



# The Association of Directors of Public Health

## LSE-Lancet Commission 'Future of the NHS': Consultation Response

The Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) is the representative body for Directors of Public Health (DsPH) in the UK. It seeks to improve and protect the health of the population through collating and presenting the views of DsPH; advising on public health policy and legislation at a local, regional, national and international level; facilitating a support network for DsPH; and providing opportunities for DsPH to develop professional practice. The Association has a rich heritage, its origins dating back 160 years. It is a collaborative organisation working in partnership with others to maximise the voice for public health.

### **1. From your/organisation's perspective what are the biggest challenges facing the NHS in the immediate future and also looking forward over the next 20 years?**

1.1. To address the burden on the NHS, it will be necessary to reduce the number of years lived in poor health and disability across the population. This cannot be realised through better health care, and is unlikely to be achieved even with optimal secondary prevention. The problem is more fundamental and requires a reversal of the increase in obesity, continued reduction of smoking, and changes in the patterns of daily living of the population.

1.2. The next decade is likely to see a continuation of the need to address challenges related to key public health issues such as obesity, smoking, mental health and alcohol harm.

- Although smoking rates have declined in recent years, in the UK 17% of adults still smoke and about half of all regular cigarette smokers will eventually die from a smoking related disease.<sup>1</sup>
- Alcohol was 61% more affordable in 2013 than in 1980, and currently more than nine million people drink more than the recommended daily limits. The cost of alcohol use on the NHS is high, with alcohol a causal factor in more than 60 medical conditions, and responsible for a high percentage of hospital admissions.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, there were 1.1 million estimated admissions related to alcohol consumption in 2015/16, which is four per cent more than 2014/15.<sup>3</sup>
- If current trends continue almost three in four adults will be overweight or obese by 2035.<sup>4</sup> This would result in about 440,000 obesity-related diseases in the UK per year, including 257,200 cases of type 2 diabetes, 101,000 cases of coronary heart disease, 43,600 cases of stroke and 38,500 cases of obesity related cancer. Strikingly, this would mean 4.62 million additional cases of diabetes over the next 20 years.<sup>5</sup>
- One in six people have a common mental health problem and it is estimated that by 2030, there will be approximately two million more adults in the UK with mental health problems than there were in 2013.<sup>6</sup> Poor mental health as with all health issues has a broad range of social determinants. Societal issues such as the current crisis in affordable housing and potential economic insecurity as a result of Brexit may lead to increased mental health issues in the population.

- 1.3. Our population is ageing. By 2040 nearly one in seven people is projected to be aged over 75 and with this will come a higher prevalence of non-communicable diseases of older age such as cancer, diabetes, and dementia.<sup>7</sup> It has been estimated that 36% of people aged 65-74 and 47% of those aged over 75 in the UK have a limiting longstanding illness.<sup>8</sup> The number of people with multiple long-term conditions is growing rapidly and a future health system must be equipped to care for people with increasingly complex needs.
- 1.4. Health inequalities are currently estimated to cost the NHS a total of at least £20 billion each year.<sup>9</sup> The most recent data show wide inequalities across all indicators related to child health, mental health, smoking, alcohol misuse and tuberculosis as well as years of healthy life and life expectancy and there is no trend indicating a clear narrowing of these inequalities.<sup>10</sup> Although large general improvements in population health have been achieved in the last decade, systematic health inequalities still exist across the UK and will continue to present significant challenges for the NHS.
- 1.5. Given this context, improving the public's health will continue to be a crucially important challenge. Changes of this kind are not simply behavioural changes but are shaped by life course and circumstances. An approach is required that addresses both those fundamental elements and the more proximate causes at a primary preventive stage. The challenge for the NHS will be to recognise that it needs to facilitate and support change in those upstream factors.
- 1.6. Prevention should be placed at the centre of practice within the NHS. This requires more than just financial investment; it requires culture change across the whole system and behaviour change amongst health and care professionals (see below).

