

Survey of COSCA Recognised Organisations October 2025



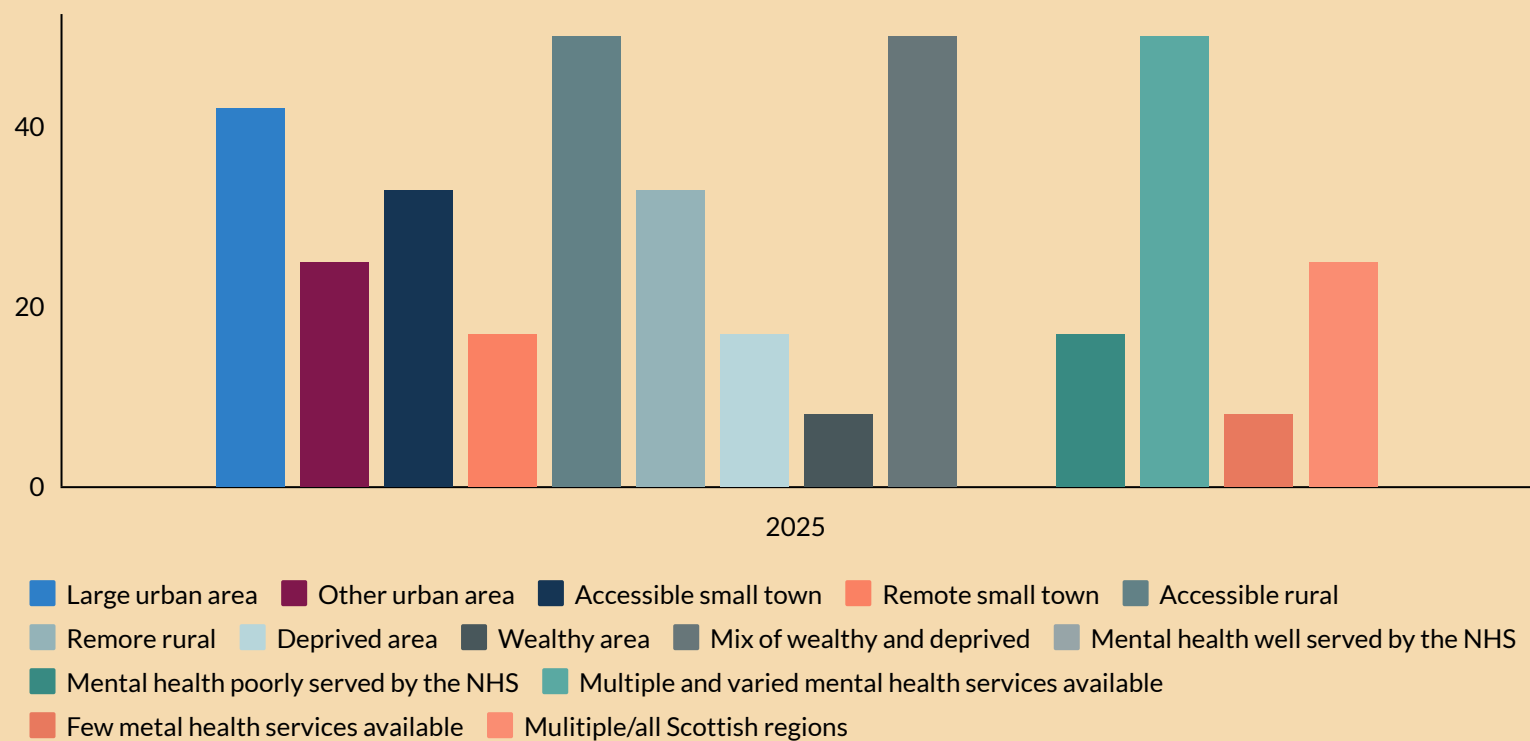
SURVEY RESULTS 2025

Introduction

There are currently 23 COSCA Member Organisations and one Corporate Organisation of 8 services who have gained the COSCA Recognition Scheme Award. During Autumn 2025 COSCA Recognised Organisations were asked to respond to our survey.

12 Recognised Organisations responded to the survey and the insights they provided are given below.

1. How would you classify the region(s) of Scotland where your organisation provides services?



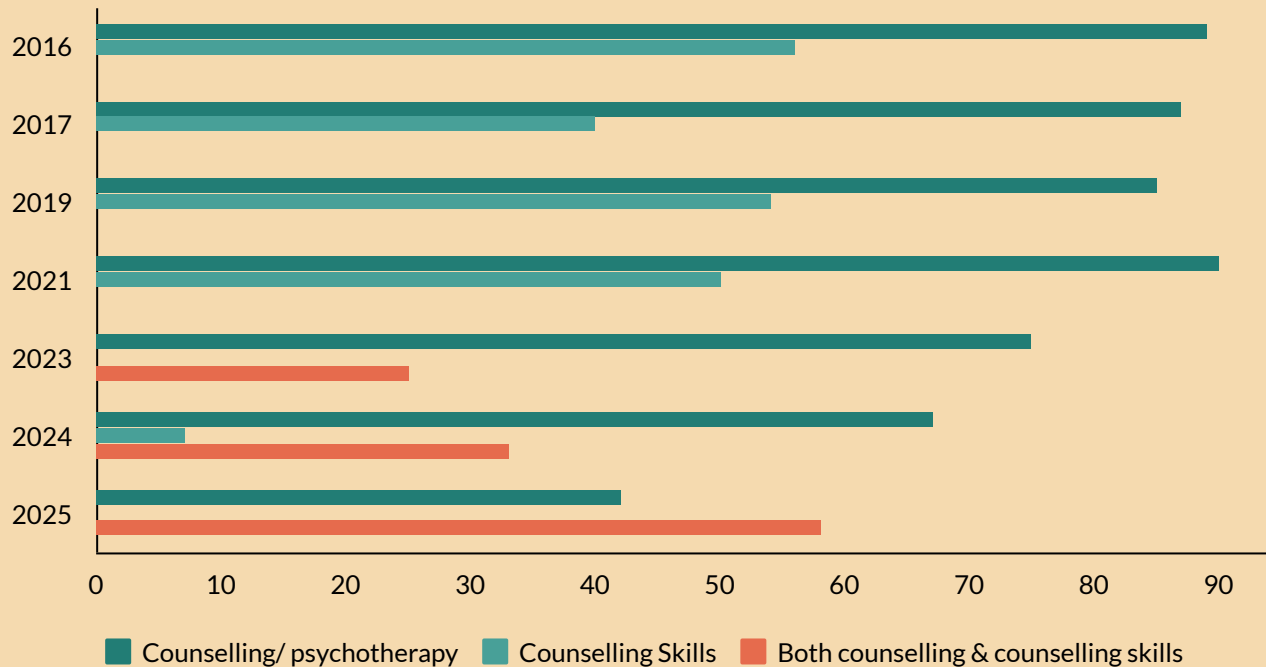
This year COSCA wanted to ask directly what populations were served by Recognised Organisations instead of inferring it from health board area. The most served was accessible rural at 50%, closely followed by large urban area (42%). Most served a mix of wealthy and deprived areas. It was a surprise that half (50%) reported that their area had multiple and varied mental health services available. It does, however, feel significant that no-one reported that mental health was well served by the NHS and 17% said that they were poorly served.

Online working provides greater accessibility and affordability for clients. It is clear the organisation has picked up an increased volume of mental health counselling from those that are not being provided for in the NHS.

Anon

2. What services does your organisation provide?

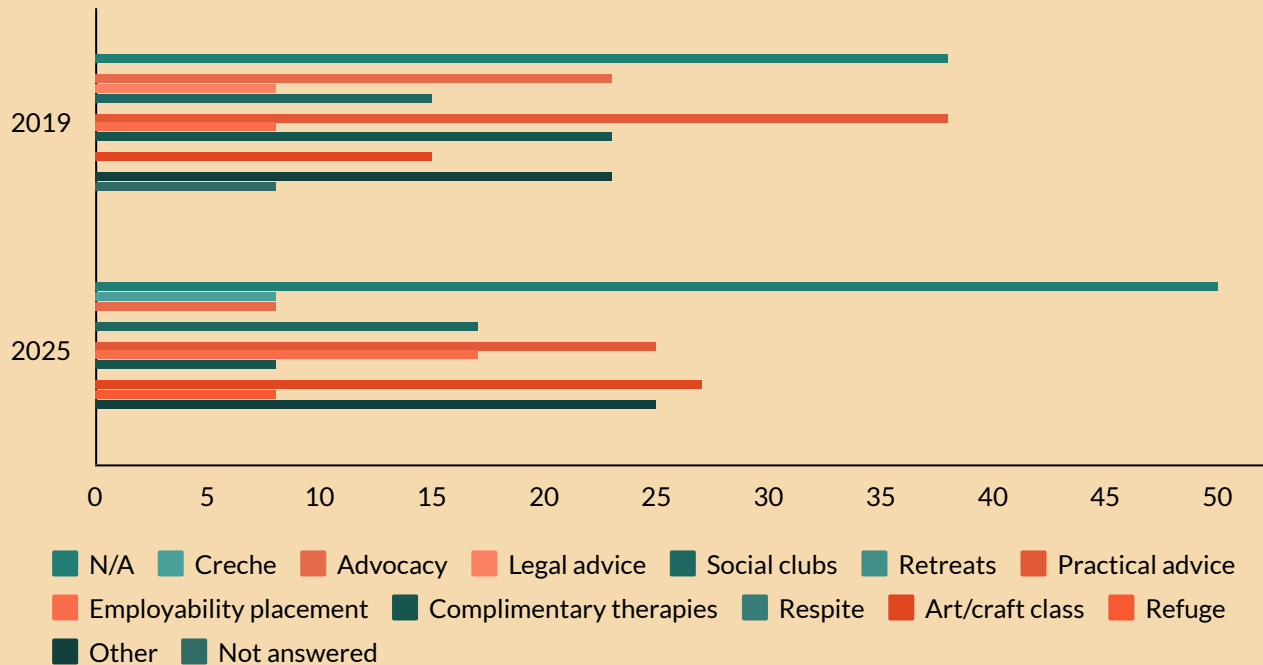
Counselling:



There was an interesting change this year with 58% of Recognised Organisations reporting that they offered both counselling and counselling skills. Those offering counselling and psychotherapy only were 42%. No counselling skills only services responded. It will be interesting to see if this is a trend towards services offering more varied mental health supports or if this is just a reflection of those Recognised Organisations who chose to participate this year.

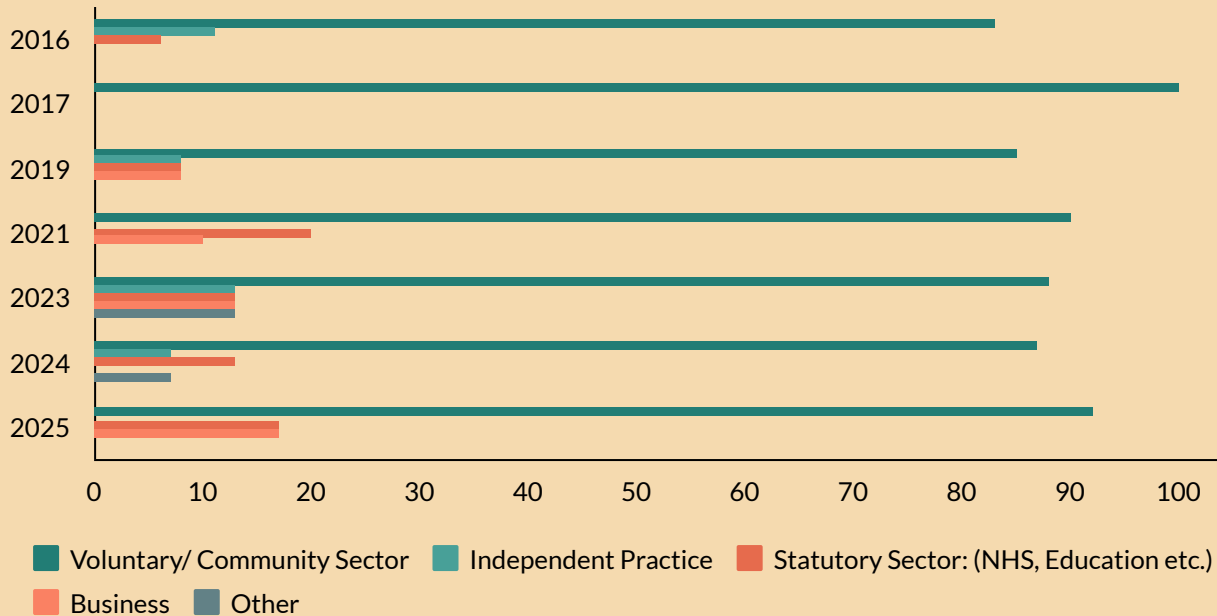
2. What services does your organisation provide?

