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Mullally endorses health initiatives

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THE financial strain on the NHS could be alleviated by church-led projects that recognised the connections between physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, a new report endorsed by the Bishop of London, the Rt Revd Sarah Mullally, says.

Ten case studies are explored in the report, *The Church's Impact on Health and Care*, launched by the Cinnamon Network last month. It concludes that they are "cost-effective solutions that can help to address the nation's major health needs", and identifies benefits, including the tackling of isolation.

"Without the restrictions that many health services are bound by, church-led initiatives can align both health and social care and, in the process, serve the needs of the whole person," it says. "For example, by alleviating an emotional need, the chronic pain an individual is experiencing may be relieved. . . There are inherent links between the physical, social, spiritual, and emotional well-being of an individual that church-led initiatives are able to make."

The projects include Mega Fitness, which helps churches to run community fitness programmes; Lyrics and Lunch, for those living with dementia, and their carers; and ED Pastors, chaplaincy volunteers who work in A&E departments. While acknowledging that it remains "a challenge to quantify the financial benefits" of such projects, the report emphasises that they tend to be inexpensive. The Cinnamon Network estimates that the average cost of setting up a project that it recognises is £650, with average yearly running costs of £280. This is largely due to their reliance on volunteers.

Bishop Mullally welcomed the report as an "important contribution". She said: "If we are able to improve our health and the health of the community, we can contribute to the better use of . . . limited resources."

The research was funded by the Allchurches Trust.

This week, the organisation Safe Families for Children commented on a survey of 500 vulnerable families who had been supported by its volunteers, and suggested that "significant mental-health benefits" had been achieved (News, 25 August 2017).