellbeing of a range of groups in society. These 'at risk' groups are prioritised by the Fund and include:

- Women (particularly young women and women affected by gender-based violence)
- People with a long-term health condition or disability
- People from a Minority Ethnic background
- Refugees and those with no recourse to public funds
- People facing socio-economic disadvantage
- People experiencing severe and multiple disadvantage
- People with diagnosed mental illness
- People affected by psychological trauma (including adverse childhood experiences)
- People who have experienced bereavement or loss
- People disadvantaged by geographical location (particularly remote and rural areas)
- Older people (aged 50 and above)
- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) communities
- People with neurological conditions or learning disabilities and those from neurodiverse communities
- Young people aged 16-24

In addition, the Scottish Government has prioritised families most at risk of poverty:

- Lone parents
- Families with a disabled family member
- Families with 3+ children
- Minority ethnic families
- Families where the youngest children are under 1 year old
- Mothers aged less than 25

Local Priorities

Local priorities, in addition to those above, have been identified in collaboration with statutory and third sector partners and experts through experience as being:

- Reduction of Poverty
- Social Isolation and Loneliness
- Prevention of Suicide
- Support for Unpaid Carers
- Support for Older People

Local Outcomes

We are looking for projects to deliver at least one of the three local outcomes, to:

- Increase opportunities for people to engage with activities/services within their own local communities
- Increase opportunities for people to take part in activities that are purposeful and meaningful to them
- Increase opportunities to embrace and enable the conversation around suicide

Grant Awards

Applications for ONE YEAR funding Applications can be made for a maximum of £7,500 for projects taking place between 1 March 2026 and 28 February 2027. Applications can include requests for funding towards small capital items up to a maximum of £5,000. If you apply for capital items, this is included in the total grant amount of £7,500.

Applications for TWO YEAR funding Applications can be made for a maximum of £15,000 for projects taking place between 1 March 2026 and 28 February 2028. No more than £7,500 can be requested in each year. Applications can include requests for funding towards small capital items up to a maximum of £10,000, and no more than £5,000 in each year.

The deadline for applications is

5pm on Friday 12th December 2025.

One year projects must be completed by 28 February 2027.

Two year projects must be completed by 28 February 2028.

Eligibility

The ambition of this Fund is to support initiatives which promote adult mental health and wellbeing at a small scale, grass roots, community level. For the purposes of this Fund, the adult population is considered to be those 16 and over. It is accessible to all groups, no matter how small or inexperienced they are. It can support both new and existing groups or projects. Your group does not have to have mental health and wellbeing as your main focus, but your application does have to clearly benefit the mental wellbeing of people in your community.

Applicants must be members of VAO, with the exception of new groups who are not yet constituted. To find out more about becoming a member of VAO, please visit

<https://www.vaorkney.org.uk/who/become-a-member>

Applications can be accepted from a range of voluntary, 'not for profit' organisations, associations, groups and clubs or consortiums/partnerships which have a strong community focus for their activities, including:

- Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisations (SCIO)
- Unincorporated Associations
- Companies Limited by Guarantee
- Trusts
- Not-for-profit company or asset locked company or Community Interest Companies (CIC)
- Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies
- Community Councils
- Parent Councils*

*Please note that parent councils are eligible to apply subject to the following conditions:

1. The funded activities must meet the aims of the Fund and specifically must focus on supporting adults rather than their children
2. Any Parent Council applying to this Fund must have a statutory duty to keep proper accounts, for which there may already be legal and regulatory requirements for them to do so depending on

the status of the Parent Council, for example, some parent councils are registered with OSCR as a charity.

The Fund can also support an un-constituted group to become constituted, or a constituted entity (that meets criteria above) can hold a grant for an un-constituted group. VAO will have to be satisfied that appropriate arrangements have been put in place. Whilst the Fund can support the expansion of existing activities it is intended to provide additionality, not replacement funding.

UNCONCSTITUTED GROUPS ARE ONLY ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR ONE YEAR FUNDING.

Previously funded projects

Organisations that received funding from Rounds 1 to 4 of the Fund are welcome to apply to Rounds 5 and 6. If applying for the same project, however, applicants must be able to demonstrate evidence of early impact from the project.

In addition, if the application is for ongoing revenue or staff costs, applicants will need to include information about their exit strategy or proposals for future funding for this element of the grant requested.

Prevention and Early Intervention

Prevention and Early Intervention are the key themes of the Fund. We define prevention and early intervention as stopping mental health problems before they start and/or stopping existing mental health problems from worsening. We know that non-clinical interventions like building community, having structure, learning new skills or being in nature can improve mental health.

The Fund is aimed at projects that are primarily support and prevention focused within the community. The Fund is not aimed at projects that are primarily treatment focused and is not meant to replace funding for direct therapeutic interventions such as counselling or CBT. It aims to provide a range of broader community supports that can complement clinical care.

What we will and will not fund

We will fund	We cannot fund
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-off events• Hall hire• Small capital spend (e.g. equipment, up to £5,000)• Staff costs (one off or fixed term)• Training costs• Transport• Utilities / running costs• Volunteer expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contingency costs, loans, endowments or interest• Electricity generation and feed in tariff payment• Political or religious campaigning or activities• Profit-making / fundraising activities• VAT you can reclaim• Statutory activities• Overseas travel• Alcohol

Fair Work

Any organisation applying for a grant which either currently employs staff or will employ staff using the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund grant, must have a **Fair Work Action Plan** and be able to demonstrate their commitment to the Fair Work Agenda. The Fair Work Action Plan must be included with your application along with a copy of your constitution and most recent annual accounts. The Fair Work Action Plan must cover the following Scottish Government priorities:

- Effective voice
- Opportunities
- Security
- Fulfilment
- Respect

If you would like support to develop a Fair Work Action Plan to accompany your application, please contact the Community Development Team.

Payment of Grant

We aim to ensure that applicants will receive payment of their grants within two weeks of return to VAO of your signed grant offer letter. If you apply for a two year grant, the second year grant will be paid at the start of year two, following receipt of a year one project report.

If your application is on behalf of a partnership of organisations, a successful grant will be paid to the lead partner.

If you are a small group without a bank account do not let this put you off applying. Please get in touch to discuss how we can support you.

Help and Support

VAO will provide one to one advice, support and resources to help you develop your project/activity ideas and complete your application form.

We will also keep in close contact with you during the delivery phase of your project/activity and will support you with any concerns or difficulties you may face.

Please do not hesitate to contact the Community Development Team at development@vaorkney.org.uk or phone 01856 872897.

Reporting

At the end of the project the applicant will be required to report on the delivery of the project. We will seek the following information:

- What did you expect to do with the funding and what did you actually do against your original plan
- How many activities were planned?
- How many activities were undertaken?

- How many participants benefited?
- Who were the main beneficiaries?
- Please let us know of any achievements to date that you are particularly proud of, or that demonstrate the difference made to individuals
- Please tell us how you achieved each of your proposed outcomes
- What methods were used to gather evidence?
- Did you achieve your outcomes? What are the indicators that demonstrate success?
- What were the challenges? Did you encounter any problems that slowed the progress or stopped the outcomes from happening, or did you need to make any changes to the project in order to deliver against your outcomes?
- What did we need to change to make the project work
- Is there anything else you want to add?
- What was your final project budget?

Submitting your application

Please ensure that you complete the application form correctly, with support if required, and attach the required documents. Completed application forms should be submitted to:

development@vaorkney.org.uk or posted to Voluntary Action Orkney, 6 Bridge Street, Kirkwall, KW15 1HR marked CMHWF by **5pm on Friday 12th December 2025.**