Support:



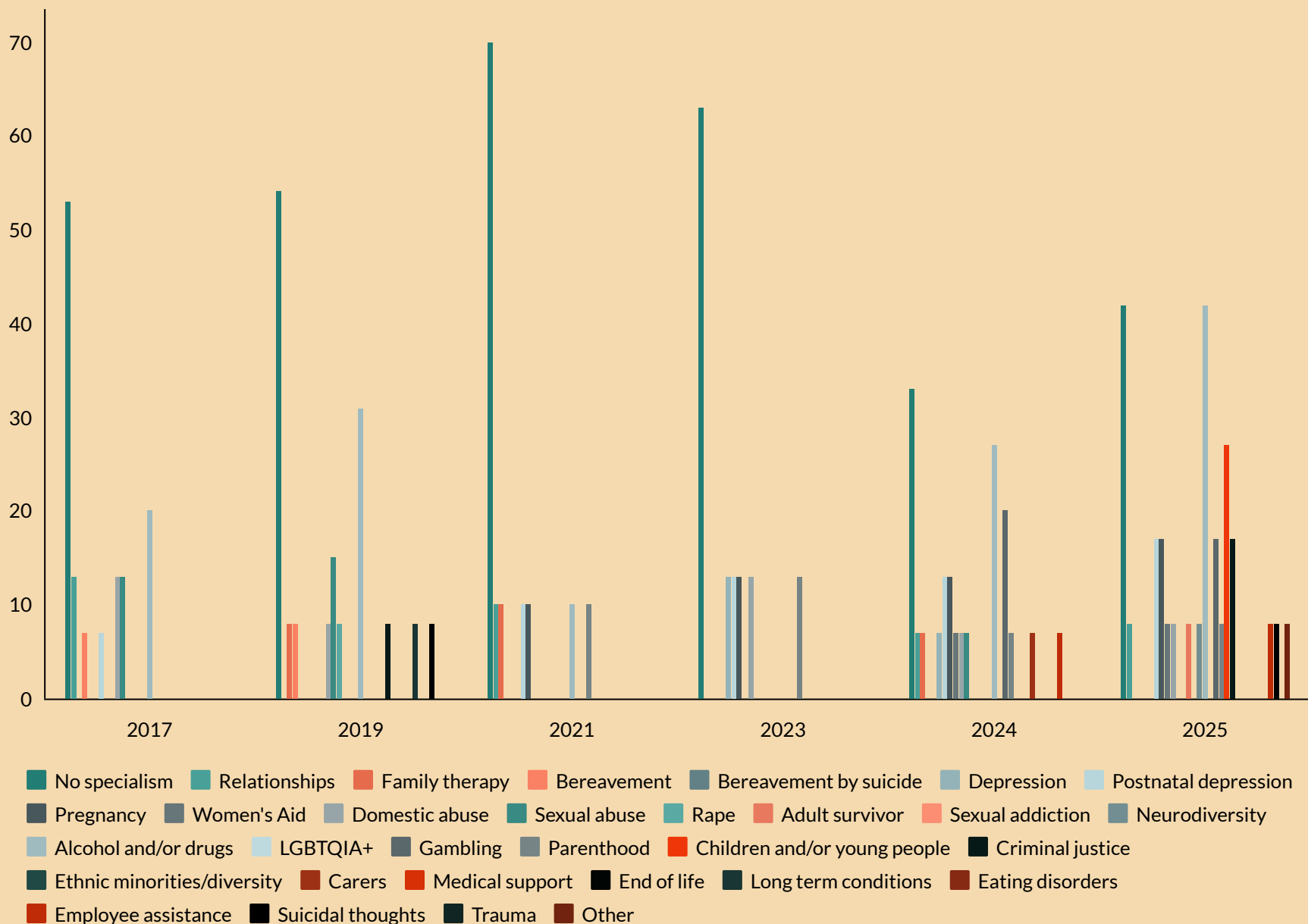
This question was re-introduced this year to see what other assistance was being offered by COSCA's Recognised Organisations. Half only offered counselling or counselling skills (50%). The largest offering was art class (27%), followed closely by practical advice at 25%.

3. In what context does your organisation work?



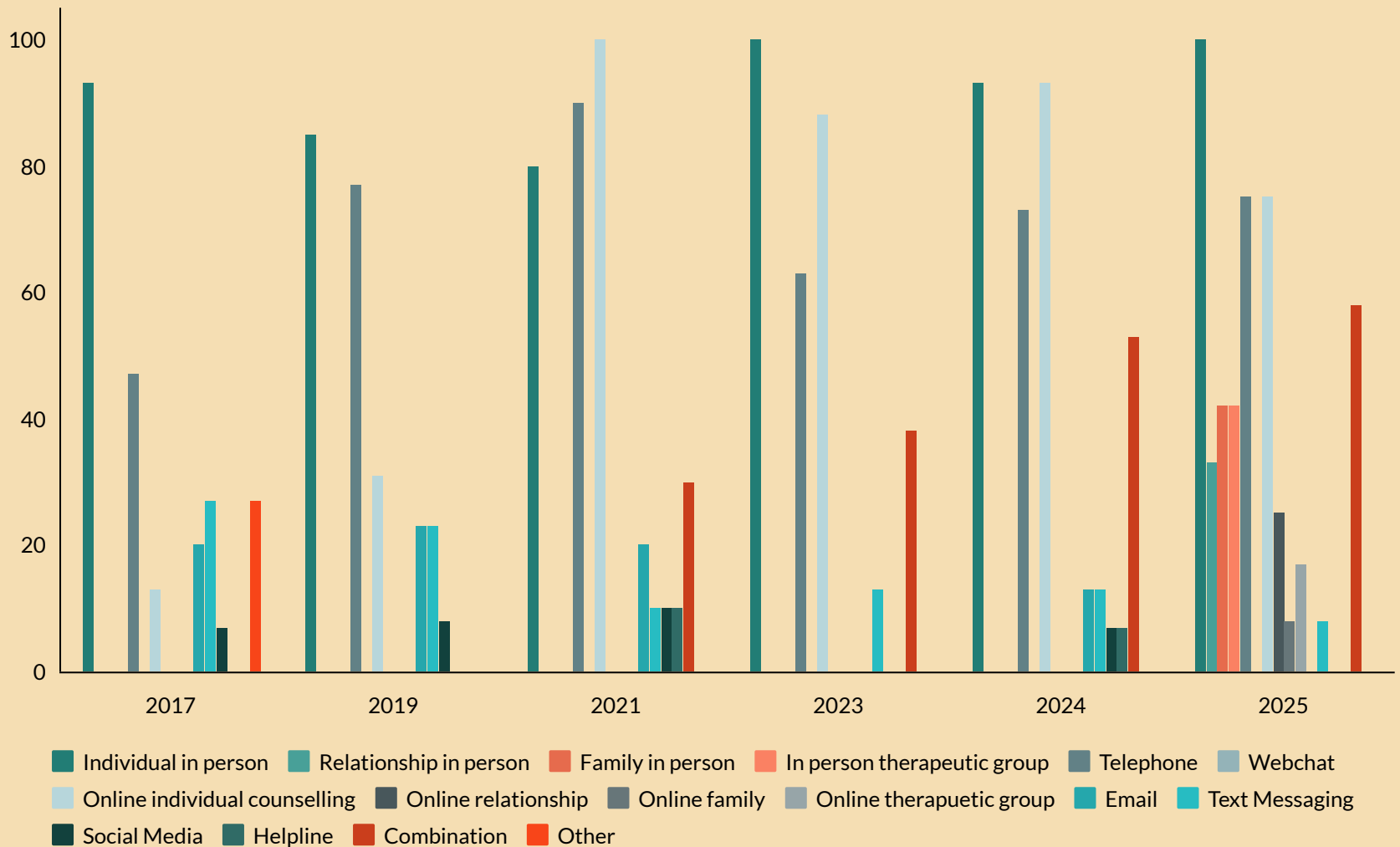
The voluntary sector continues to play a vital role in providing Professional Body quality assured counselling and counselling skills services across Scotland with 92% reporting that they work in the voluntary/ community sector.

4. Does your service specialise in one or more areas?



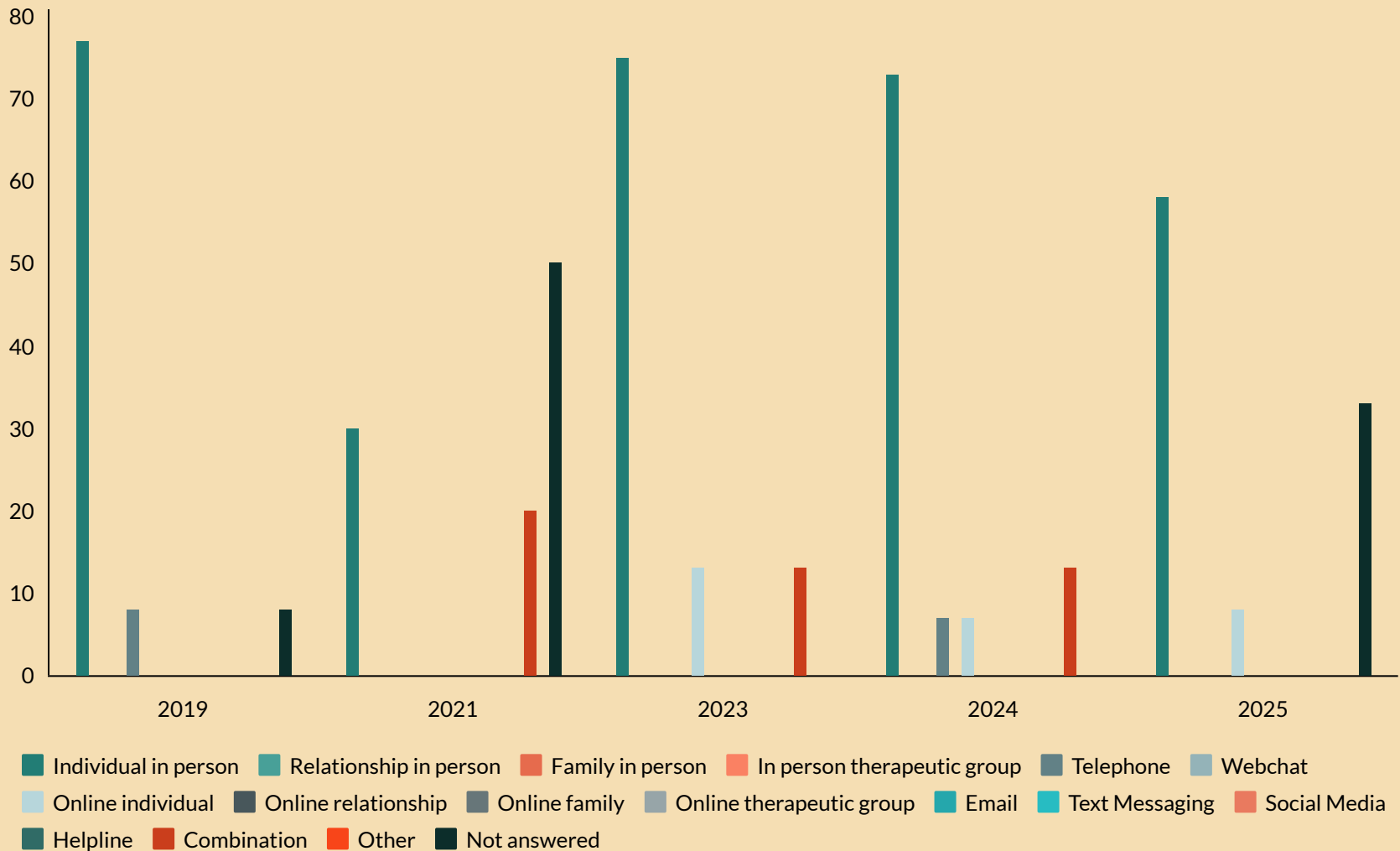
For the first time a specialist service, alcohol and/or drugs (42%), is as represented as no specialism (42%); up from 27% last year. Children and/or young people is newly introduced this year and the next most represented at 27%. It will be interesting to see in future surveys if this is a general trend towards specialist services, alcohol and/or drugs services, or merely a representation of those Recognised Organisations who chose to take part this year.

5a. Do your Counsellors/ Psychotherapists/Counselling Skills practitioners work with clients in any of the following ways?



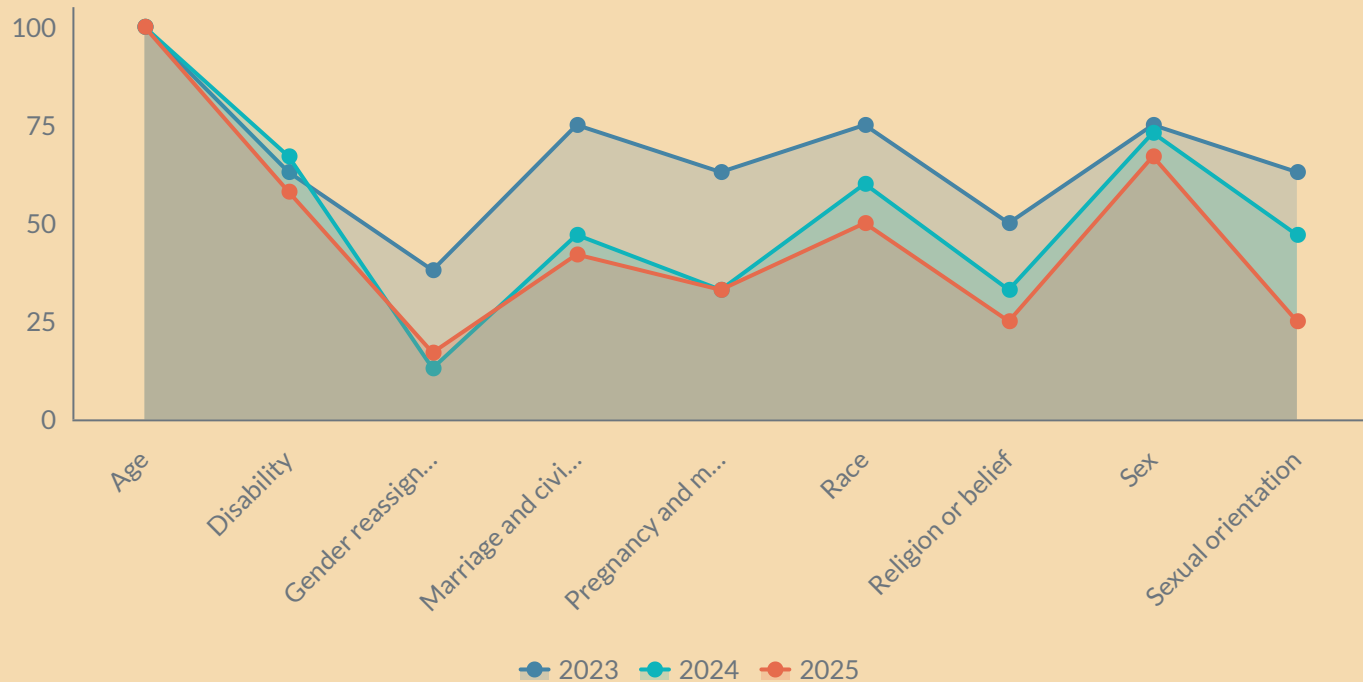
This year took a deeper look at how counselling was being offered by splitting more options into in person and online. 100% still offer individual counselling in person, but 75% offer that online. Telephone counselling doesn't seem to be affected by the option of online counselling and continues to be high, also at 75%. There has been a steady increase in COSCA Recognised Organisations offering a combination of counselling both in person and online, this year 58% from 27% in 2017.

