

HEALTHY LIVES, HEALTHY PEOPLE: THE GOVERNMENT'S PLANS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

This leaflet explains our plans for helping people lead healthier lives, and how you can have your say about them.

What is public health?

Public health is about everything society does to prevent people getting ill, rather than treating sickness. We take for granted the huge advances in public health made in the past. Dirty water, hunger and infection are no longer major killers here.

On average, people in England are healthier and live longer than ever before. Nowadays “diseases of lifestyle” like heart disease, obesity and depression are the issue. Smoking, drinking, lack of exercise and poor diet play a big part.

What is the problem?

Poor health is still a big problem. It shortens and damages people's lives, harms our economy and puts a huge burden on the NHS and taxpayers. Much of it can be prevented, and many of the root causes are social.

This is about how we live our lives, but also about our position in society. Rich people live longer and have better health than poor people. Low income, unemployment, loneliness and discrimination are bad for people's physical and mental health. As a society we have focused a lot on cure and not enough on prevention. We need to do better.

Who should do what?

The health of the nation is everyone's responsibility.

The government must make sure we have high quality health services and that we prepare for health emergencies like flu epidemics and chemical spills. The government is also in charge of other policies that affect health such as housing, jobs, welfare benefits, pensions, transport, environment and education.

The government cannot force people to live healthy lives. People can be helped and encouraged to make healthier choices. Local communities working together, and with a good understanding of human behaviour, will achieve more than extra laws and lectures from the government. Local councils have a critical role to play. Business and industry such as the food

and drink industry has a big responsibility to help us make healthier choices by encouraging healthier eating and sensible drinking.

What will change?

A new service called Public Health England will bring together the things that have to be done at national level, such as preparing for emergencies. From 2012, Public Health England as part of the Department of Health will have responsibility for protecting the health of the population.

From 2013, councils will be responsible for public health in local areas. Their job will be to help improve people's health, particularly those with the worst health. Directors of Public Health will be in charge of this work, in partnership with the NHS, local communities, charities and businesses. It makes sense for councils to have this duty as they are already in charge of many things that affect health.

Councils where people's health is worst will receive more money than other areas where health is better as they have more to do. Councils will be rewarded with extra funds for some of the improvements they make in people's health.

Unlike in the past, funding for public health will be identified as a separate budget so that the government and councils will only use this for public health.

Your GP will also be asked to play a bigger part in preventing ill-health, not just treating sickness.

The Government will work with the business and industry (including food, drink, leisure and lifestyle) through a voluntary Public Health Responsibility Deal. The government will look at a range of ways to encourage business and industry to have a more positive impact on health before considering more laws and regulations.

What will this mean for.....?

Parents, children and young people

- A good start in life is vital for health. The government aims to end child poverty by 2020. We will increase the number of health visitors, and provide extra support for families most in need, including through Sure Start Children's Centres.
- We will encourage employers to make it easier for mothers to breast-feed at work.
- There will be a new school sports competition linked to the Olympics.

Older people

- We will continue to offer NHS health checks to people aged 40 to 74.
- There will be local schemes to help and encourage older people stay fit and active, enjoy their environment and live independently at home.
- There will be more support for carers.
- We will improve living standards by increasing pensions in line with inflation or average earnings (whichever is the higher).

Local communities and the environment

- There will be local schemes to encourage more walking and cycling
- There will be new protections for public green spaces to encourage recreation, community activities and food growing.

Smoking

- We will keep the current smoke free laws.
- It will be illegal to sell cigarettes and tobacco from vending machines after 1 October 2011.
- The government is looking at other options, including whether cigarettes should be sold in plain packaging. It will publish a tobacco control plan shortly.

Alcohol

- There will be tougher penalties for clubs, bars and pubs and shops that sell alcohol to children or contribute to alcohol related crime and anti social behaviour.
- There will be tougher controls on selling cut price alcohol.

Have your say

This is only a summary of our plans; you can find more detail at

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_121941

We want to hear your views and suggestions. Please make your voice heard and contact us by 8 March 2011.

This leaflet applies to England only. It has been produced by the Department of Health and put into plain English with the help of the health and social care charity National Voices.