## **2. Any other issues your organisation wishes to highlight to our commission?**

- 2.1. The Five Year Forward View articulated the need for a 'radical upgrade in public health and prevention', but this has not been delivered. The financial challenges facing the NHS, while clearly needing to be tackled, can sometimes overshadow the need to invest in preventive initiatives. A sustainable NHS cannot be achieved without a sustainable social care system and investment in public health and prevention.
- 2.2. Public health funding in England will be cut by 9.7% by 2020/21, £331 million in cash terms in addition to the £200 million in-year cut in 2015/16.<sup>11</sup> If there continues to be a lack of investment in public health and prevention this will continue to put pressure on the health and social care budget. For example, research conducted by the charity Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) concluded that current and ex-smokers who require care in later life because of smoking-related illnesses cost society an additional £1.4bn each year across England.<sup>12</sup>
- 2.3. Investment in preventive initiatives paired with an effective approach to encouraging self-management of long term conditions is key for both improving the health of the public and the sustainability of the NHS and social care system.

- 2.4. The NHS needs to step up and recognise its role in prevention. A more collaborative and holistic approach to primary, secondary and tertiary prevention is needed across local systems, with a focus on wellbeing and, where possible, self-management. It was disappointing to see limited reference to the importance of public health and prevention in the recent health care workforce strategy for England, Facing the Facts, Shaping the Future.
- 2.5. The NHS workforce can play a key role in prevention by supporting behaviour change in people who are well but at risk of ill health, as well as in people who have a health condition and are at risk of deterioration or developing other conditions. Staff should be able not only to signpost and refer individuals to the appropriate services, but to empower and support patients and carers with self-management and self-care e.g. through health coaching.
- 2.6. Public health training for healthcare professionals is limited and represents a missed opportunity. The education and training that healthcare professionals receive both before they qualify and throughout their careers should embed and reinforce the importance of public health and prevention. All staff should have a foundation in health coaching (e.g. Making Every Contact Count/All Our Health) to facilitate conversations about risk factors and staying healthy.
- 2.7. In order to make progress on prevention a truly whole system, an integrated approach to health and care which encompasses the social determinants of health is needed. Integration needs to extend beyond the NHS and social care and take a place-based approach. This involves working collaboratively with a wide range of partners including the police, fire service, housing services, planning teams and schools, with a collective responsibility to address the factors that impact on health and ensure that people can lead healthy and fulfilling lives.
- 2.8. New and emerging health and care systems such as Sustainability and Transformation Partnerships (STPs), Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and increased devolution have a key role to play in prevention and tackling health inequality. Clarity is needed over the responsibilities and the power of STPs to achieve tangible improvements to health outcomes. Directors of Public Health report that the STP process is in danger of being driven by specific issues facing the NHS (particularly the need for the NHS to make efficiency savings) and does not reflect a whole system approach, with a lack of consideration of the wider determinants of health. Addressing the wider determinants of health is crucial for achieving reductions in health inequalities, which was one of the key original goals of the STP process.

**Association of Directors of Public Health**  
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<sup>1</sup> ASH, *Smoking Statistics* (2017).

<sup>2</sup> Alcohol Concern, *Alcohol Statistics* (2016).

<sup>3</sup> NHS Digital, *Statistics on alcohol, England 2017* (2017).

<sup>4</sup> Cancer Research UK and UK Health Forum, *Tipping the Scales: Why Preventing Obesity Makes Economic Sense* (2016).

<sup>5</sup> Cancer Research UK and UK Health Forum, *Tipping the Scales: Why Preventing Obesity Makes Economic Sense* (2016).

<sup>6</sup> NHS England, *The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health* (2016).

<sup>7</sup> Government Office for Science, *Future of an Aging Population* (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Age UK, *Later Life in the United Kingdom* (2018).

<sup>9</sup> NHS England, *Challenging health inequalities: Support for CCGs*, (2017).

<sup>10</sup> Public Health England, *Public Health Outcomes Framework: Health Equity Report, Focus on Ethnicity* (2017)

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<sup>11</sup> Local Government Association, *Public health funding in 2016/17 and 2017/18* (2016)

<sup>12</sup> Action on Smoking and Health Ready Reckoner Tool, updated 2017, available here: <http://ash.org.uk/category/information-andresources/local-resources/>