5b. What is the main way your Counsellors/Psychotherapists/Counselling Skills Users work with clients?



There are only two ways that those who chose to take part in the 2025 survey primarily work: individual in person (58%), online individual (8%). 33% didn't answer the question. It would be good to hear if that is due to the questions wording, placement or something else.

6a. Do you collect data on the following characteristics protected in the Equality Act 2010:



This year's data closely agrees with last years'. Everyone collected data on age and after that it tails off rapidly with only 17% collecting data on geder reassignment.

6b. What do you do with this information to tackle disadvantage and discrimination?

This is an area of development for us: We are undertaking a data review process and as part of this we will collect much more comprehensive equality and diversity monitoring – this is a strategic aim for us. We will then use this to assess more fully who is accessing our services and whether targeted outreach / input is needed to support members of particular communities to reach our services.

We currently pay close attention to the gender of our clients as attracting more men and dads to our service is a strategic priority.

We are planning to collect data sexual orientation as LGBT+ may feel there are barriers accessing a pregnancy focused service / may have a concern regarding stigma.

We also want to know more about the racial diversity of our client base as we know Black women are more likely to experience poor birth outcomes, but are not necessarily as reflected in our client population as in the population at large. With more data we will be able to tailor our outreach.

Anon

To ensure that we are open to working across all possible barriers to accessing our services.

Ann Donnan Safe
Space

Helps us to identify areas where extra training may be needed to gain better understanding.

Cheryl Douglas FASS

In 2024 over half of our clients lived in the 50% most deprived SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) data zones in Scotland. This follows the same pattern as in 2023. Across our perinatal services, we know that counselling is accessed by relatively few dads. We have developed strategies to make our services more inclusive: we continue to encourage perinatal mums to signpost partners to our services; have been working on ensuring our literature is more inclusive; have been promoting our services more widely and developing better and more informed referral networks. We can see that the work done to engage/promote our services to male clients is continuing to have a positive impact, demand from male clients has remained stable (29% of our clients in 2024 were male which is the same % as in 2023). Gathering equality data continues to be challenging – it is voluntary and often clients do not provide us with the data we need to have a full and clear picture of those accessing our services. We will continue to work on, in a way that is quick, straightforward, non-stigmatising and anonymous for clients.

Christina Smiley
CrossReach
Counselling Scotland

We are a single sex service and use monitoring data to monitor our reach to groups of women who face additional exclusion, such as on the basis of disability or race. We provide anonymised monitoring data to funders.

Kate McCormack Fife
Women's Aid

Previously we used to collect a wide range of equality monitoring data in line with the requirements of statutory contracts. However, we found that on several occasions service users felt the level of questioning was overly intrusive. Once these contracts ended, this requirement to collect the full dataset was removed.

At this stage we reviewed our approach and made the decision to reduce the information gathered to core demographics of sex and age.

This streamlined approach ensures that we continue to collect meaningful data without creating unnecessary barriers for people to engagement. It also provides us with sufficient insight to inform the development of new projects, particularly those with a specific focus such as women-only services or support for young people.

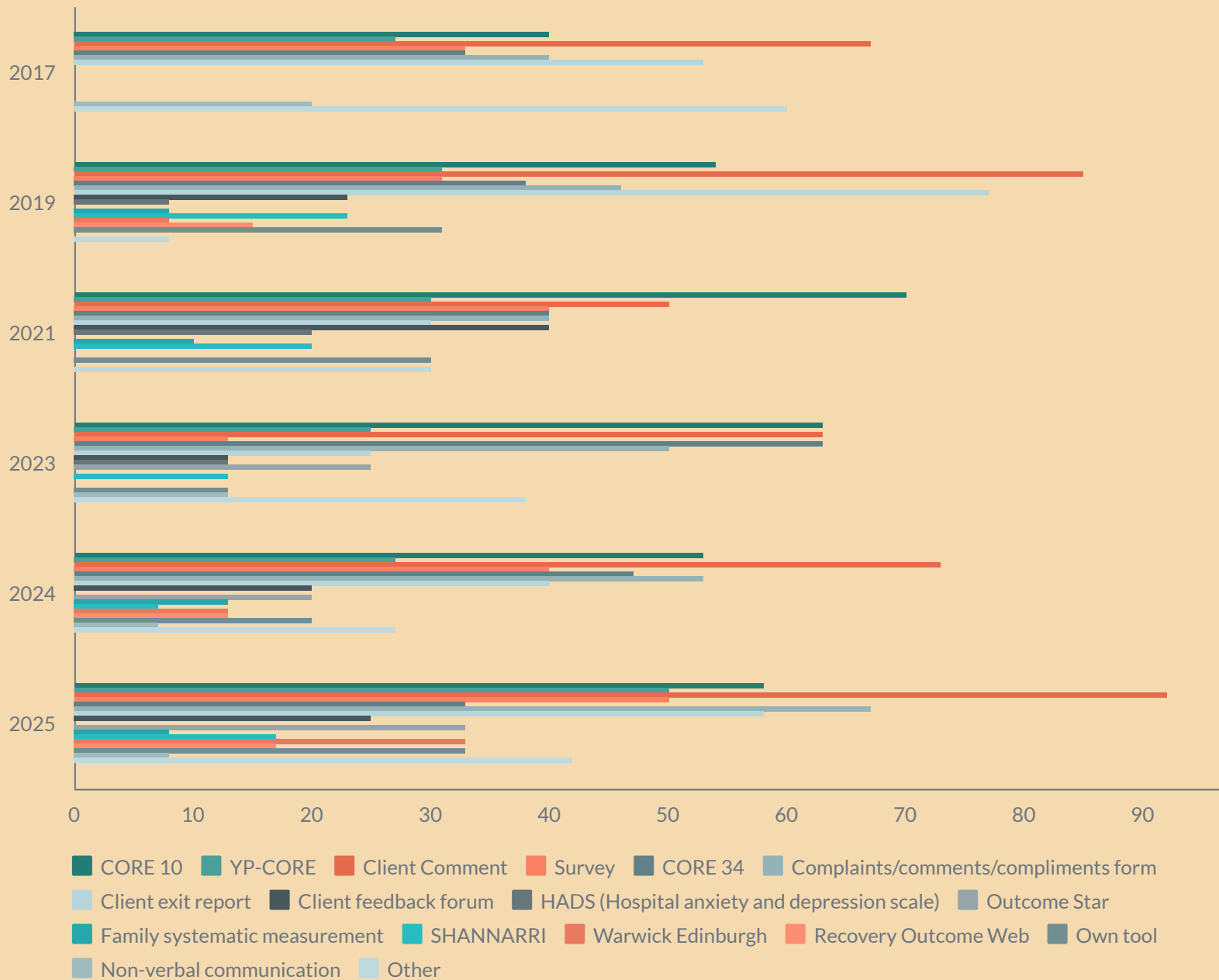
Margaret Halbert
Liber8

We keep minimum information on our clients. For 10 years we have felt 'harvesters' of information on people lives, habits and intimate details on addiction, all requested and collected by NHS before they can be 'treated'. We are now free from this constraint and ready to have a level of data collection that does not offend the people we are trying to get close with.

We are, by nature inclusive and opening to everyone, so hopefully not too much work required.

Sharan Brown ACI

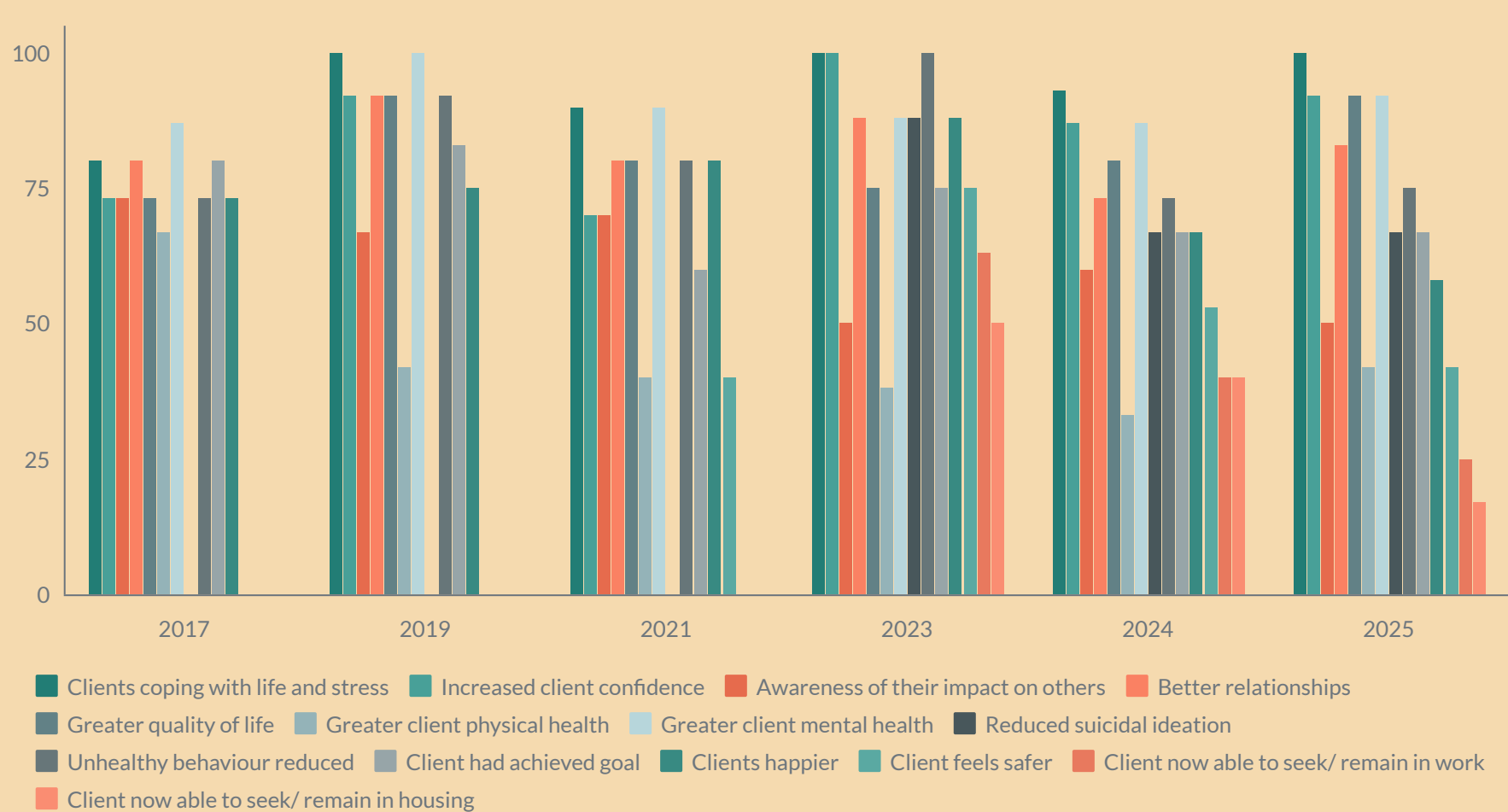
7. How do you measure the outcomes of your service?



