

because prevention is better than cure

## Annual Review 2018 - 2019

### Our vision

A country where people live longer, healthier lives – instead of our health often being a postcode lottery.

### Our mission

To encourage everyone who can (including government, businesses, employers and the NHS) to make healthy choices the easy choices for people – and to encourage ordinary people to make healthy choices a personal and political priority.

### Why this matters

We need to bridge the divide in the nation's health. Living in a less affluent area shouldn't mean you're likely to die younger and spend more years in poor health.

Wherever you are born, and whatever your ethnic origin, gender or social class, you should have a reasonable chance of living a long and healthy life. Recognising that prevention is better than cure is key to achieving this.

This will also help free up potential - with more people able to contribute positively, more actively and for longer.

### Who we are

We're a health charity, recognised by HMRC, which launched in 2015, made up of expert volunteers from a range of backgrounds, in particular health and medical research.

Our guiding principle is that prevention is better than cure.

### Partnership working

We are currently working in partnership with:

- King's College London on research into student mental health.
- Our sister charity, Age Watch, to ensure evidence-based information is available to increase the chances of people living long and healthy lives.
- The Obesity Health Alliance, to encourage the government to give higher priority to tackling obesity.
- The Richmond Group of Charities, to move public health up the government's agenda.

### Our Long Term Priorities

**Make healthy choices the easy choices for people** – by making healthier food and drink more widely available, by increasing opportunities for mental and physical exercise, and by continued initiatives to make it easier to stop smoking and to keep alcohol consumption to reasonably safe levels.

**More focus on child health** – because what happens to us in the early years of life from conception onwards can influence our health and our weight for years to come.

**Greater support for those at risk** – to avoid health inequalities being carried forward from one generation to another.

**A true National HEALTH Service**, which gives higher priority to preventing people from falling ill, not simply treating them once they fall ill.

### Current Projects

**Health at Work** – Initiatives here can be good for both employers and employees, potentially reducing sickness absence, boosting morale and productivity and improving staff retention.

Our draft Employers Guide to Health at Work has received very positive initial feedback, including:

*This is a brilliant document. Content wise it's really good!* (HR Officer for an infrastructure development company)

*This document looks fantastic! The contents are comprehensive and the headings for each section are really succinct and strong.* (Director, international advertising agency)

*Very clear and easy to read and covered all the necessary points.* (Employment law adviser, health and safety services company)

*I thought the guide was really useful, and I'm definitely going to use this to benchmark what my organization has to offer.* (HR Adviser, beauty company)

## Student Health Behaviour Change

Half of young people in the UK now go to university and lifestyle choices there can continue into adult life. So student health is an increasingly important public health issue.

That's why we undertook research into student health behaviour change, in partnership with King's College London – with our findings published in *Perspectives in Public Health* in August 2018.

The traditional stereotype is of students following a physically unhealthy lifestyle once freed from family constraints – but our research suggested a different picture, supported by data from the Office for National Statistics. Today's students (Generation Z) appear more health conscious – smoking less, consuming less alcohol, eating more healthy food and taking more exercise. This suggests an opportunity for universities and student unions to work with their students to create Healthy Universities.

However, although students appear to be following physically healthier lifestyles, reported levels of mental ill health have been rising. How to reduce the risk of mental ill health among students is therefore a current priority for our research.

## Reducing the risk of Mental Illness

Each year 1 in 4 people in the UK are said to experience a mental health problem. This can have big implications for themselves, their families, their employers, the NHS and society.

Most people know what they can do to reduce the risk of physical illness (like not smoking and getting enough exercise) – even if they don't always act on what they know. However, do they know what can be done to reduce the risk of mental illness?

In May 2019 *Perspectives in Public Health* published our research review. We found that in mental health as in physical health, what happens to us in the first 1000 days of life appears to have long-term health implications. This suggests the value of timely intervention with new parents, in particular those most at risk, such as the children of parents with a family history of mental illness or at risk of post-natal depression and single teenage mothers, each of whom may face difficulties with parent-child bonding.

Fortunately our research also identified a number of initiatives that have helped here, include targeted home interventions aimed at preventing relationship problems in depressed mothers and their infants; the Mom Power parenting programme to improve mental health and parenting among high risk mothers in the US; arts and music programmes which have reduced mental ill-health risks among mothers of young children in initiatives in Stockport, London and Bristol; and useful voluntary sector resources, including Barnardo's five 'building blocks for a healthy brain'.

## Tackling Childhood Obesity

Childhood obesity is a major risk to public health in the UK. Obese children usually grow up to become obese adults – with an increased risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes, stroke, cancer, osteoarthritis, back pain and depression.

This is a classic example of prevention being better than cure, which is why tackling childhood obesity is one of our current projects – seeking to influence the government and the food industry in particular.

For example, in November 2018 our Director was invited to speak at *Food Matters Live* (a major food industry event) to explain what other countries have been doing to tackle childhood obesity and what the UK can learn from this. He was also invited to take part in the first *Food Matters Live* podcast, about obesity, in March 2019.

## The Prevention Green Paper

In November 2019 the government published *Prevention is better than cure: our vision to help you live well for longer*. It was encouraging to see the government recognising and highlighting our core messages, including –

- Prevention is crucial to improving the health of the whole population.
- Prevention means stopping problems from arising in the first place; focusing on keeping people healthy, not just treating them when they become ill.
- Prevention cannot be solved purely by the health and social care system alone. Everyone has a part to play, and we must work together across society – including recognising how the wider environment we live in determines our health.

A Green Paper is due to be published in 2019, to explain the government plans in more detail.

We were pleased to receive an invitation to meet with one of the Secretary of State's Special Advisers to discuss practical proposals we had made to help make the government's vision for prevention a reality.

## The Next Steps

We look forward to reporting further progress in our next Annual Review, in particular on our three current projects:

- Tackling Childhood Obesity
- Reducing the Risk of Student Mental Ill Health
- Health at Work

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