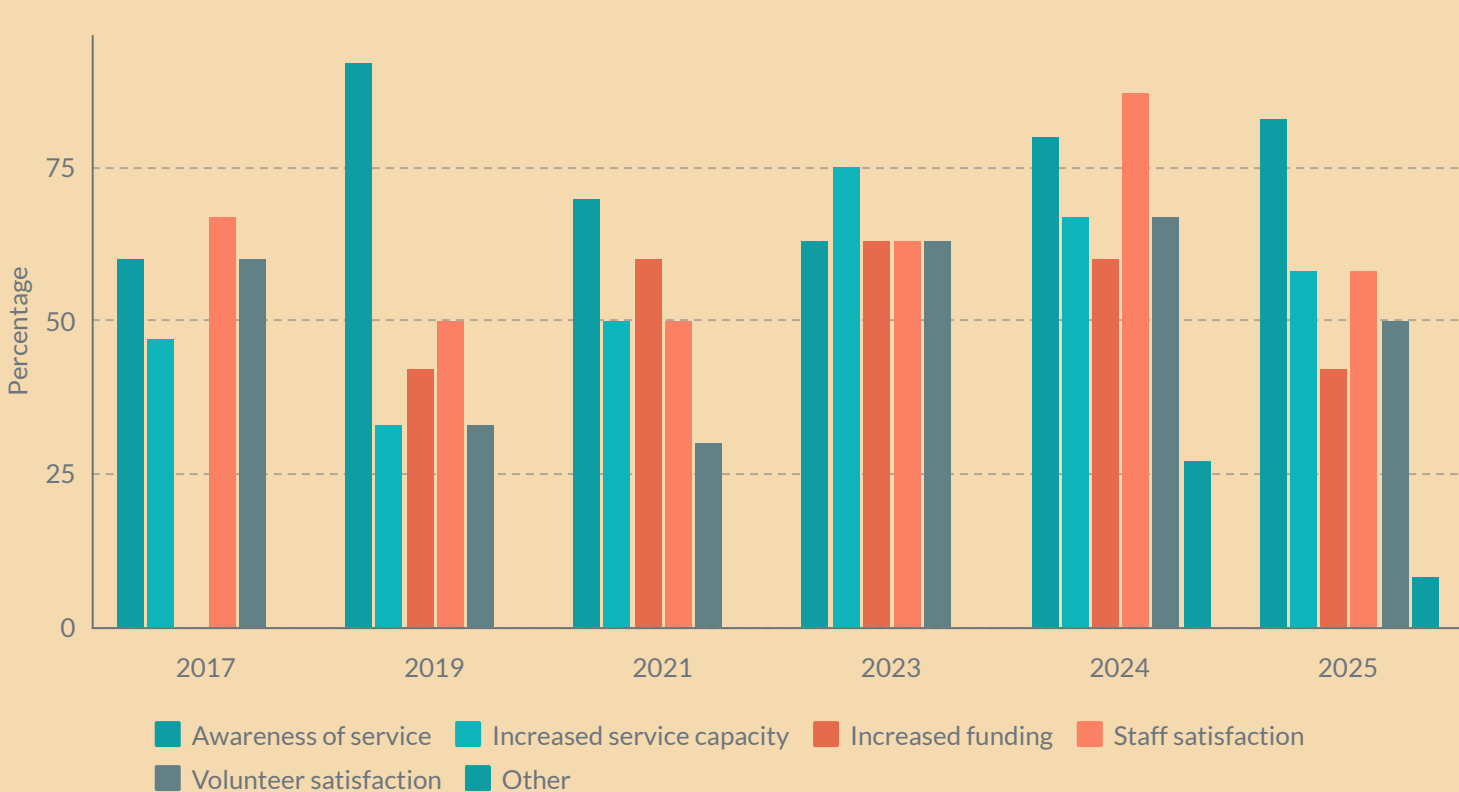
Client comment continues to be the most utilised form of feedback with 92% of those who responded to the survey offering that to their clients. This has been on a steady increase since 2021. This is closely followed by complaints (67%), client exit report and CORE10 (both 58%).

8. What were the significant benefits/outcomes of your service in the last year?

For your clients:



For your service as a whole:



Clients better able to cope with life and stress and a better quality of life are reported by 100% of those responding to the survey, closely followed by increased client confidence, quality of life and improved mental health (92%).

Awareness of service has continued to rise and is now the highest reported outcome for services at 83%, with increased capacity and staff satisfaction close behind at 58%.

CrossReach looks to source staff & volunteer’s feedback via annual surveys. These are an opportunity for staff and volunteers to make their voices heard and all responses help inform and influence how CrossReach delivers its’ services and develops its policies. In our survey April 2024, 77% of volunteer respondents said they felt very valued. Volunteers’ reasons for volunteering were varied, for example, gaining valuable experience, helping my local community, course requirements, building skills when returning to world of work, accreditation purposes, support from administrative & clinical staff, welcoming atmosphere; sense of community & being valued, opportunity to help others, CPD; training & peer supervision opportunities, learning from other counsellors, opportunity to meet other people. CrossReach continues to be a valued placement provider for many counselling courses, for example, Strathclyde University and University of Highlands and Islands, Garnethill etc.

Some of the staff feedback that we have received has been:
‘I have nothing but positive feedback from my experiences of working here’
‘Have have been welcomed and supported from day one within my new position at Crossreach’
‘This has been the best work place I have experienced in my career’
Some of the volunteer feedback that we have received has been:
‘I find the service and team very supportive, encouraging and helpful’
‘It has been a wonderful introduction to the counselling services and to the world of work. I have felt very supported, and valued as a team member. The structure and systems in place are clear and concise as a beginner which has been useful’
‘The support from managers/clinical team enables a very accepting and safe environment’
‘I feel respected and valued by the organisation’

Christina Smiley
CrossReach
Counselling Scotland

Our client, partners and staff surveys are undertaken every 2 years, and won’t be undertaken again until the end of 2026. However, for one of our largest services, we conducted a Strength Based Needs Analysis, the methodology included, focus groups, interviews and 4 consultation surveys of 4 specific target groups-clients, stakeholders, loved ones and wider public.

While there were several recommendations actioned from the SBNA Summary Report, we received overwhelmingly positive feedback, highlighting the service profound impact on participants’ personal growth, recovery, and sense of community. Many participants describe their experiences as life-changing, appreciating the welcoming, inclusive atmosphere and the diverse range of activities offered. Recovery and group meetings are particularly valued for fostering connection and structure, while therapeutic workshops—such as yoga, meditation, and emotional regulation—have been especially impactful. Additionally, respondents emphasise the importance of educational and skills-based workshops, creative outlets, and social activities in enhancing their overall well-being.

This SBNA exercise allowed us to witness the increased awareness of our work and organisation throughout both urban and rural areas.

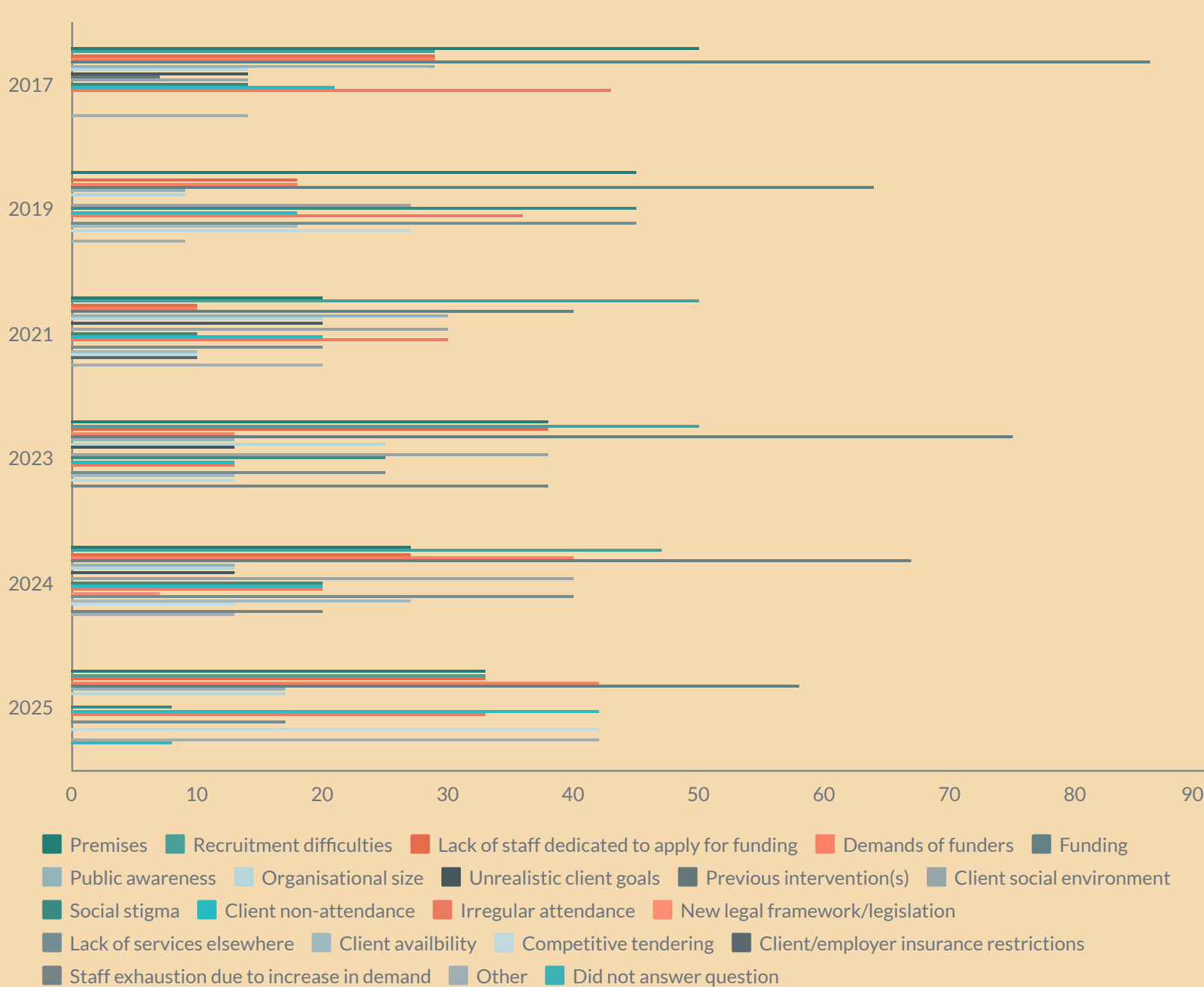
Margaret Halbert
Liber8

9. What activities produced the outcomes in the question above?



For the first time in three years, continuation of reliable, established services is not 100%, but still high at 83% of COSCA Recognised Organisations as a reason for their success. Specialised service is not far behind at 75% reflecting the trend for this year. Staff support remains encouragingly high at 58%.

10. What were the challenges for your service in achieving the above impacts/ outcomes?



Funding remains a high concern (58%), but has been on the gradual decrease since 2023 (75%). Is this a reflection of increased funding available, that organisations have diversified their funding streams, or that it is now accepted that funding is a challenge? Competitive tendering as a challenge, however, has seen a rapid increase since last year (13%) and is now a concern of 42% of COSCA Recognised organisations in this years' survey; along with demands of funders (no change) and client non-attendance (up from 20% last year).

- We have a consistently strong reputation for delivering quality therapeutic services and have well established referral pathways, (in 2024, 43% of our clients were directly referred to us by statutory services), however, maintaining financial sustainability across all our services remains challenging. The combination of with National Insurance and salary increases alongside increased insecurity of Local authority and Scottish government funding is making the job of keeping services going harder than ever.
- Managing our resources (including human) effectively and balancing our involvement in any new opportunities with our capacity to deliver and prevent burnout.
- Having to close waiting lists due to demand outstripping supply. For our general adult and perinatal donation-based services, on average we continue to have to close waiting lists twice a year for around six to eight weeks to manage client expectation and risk.
- Consistent demand for clients wanting face to face counselling – trying to make most efficient use of limited space available
- Across all our services, we are working with an increasingly complex caseload. For example, 29% of clients reported distress levels on COREnet as 'moderate to severe' or 'severe'.
 - In 2023 we had 83 clients on the risk register, around 4% of all clients supported. 21 of whom were referred to safeguarding (25% of cases on risk register to safeguarding). In 2024 we had 211 clients on the risk register, around 10% of all clients supported. 145 of whom were referred to safeguarding (65% of cases on risk register to safeguarding). Suicidal ideation and self-harm were the most frequent risk factors recorded.
- Continued high levels of distress and complexity in the referrals made to our CYP counselling services.
- Many of our CYP clients are facing challenges such as Parental Drug death, Parental Imprisonment, Separation for siblings, Domestic Abuse, Self-Harm.
 - The cost-of-living crisis continues to mean that the pool of professional counsellors who can volunteer is reduced as they need to complete more paid work to cover their costs. Regular volunteer recruitment is therefore required, which is both time consuming and costly. Overall, our pool of volunteers has remained inexperienced, almost half of our volunteers are in training. This means that much time and effort is put into both extensive induction training and ongoing support and guidance from clinical teams.
- Recruiting counselling managers with the skills required to manage services through these challenging times, when post become vacant (in the main due to retirement) is proving to be hard.

Christina Smiley
CrossReach
Counselling Scotland

Most of the challenges are normal business management issues. However Tender applications are our biggest time consuming issue. The processes are not helpful to organisations without dedicated resources. The application forms are bigger, often requiring more than one submission for each separate type of counselling provision eg individual, group work etc. The shortness of the time frame for submissions is also prohibitive when more than one application is in progress. The Q&A services provided to support the application can lack timely responses introducing further pressures on the submitting organisation. The ask for type of counsellor qualifications is becoming more restrictive eg several tenders are now stipulating BACP accredited counsellors only. This is not helpful if the organisation has a number of COSCA members which will affect future staffing decisions.

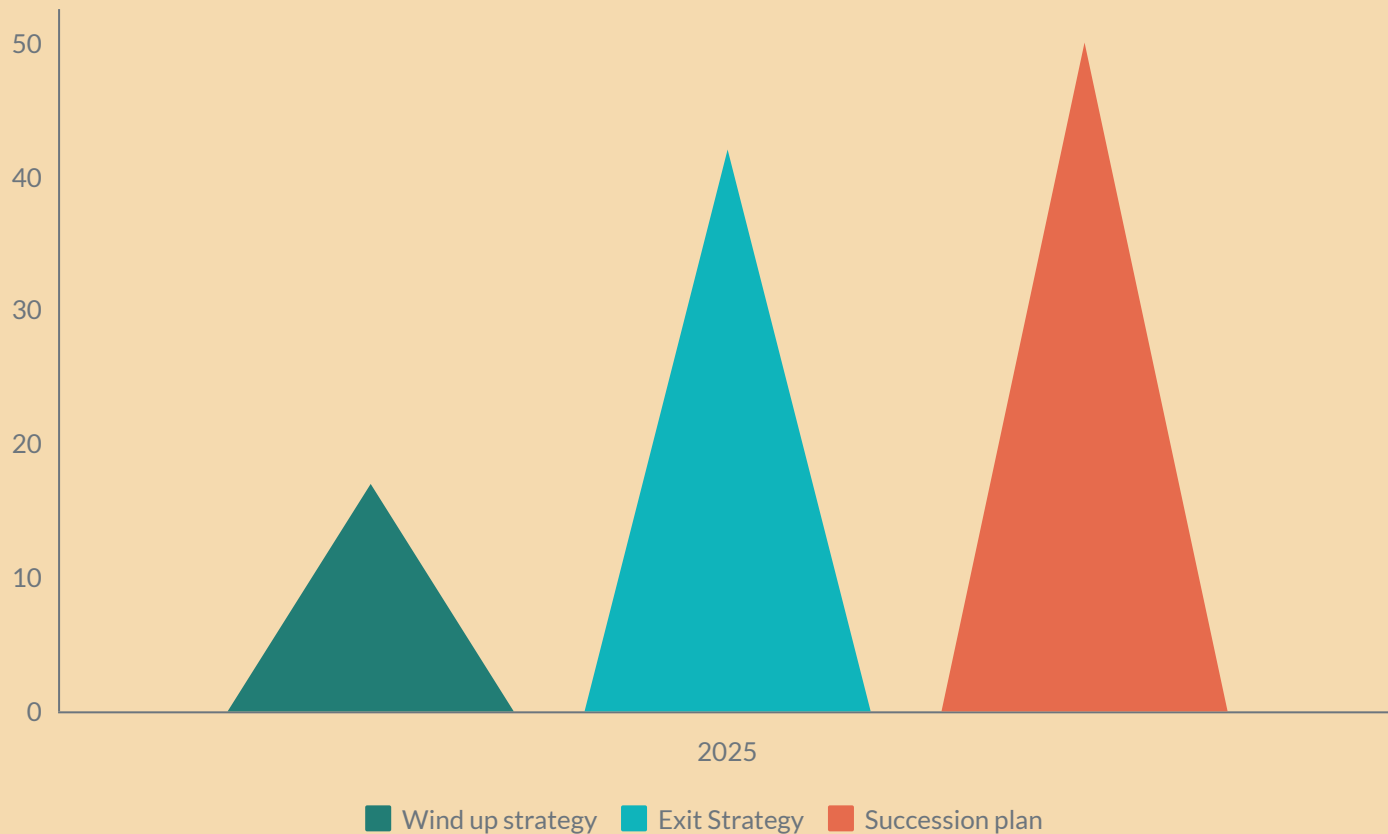
Anon

In relation to our counselling services, we continue to face challenges similar to those experienced last year regarding the availability and criteria of suitable funding streams. Similar to last year, the Scottish Government launched the Community Mental Health Fund and allocated significant resources to each local authority, we initially welcomed the development. The focus on community mental health appeared to align closely with our work and we anticipated that our services would be a strong fit for support.

However, we were both disappointed and concerned to learn that the fund explicitly excluded professional counselling and therapy, instead prioritising generic wellbeing initiatives and group-based activities. While such activities have value, this decision fails to reflect the pressing need for evidence-based therapeutic interventions at a time when NHS waiting lists for counselling and mental health support remain critically high.

Margaret Halbert
Liber8

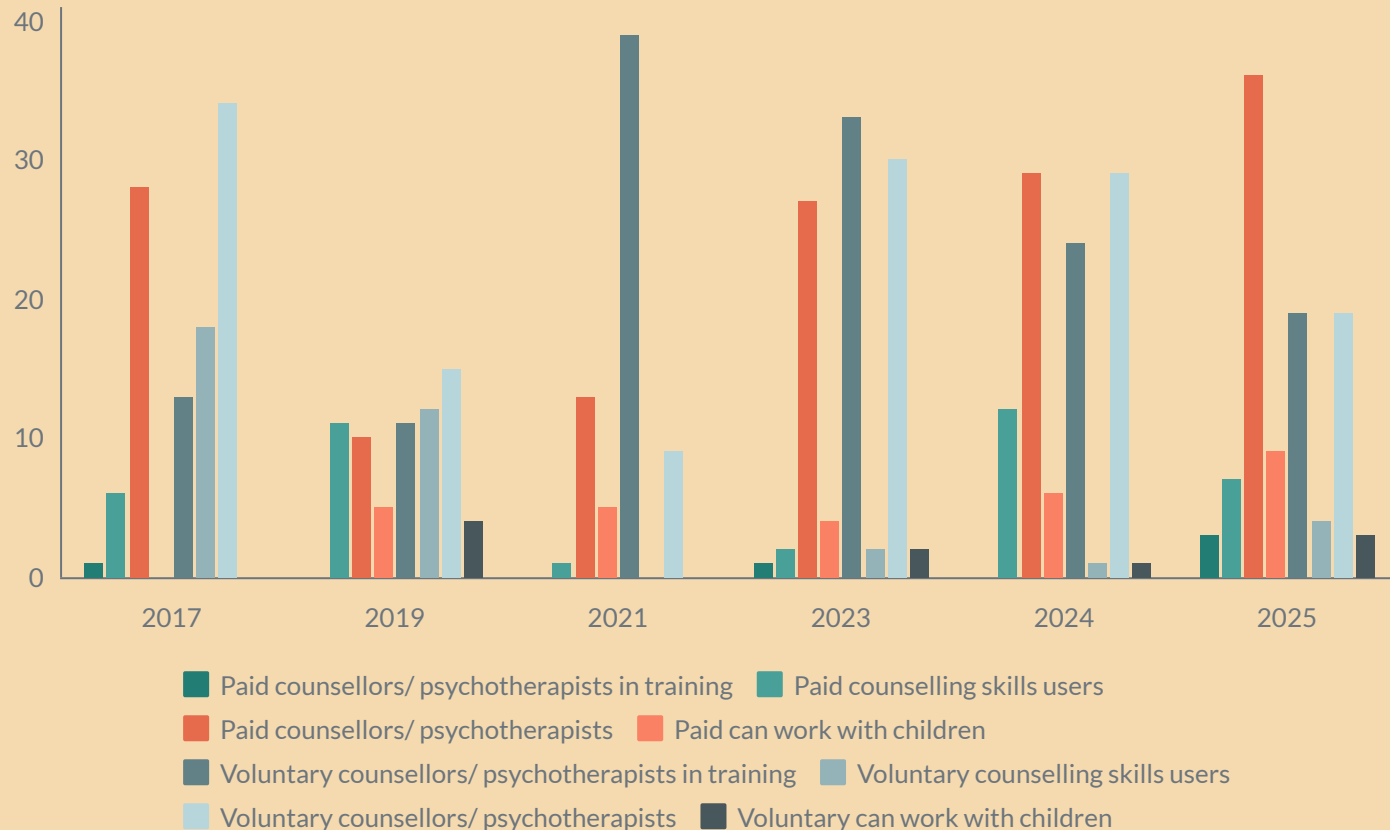
11. Do you have any of the following:



This year a new question has been added on contingency planning. Only half of COSCA Recognised Organisations taking part in the survey have any form of contingency plan for cessation of a service or a significant person leaving.

In terms of individual projects, we actively manage exit strategies to mitigate risks for both the organisation and staff. Employment contracts linked to specific funding streams are issued on a fixed-term basis, aligned with the duration of the funding or contract. This allows transparency and also helps manage expectations while protecting the organisation from unsustainable long-term commitments. We also have a succession plan to ensure continuity of leadership, governance, and service delivery if key staff or Board members leave suddenly or through planned transition.

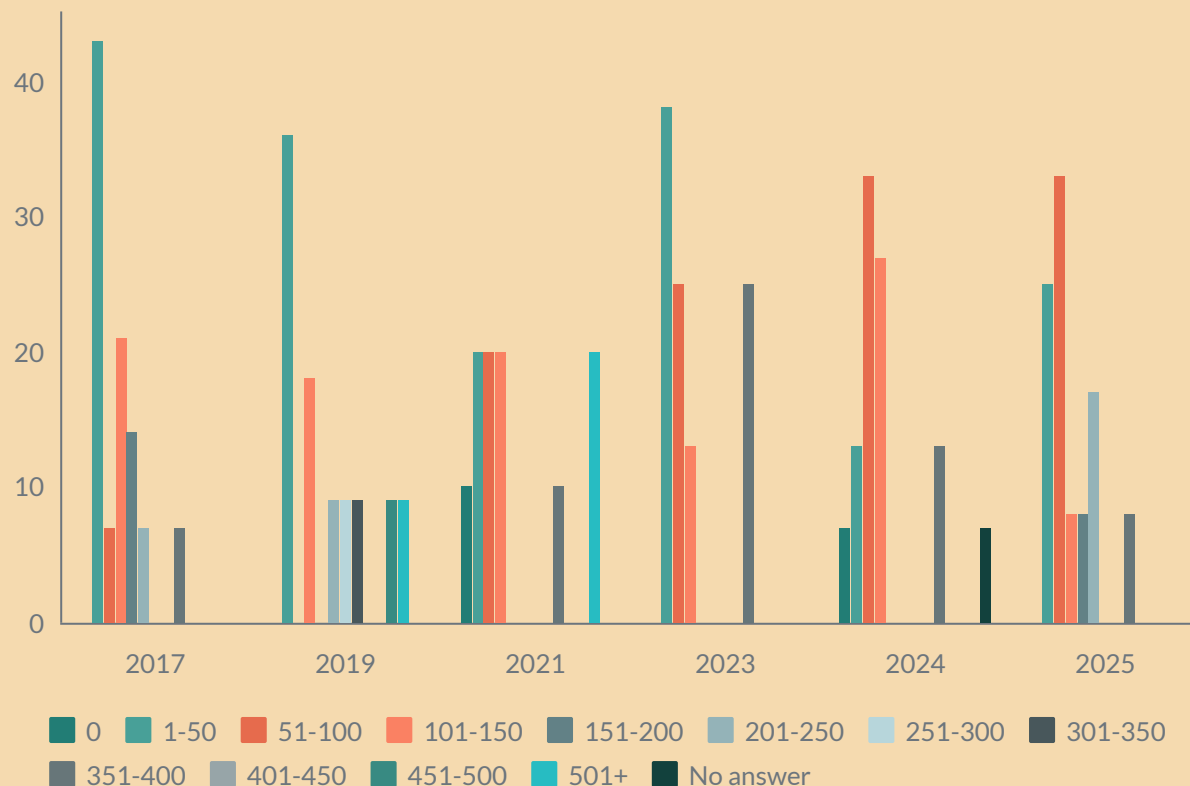
12. How many practitioners within your organisation are:



The percentage of paid counsellors (36%) has continued its upward trend and now is higher than the percentage of voluntary counsellors (19%). Last year there were equal numbers of paid and voluntary counsellors/psychotherapists (29%).

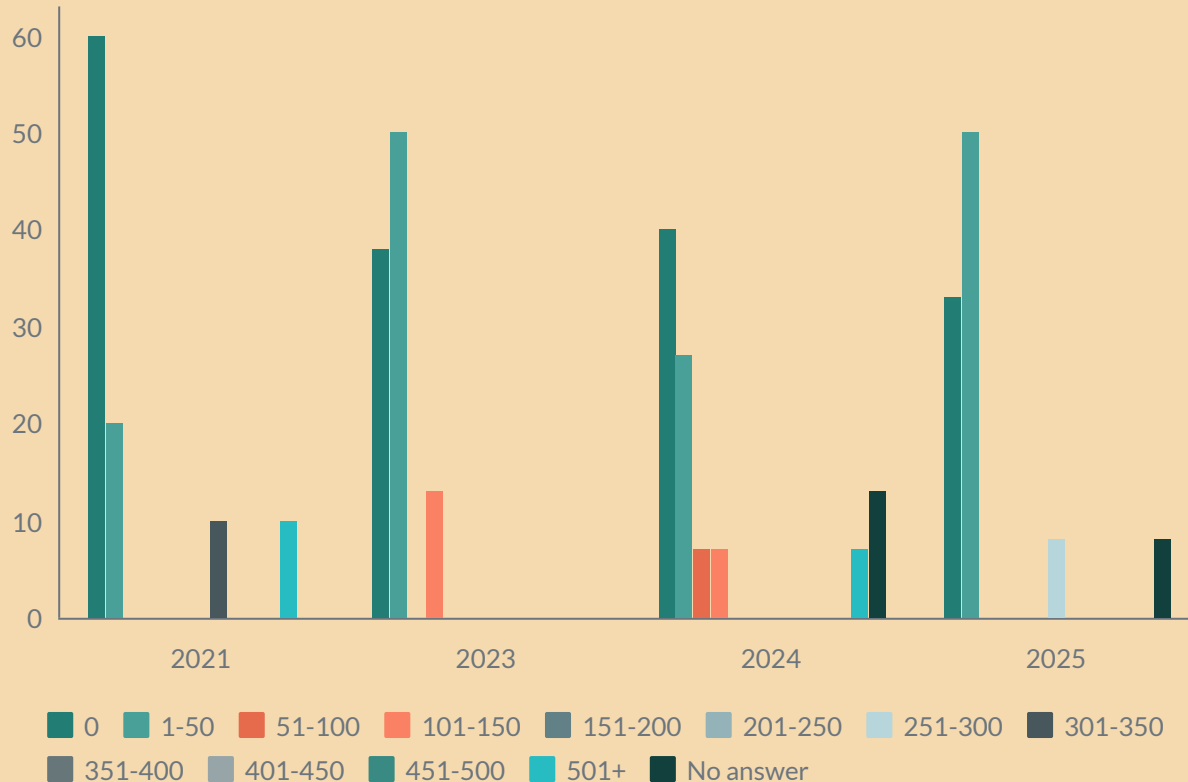
It also seems the number of voluntary counsellors/psychotherapists in training has continued to drop from (24% to 19%).

13a. On average, how many hours of counselling per week are provided by your organisation?



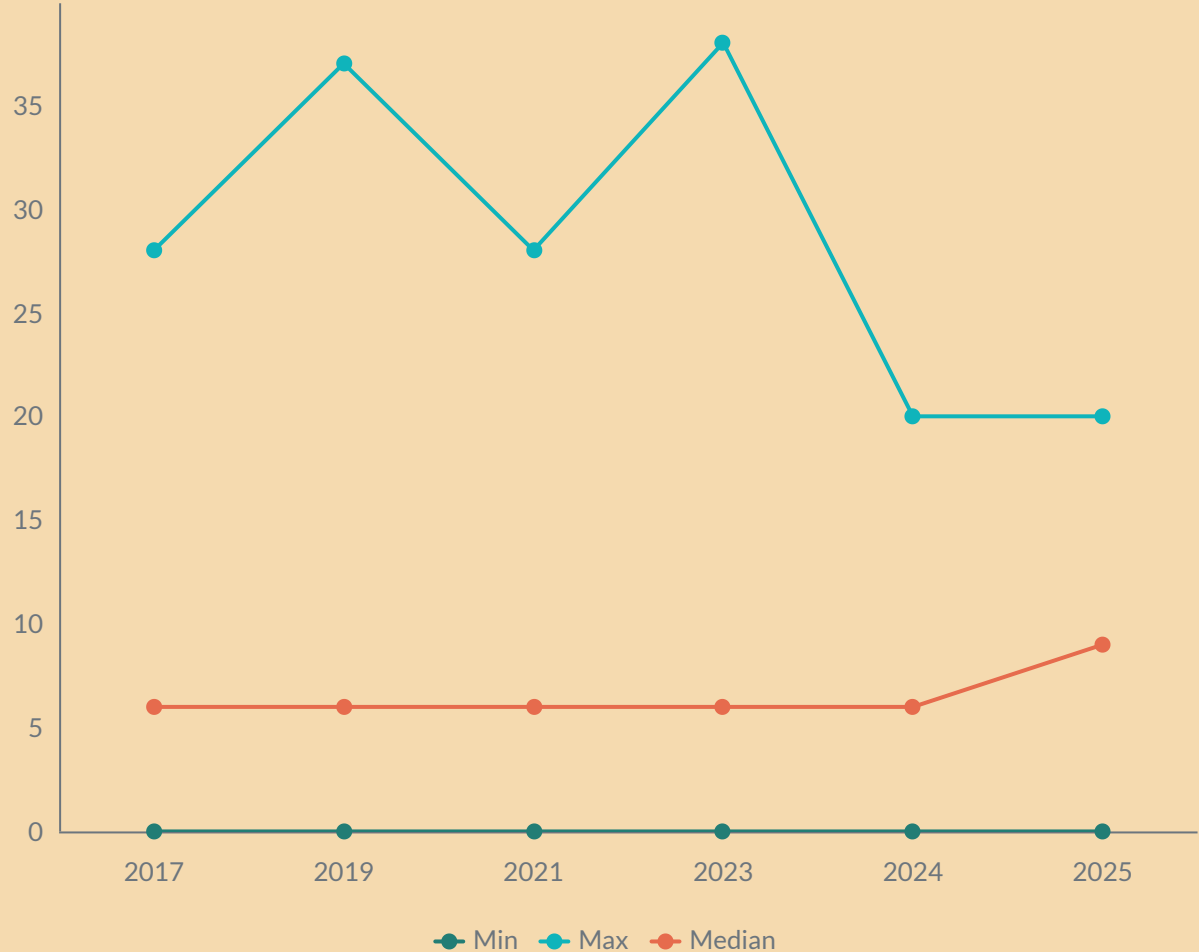
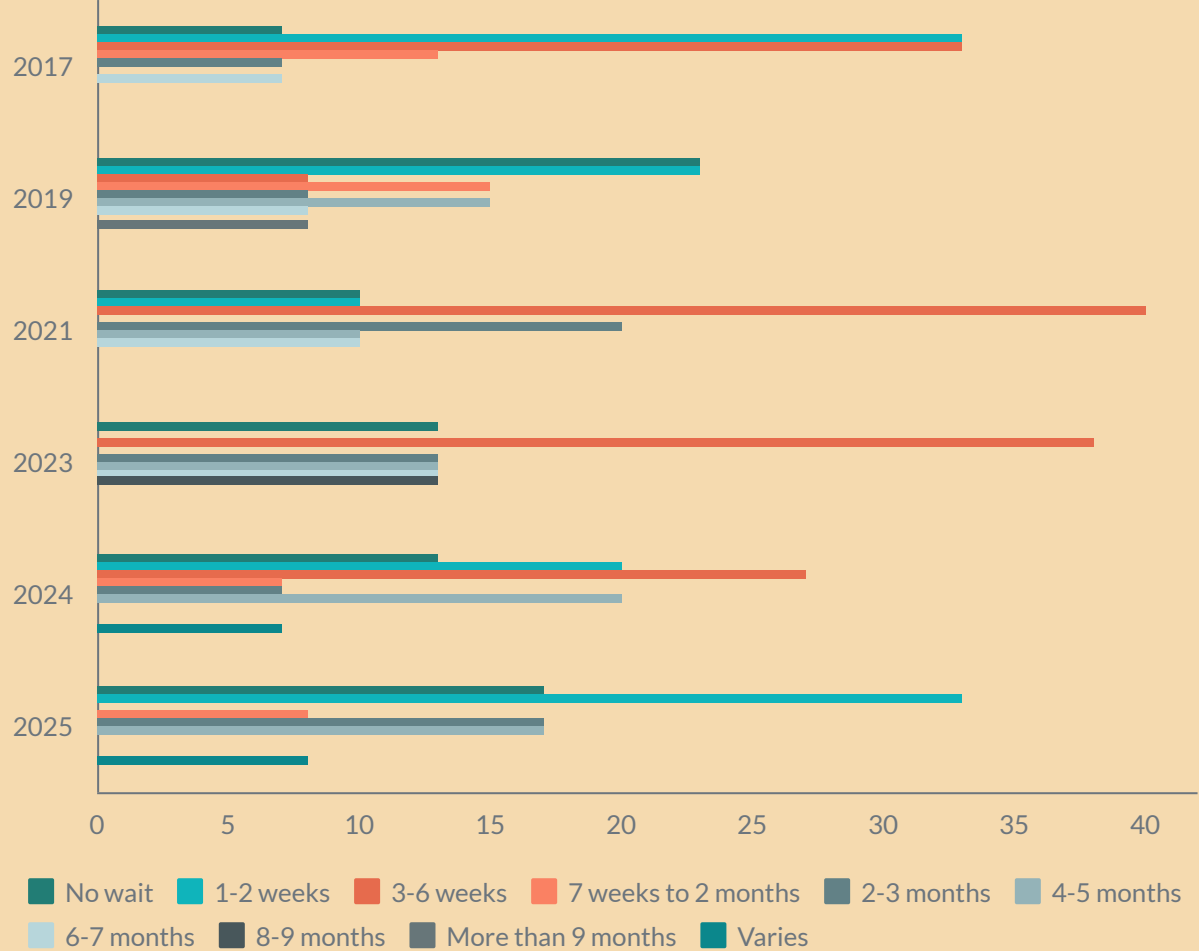
This year most COSCA Recognised organisations taking part in the survey offered 1-50 or 1-100 hours of counselling per week (25% and 33%). However, there was a good spread in hours offered showing that both large and small organisations are being represented.

13b. On average, how many hours of counselling support per week are provided by your organisation?



Half of participating organisations provide one to 50 hours of counselling support per week. 33% offer none at all. Counselling is still the main focus of COSCA Recognised Organisations.

14a. How long can a client expect to wait from first contact with your organisation to the start of regular counselling?



The maximum waiting time has continued at around 5 months. The median time from first contact to first session has risen a little to 9 weeks. COSCA Recognised Organisations are managing waiting lists despite the continuing increase in demand.

14b. What are you doing to manage these waiting times?



Assessment interview (58%) and prioritising the waiting list (42%) are the two most utilised ways of managing waiting times, but other ways are also put into practice (33%): waiting list, fast track, reduce number of sessions and offer an alternative service within your organisation.

15a. How many sessions are your clients usually offered?

Year	Min	Max	Average
2019	6	Open ended	23
2021	6	Open ended	30
2023	8	Open ended	26
2024	9	Open ended	22
2025	6	Open ended	14

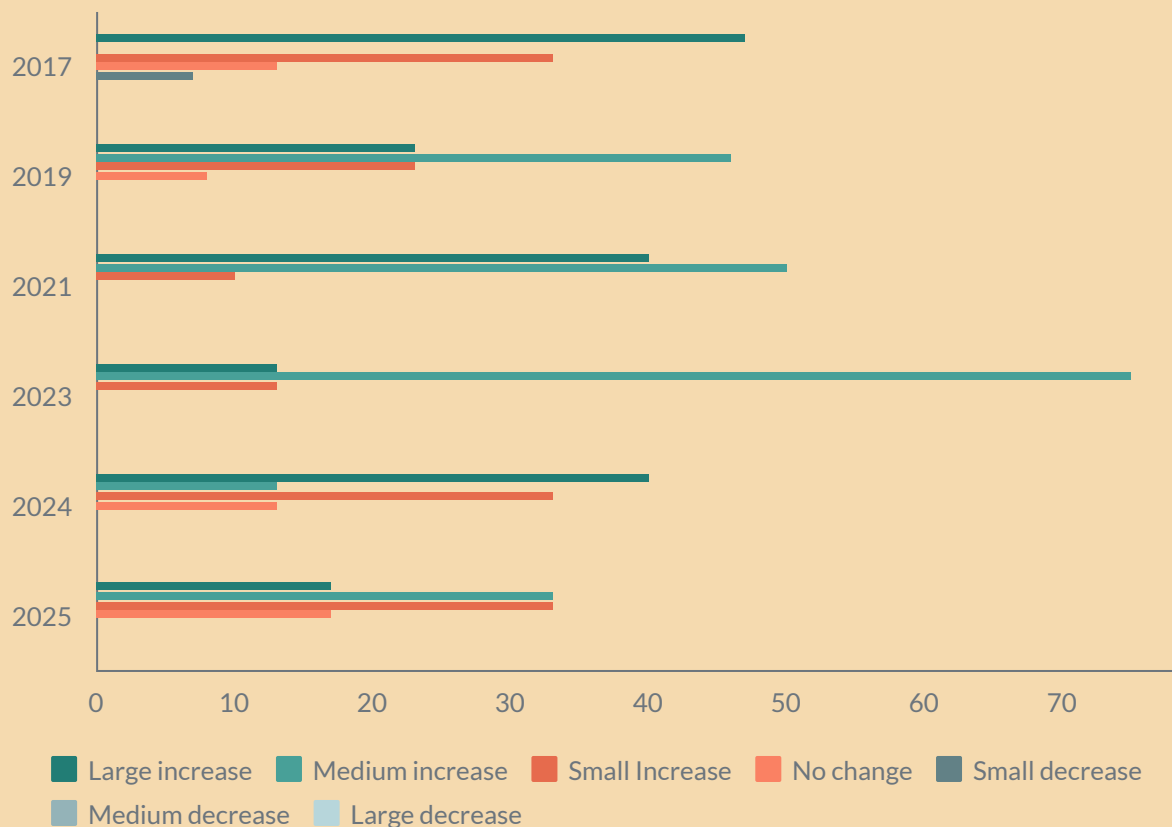
Clients were offered sessions from 6 to up to open ended. With the open ended removed the average was 14, so it seems the overall sessions offered has slightly decreased.

15b. How many sessions did your clients usually attend on average?

Year	Min	Max	Average
2019	2	25	11
2021	6	33	13
2023	10	26	14
2024	9	24	14
2025	5	24	13

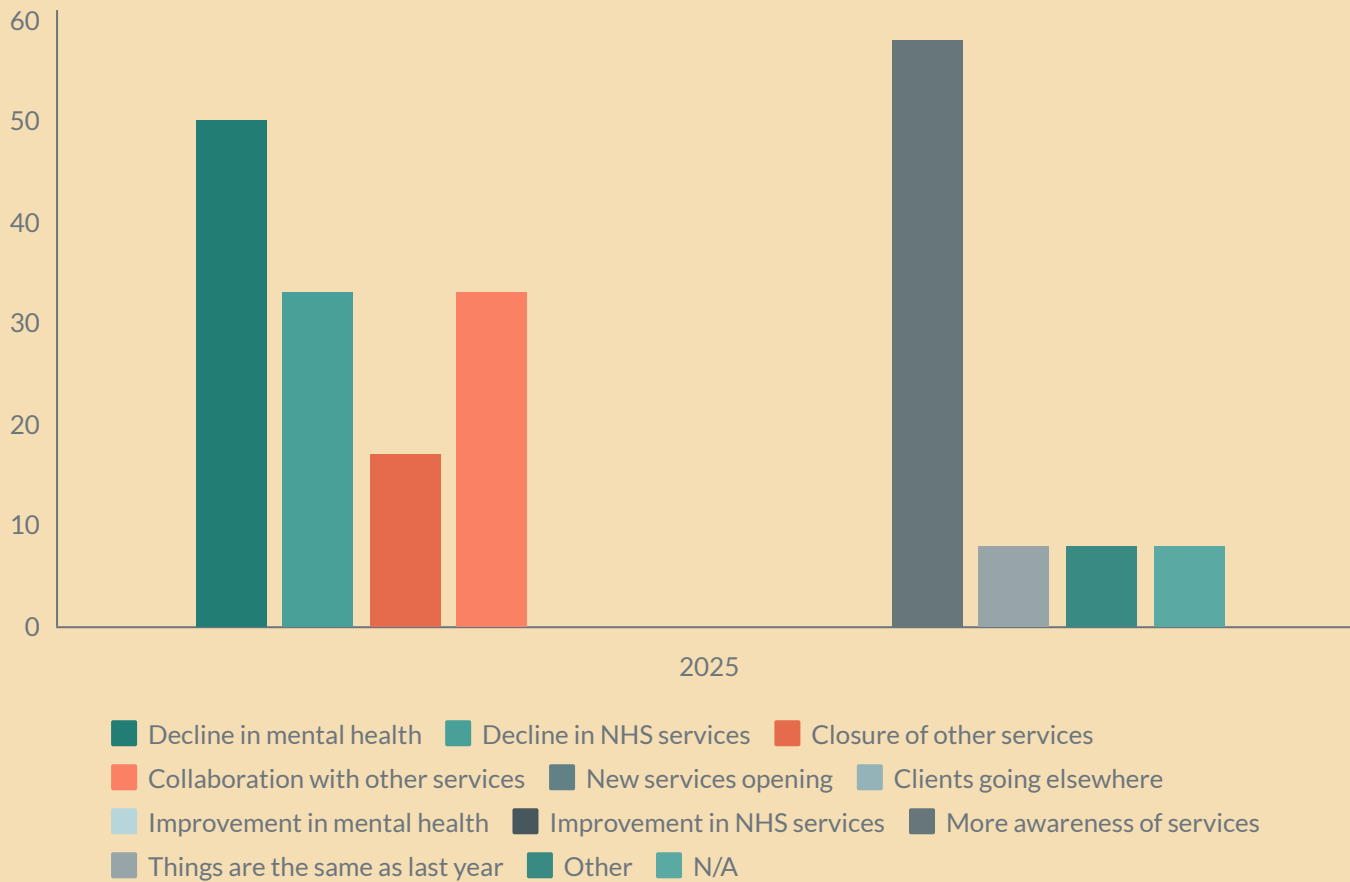
Clients attended between 5 and 24 sessions (on average per organisation) with the average of all COSCA Recognised Organisations that responded of 13. The number of sessions attended continues to be pretty stable.

16. Has your organisation experienced an increase or decrease in demand for support over the last 12 months?



All COSCA Recognised Organisations saw no change or an increase in demand from last year with 33% reporting a medium or small increase. It looks like demand for counselling and counselling skills is still on the increase, but that increase has continued to slow.

16b. What, in your opinion, is causing this?



This year this question was expanded to look at the possible causes of an increase in demand. The highest (58%) was awareness of services, but decline in mental health (50%), decline in NHS services (33%), closure of other services (17%) also featured. This appears to be slightly mitigated by collaboration with other services (33%).

CYP especially need has increased by over 50%.

**Alyson Smith
Lochaber Hope**

Despite the small increase in counselling this year on last, the organisation is facing fierce competition from others in the market place that have bigger marketing budgets eg Better Help.

Anon

17a. In what way(s) do you generate income for your organisation?



Donations are still the most common source of funding used by along with local authority 58%. This is closely followed by independent trust and charitable fund (42%).

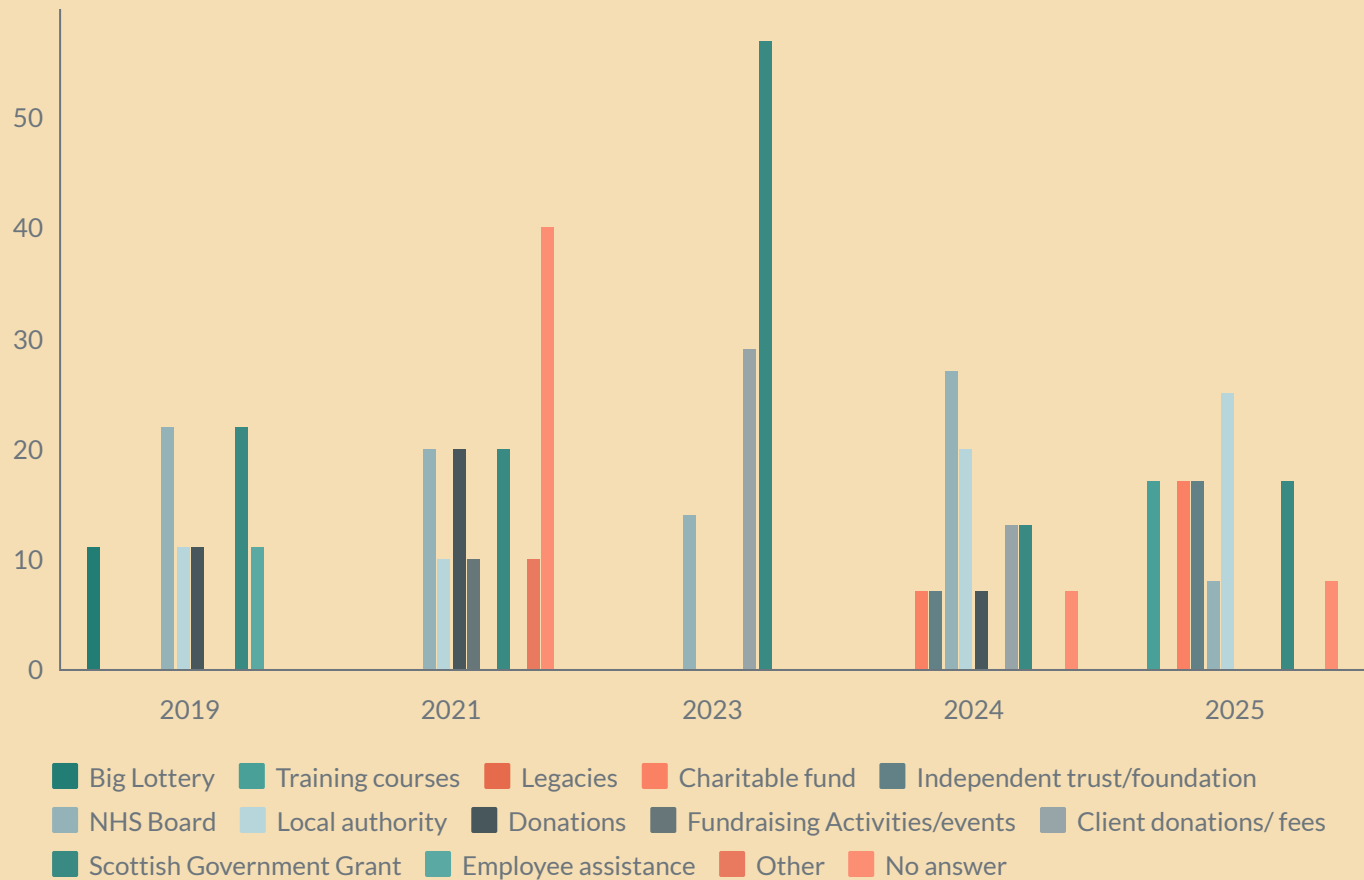
Ensuring the financial sustainability of our services is challenging. Our counselling services currently bring in an income of around £2million. There are a over 35 income sources, including individual client donations, fixed fee counselling in addition to tenders, grants and trusts and support from the Church of Scotland. A few of significant challenges are:

- The gap between our income and our costs (over £2million)
- The number of income sources to manage and report on, currently over 35 sources
- The short-term nature of much of this funding.

This means that a high percentage of management team time is spent chasing income to ensure sustainability of our services.

We try to be creative and entrepreneurial in our approach. For example, in many of our services, we offer a Fixed-Fee service at £50-60 per session, dependant on local competitor pricing. This service offers fast and flexible access to counselling with one of our qualified and experienced counsellors but also helps fund our donation-based service (a type of pay it forward model), so we can help provide counselling to those who might otherwise struggle to access support. It also helps us reduce our donation-based waiting lists.

17b. Which of those is your main source of income?



This becomes a lot more interesting when looking at the main source of income. Although a lot of COSCA Recognised Organisations apply for local authority funding their main sources of income are quite varied.

18. Is there anything of which you are particularly proud to have achieved in the past year?

- The year has seen a lot of change within the service. We changed the staff structure last year, to split off the counselling administration to a separate post. This has been very successful in ensuring effective management of referrals/clients and liaison with counsellors.
 - We reached the end of a double maternity cover post for the Counselling Lead, which had two maternity cover staff. As the original postholder then gave notice, we have recruited for a new permanent Lead. The team has worked very collaboratively this year to ensure all support needs for counsellors and placement counsellors were met in both the interim periods between Leads.
 - Launched a new website for the whole charity. It contains enhanced information for counselling clients, more information available on specific counsellors and how counselling works. Also has the option for a healthcare worker to make a referral to counselling on behalf of a client, not previously possible
- We are in the process of moving the whole charity to new premises, a more permanent home – where we have both our Baby Bank and counselling service in the one premises. However careful layout ensures there is no crossover, and counselling clients will not be aware of the Baby Bank service. Will give us two counselling rooms with unlimited usage from 8am-7pm Mon to Fri.

Anon

To start to introduce the pay what you can community café to our community.

Alyson Smith
Lochaber Hope

Being Awarded the Investors in People Employer of the Year 2024 Award.
Having retained both Talking Therapies and Family Support Service contracts following competitive tender.
Significant contribution to achieving MAT Standards

Angela Roberst
ADSSWS

Increased funding allowing us to create outreach teams increasing access in more rural areas.

Ann Donnan Safe
Space

Project shield: a new counselling project for veterans.

Cheryl Douglas FASS

In line with CrossReach values of respect, support, acceptance, inclusivity and teamwork, the Counselling teams continue to deliver high quality services to over 2000 clients, provide fantastic and well scaffolded learning experiences for volunteers and staff members alike. Our services are as individual as the communities they serve but across them all there is a cohesive sense of CrossReach counselling as a team. Together we are working to adapt and develop in an ever-changing, challenging environment.

Christina Smiley
CrossReach
Counselling Scotland

We have leaned into diversifying clinical and counselling skills services (such as reflective practice) and expanding corporate partnerships. We have improved automation to create greater efficiencies in the offering of our services. We have reviewed contracts and services to reduce costs.
Significant expansion in training delivery.

We have a great team who are achieving amazing success despite a significant withdrawal of government funding last year which needs replacing.

Anon

Started to provide art therapy for women – previously only available for children and young people.

Kate McCormack Fife
Woman's Aid

Last year, we carried out a Strength-Based Needs Analysis (SBNA) using a comprehensive methodology that combined both quantitative and qualitative approaches. This process included focus groups, individual interviews, and four consultation surveys targeting key groups: clients, stakeholders, loved ones, and the wider public.

The SBNA Report generated several recommendations, many of which have already been actioned to better align our services with the needs and expectations of respondents. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with participants consistently highlighting the profound impact our services have had on their personal growth, recovery journeys, and sense of belonging within the community.

Participants frequently described their experiences as life-changing, praising the welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, as well as the wide variety of activities available. Recovery and group meetings were particularly valued for providing structure and fostering connection, while therapeutic workshops—including yoga, meditation, and emotional regulation—were highlighted as especially beneficial. The combination of psychological and psychosocial interventions, alongside access to counselling, was also noted as a particularly impactful and much-appreciated aspect of the service.

This SBNA exercise provided valuable insight into the increased awareness and positive influence of our organisation on health and wellbeing across both urban and rural communities. The testimonies were humbling for our entire staff team, who deeply appreciated the recognition of their compassion, commitment, and dedication. For the organisation as a whole, this affirmation of impact was both encouraging and inspiring.

Margaret Halbert
Liber8

Adjusting to several staffing changes due to one resignation and another maternity leave. We successfully recruited to fill these posts and inducted the new staff, to ensure smooth service delivery for our counselling clients.

We designed and delivered a new 2-day training in “Critical Incident Response” for counsellors.

We delivered COSCA Certificate in Supervision in Dundee for the first time.

Rachel Weiss Rowan
Consultancy

This past year has been one of significant growth and resilience for ACI Recovery Services. We are especially proud of the dedication shown by our team of over 20 highly skilled volunteer counsellors, who collectively donated more than £155,000 worth of professional time to support people across the Highlands.

Despite increasing demand for our services, we successfully offered over 4,400 counselling sessions – a 65% increase on the previous year – alongside recovery coaching, family support through CRAFT, and a growing programme of nature-based therapies.

We are also proud of the progress made in strengthening our governance and organisational structure, completing our first organisational membership annual review, and embedding new systems and quality frameworks to ensure that our services remain ethical, safe, and client-led. These achievements reflect the collective passion of our counsellors, staff, and board in responding to the ongoing addiction and mental health crisis within our communities."

Sharan Brown ACI

This year we are particularly proud of how FDAMH's Counselling Service has evolved to meet the needs of the whole family system through the addition of both the Young Person's Service (YPS) and Family Counselling.

These additions have enabled us to provide a truly holistic, lifespan approach to emotional wellbeing and early intervention, ensuring there is now “no wrong door” for individuals or families seeking support.

We are also proud of maintaining high clinical standards and reduced waiting times, despite increasing demand, through a combination of revised workflows, integrated supervision, and strong cross-team collaboration.

Client feedback has shown significant improvements in confidence, relationships, and emotional regulation, reflecting the positive impact of this joined-up approach.

Val McInroy FDAMH

19. Have you found anything particularly helpful or inspiring during the past year?

We took part in four health visitor engagement events across the city at the start of the year. Board and staff supported these, and they were very helpful to connect with existing and potential referrers and referrals organisations.

Anon

The input and support from our board has been exceptional.

**Alyson Smith
Lochaber Hope**

Significant contribution to achieving MAT Standards

**Angela Roberts
ADSSWS**

We are always inspired by the dedication and commitment of our volunteer counsellors.

**Ann Donnan Safe
Space**

The continued dedication of our teams and the impact our work has on enhancing our clients' lives.

**Christina Smiley
CrossReach
Counselling Scotland**

*The ability of the staff team to step up to the challenges of recent times.
The positive comments received from clients.*

Anon

Feedback from women using the service.

**Kate McCormack Fife
Women's Aid**

As noted above, the feedback from the SBNA, was both helpful and extremely inspiring. In addition, the strides and progress of many of the people using our services continue to inspire our work.

**Margaret Halbert
Liber8**

The dedication of our counselling and admin staff. The enthusiasm of our students.

**Rachel Weiss Rowan
Consultancy**

*One of the most inspiring aspects of this year has been witnessing the resilience and courage of our clients and their families. Every day, we see individuals facing trauma, grief, and addiction – and making incredible steps towards recovery. Their determination reminds us why we exist and drives our continued commitment to deliver compassionate, person-centred support.
Equally inspiring has been the unwavering generosity of our volunteer counsellors, who continue to offer their time, expertise, and professionalism to ensure that no one is turned away due to financial barriers. The support of our partners, funders, and wider Highland community has also been invaluable, helping us sustain our services during a period of significant financial and operational pressures.
Finally, connecting with other organisations through COSCA membership and quality assurance processes has been hugely helpful. Sharing learning and best practice has enabled us to strengthen our own delivery and feel part of a larger movement working towards ethical, effective, and sustainable counselling provision.*

Sharan Brown ACI

It has been both helpful and inspiring to witness the collaboration and shared learning that has emerged between our adult, young person, and family counsellors.

Working together has deepened our collective understanding of the interconnected nature of mental health across generations, reinforcing the value of supporting families as whole systems rather than individuals in isolation.

Feedback from clients has been a major source of inspiration particularly hearing how young people and families have felt “seen, heard, and understood,” and how counselling has strengthened communication and resilience at home.

The commitment of our practitioners to continuous professional development and reflective practice, has also been a key driver of quality and inspiration within the team.

Val McInroy FDAMH

20. What are your hopes for next year?

- Settle into our new premises with new Counselling Lead. Potentially increase placement numbers due to savings in premises costs (as no longer per session rental)
- Continue to build on our specialist training programme (including CPD training on working with men and dads)
 - Enhance our equality and diversity monitoring
 - Establish secure continued funding - introduce a donations-based element to the service, ensuring it does not become a barrier to accessing the service
- Data review project – seek lottery funding to undertake a review of how we use and analyse our data

Anon

To embed our staff team and volunteers, develop the café, and have our internal organisational structure tight.

Alyson Smith
Lochaber Hope

Maintaining Investors in People Accreditation.

Angela Roberts
ADSSWS

To continue as we are.

Ann Donnan Safe
Space

To continue to develop counselling projects.

Cheryl Douglas FASS

Secure financial sustainability for all our services
Evolve our service structures to future proof support for our clients
Continue to retain / recruit /train the right people in the right place with the right skills to provide the support that our clients/ teams need to develop.
Have an opportunity to reflect and review on our success and areas for development so that we can move forward together in a healthy, sustainable way.

Christina Smiley
CrossReach
Counselling Scotland

Continued growth

Anon

To continue to deliver a service and to secure longer-term funding.

Kate McCormack Fife
Women's Aid

We are currently undergoing a period of restructuring, during which we are carefully reviewing all aspects of the organisation – from service delivery and succession planning to governance and long-term sustainability. We recognise that external factors, such as the forthcoming national election and the conclusion of both the National Mission and the National Collaborative, will inevitably influence this process.

Our aim is to update and strengthen every area of the organisation, building a sustainable model that will future-proof our work and establish a solid foundation for the next 5–10 years. This is detailed and often time-consuming work, and while progress may not always be immediately visible, it is essential to ensuring our resilience and readiness for the future.

At present, high demand on staff capacity limits the pace of this work. Senior staff are heavily engaged in meeting immediate operational needs, which reduces the time available for long-term strategic planning. In an ideal scenario, securing funding to support our core functions would enable senior staff to step back from day-to-day operations and dedicate focused time to developing a robust organisational structure. Unfortunately, this type of funding is not currently available, meaning we must progress gradually within existing capacity, even if this extends the timeframe.

In addition to the organisational review, we have identified two further priority areas where we see opportunities to design new services tailored to community needs. Once these models have been developed, our focus will shift to securing the necessary funding to bring them to life.

Margaret Halbert
Liber8

To continue delivering the COSCA Certificates in Supervision and in Counselling Skills.

To continue to acquire new employee counselling contracts in the third sector. I wonder how many COSCA members provide employee counselling services for their volunteers and employees? Is there a way that COSCA could let them know that Rowan provides such a service to many third sector organisations perhaps? Together with other COSCA members who provide such services, of course.

Rachel Weiss Rowan
Consultancy

Looking ahead, our priority is to continue delivering accessible, high-quality counselling and recovery services while expanding our reach into more rural and remote Highland communities.

Next year, we plan to:

- Strengthen our volunteer programme by recruiting and supporting more qualified counsellors and trainees
 - Grow our recovery coaching and family support services, ensuring families have the tools and guidance they need
 - Develop our nature-based programmes, including our Roots of Resilience equine therapy and Heilan Harbour wellbeing initiatives, recognising the powerful role that connection to nature plays in recovery
 - Invest in digital and hybrid delivery models to reduce barriers to support, particularly for people living in isolated areas
 - Build stronger financial sustainability by diversifying funding streams, increasing partnerships, and developing community-led initiatives
- Our ultimate hope is to be there for everyone who needs us, without long waits, and to continue challenging stigma while advocating for better access to trauma-informed, person-centred addiction support across the Highlands.

Sharan Brown ACI

Looking ahead, our aim is to further strengthen the integration of counselling pathways across FDAMH, ensuring seamless transitions between individual, young person, and family support.

We plan to:

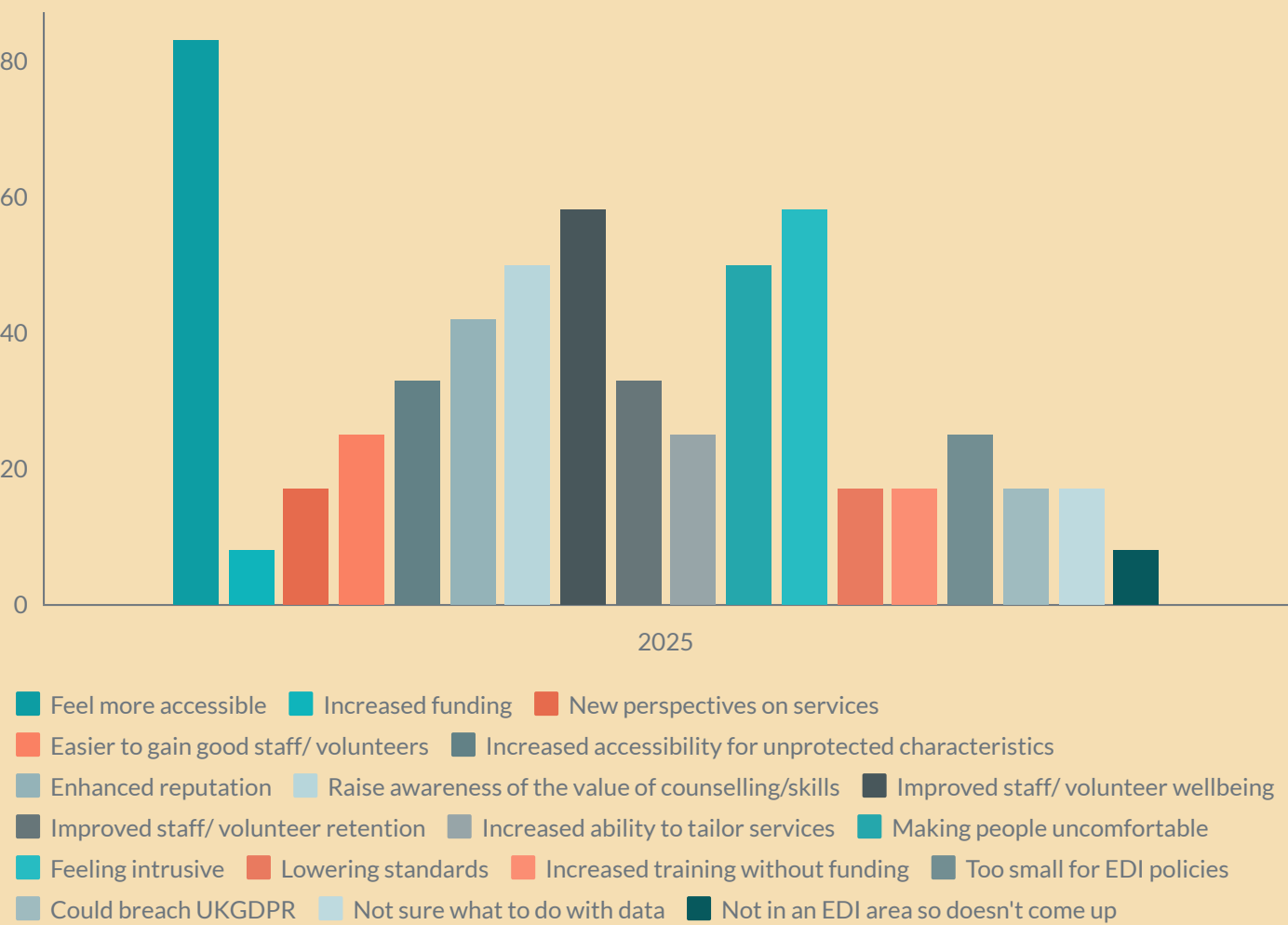
- Embed shared assessment and referral systems to ensure clients are offered the most appropriate form of counselling or family support at the earliest stage.
- Expand partnership working with schools, health professionals, and community organisations to increase access to counselling for young people and families in need.
- Develop group therapeutic options (e.g. themed psychoeducational and family communication groups) to complement one-to-one work.
- Continue to invest in practitioner development, ensuring we maintain the highest ethical standards and trauma-informed practice across all counselling disciplines.

Val McInroy FDAMH

Some areas do not need to be explored every year, but are very relevant at the time. To capture and share this information COSCA ask a guest question.

Guest Question:

What are your hopes and fears around this increasing focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion?



The majority of respondents thought that collecting EDI data would make them feel more accessible (83%), with 58% feeling it would improve staff and volunteer wellbeing. However, 58% also felt that asking for EDI data is intrusive and half thought that it makes people feel uncomfortable.

CrossReach has developed a mandatory online training programme on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) to ensure all team members are as well informed and trained as is possible to support our clients. CrossReach counselling is committed to working in a way that incorporates EDI considerations as part of normal working practice. A number of our teams attended EDI focused training last year including COSCA Trainers Event. These trainings are helping us to consider for example: How we can become aware of and minimise the impact of our own cultural blind/ deaf and dumb spots. Ethnic inequalities in maternal health - how we can improve outcomes for women and their families from the poorest backgrounds; women from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups. Working with children in care to reduce the impact of trauma -how our counselling services can work in a more integrative way with our care and education services to improve outcomes for care experienced young people. Whole person approach which embeds EDI as standard from initial contact, through our counselling agreement and on to endings.

Christina Smiley
CrossReach
Counselling Scotland

As noted in a previous question, we previously collected a wide range of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) monitoring data, primarily to meet the requirements of statutory contracts. However, we found that some clients considered the level of questioning to be intrusive and irrelevant to their suitability for counselling – which, in truth, it was. Once those contracts ended and the requirement was removed, we reviewed our approach and decided to reduce monitoring to core demographic information: sex and age. This enables us to identify broad trends without creating unnecessary barriers for clients. A similar challenge arose last year in relation to a government-funded, non-counselling project. An additional four pages of EDI monitoring questions were introduced, voluntarily initially with a view to becoming mandatory. When discussed with existing participants, this was not well received and, in fact, was beginning to act as a barrier to engagement. Participants felt the level of questioning was unacceptable, in part due to the granular level of breakdown of certain questions. Following consultation, we decided not to collect this additional data, respecting the wishes of those involved and the understanding that enforcing it could have brought additional challenges to staff or potentially change the relationship between staff and clients. Ideally, we would like EDI monitoring to be a tool that does support accessibility and helps ensure that counselling and psychotherapy services are truly representative of the communities we serve. However, this is only achievable when data requirements are sensible, proportionate, and sensitive to the context. If handled poorly, monitoring risks becoming counterproductive – acting as a barrier to participation rather than promoting inclusion, which is the very opposite of its intended purpose.

Margaret Halbert
Liber8

We welcome COSCA's increased focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and see it as an essential step towards ensuring counselling services are truly accessible to everyone, regardless of their background, identity, or circumstances. Our hope is that this focus will encourage greater representation within the counselling workforce, promote inclusive policies, and support organisations like ours to better meet the needs of individuals from diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. Living and working in the Highlands, we know that people face additional barriers due to rurality, stigma, poverty, and limited access to services. We want to ensure that no one is excluded from receiving support because of their identity, location, or life experience. At the same time, we recognise some challenges. As a small charity relying heavily on volunteer counsellors, many of whom already give significant professional time in-kind, we must balance implementing robust EDI policies with our limited resources. There is a need for ongoing guidance, training, and tools from COSCA to ensure organisations like ours can embed inclusive practices effectively and meaningfully, without creating additional pressures on already stretched teams. Our greatest fear would be that EDI becomes a 'tick-box' exercise, rather than a genuine opportunity to listen to underrepresented voices and shape services around them. We believe COSCA's leadership can play a vital role in supporting smaller organisations to make lasting, practical change, helping us all work towards a sector where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

Sharan Brown ACI

Conclusions

Increase in demand for counselling appears to be inversely matched by funding that is increasingly time consuming and difficult to apply for, gain and continues to be erratic and uncertain. This, alongside poor provision by the NHS paints a pretty bleak picture of counselling and counselling skills in Scotland.

However, seeing the hard work and determination of COSCA Recognised Organisations and their dedicated teams of staff and volunteers can only make us feel proud of what they have achieved. It was wonderful to hear about the impacts in CrossReach and Liber8's surveys and those that were briefly referenced by other organisations. I hope that you are all incredibly proud of what you continue to achieve in increasingly challenging circumstances.

EDI seems to be a big topic that is having multiple effects on COSCA Recognised Organisations. EDI data, although incredibly helpful for highlighting under served groups, can be difficult to collect and risk feeling intrusive. The overwhelming message is that COSCA Recognised Organisations want any data to be collected sensitively and result in meaningful changes to their services, rather than just being a "tick-box" exercise.

Thank you to everyone that was able to take part in this year's survey. Hopefully this helps, in some small way, to highlight your hard work and dedication to counselling and counselling skills provision in Scotland.

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