

Prevention in health and social care

February 2023

About us

The [NHS Confederation](#) is the membership organisation that brings together, supports, and speaks for the whole healthcare system in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The members we represent employ 1.5 million staff, care for more than 1 million patients a day and control £150 billion of public expenditure. We promote collaboration and partnership working as the key to improving population health, delivering high-quality care, and reducing health inequalities.

Proposal

1. The [NHS Confederation](#) is the membership organisation that brings together, supports, and speaks for the whole healthcare system in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The members we represent employ 1.5 million staff, care for more than 1 million patients a day and control £150 billion of public expenditure. We promote collaboration and partnership working as the key to improving population health, delivering high-quality care, and reducing health inequalities.
2. There is currently a 19-year life expectancy gap between those living in England's areas with most and least deprivation.¹ Women living in the areas with the lowest levels of deprivation will enjoy 20 years more good health than those living in the areas with the highest levels of deprivation.
3. The country's stark and widening health inequalities accumulate across the life course, and closing these gaps requires a preventative approach that creates the conditions for healthy communities.²
4. Given that up to 80 per cent of what affects both physical and mental health sits outside of the health system, a cross-government approach that considers health equity in all policies, at a local and national level, will be vital to promote equitable health outcomes³, promote good health across the life course and reduce demand on services making them more sustainable for the future.
5. Given that a preventative and early intervention approach to improving population health outcomes requires action across a spectrum that includes primary, secondary and tertiary prevention, the focus of the prevention inquiry must be conducted through

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/bulletins/healthstatelifeexpectanciesbyindexofmultipledeprivationimd/2018to2020#healthy-life-expectancy-at-birth-by-the-english-index-of-multiple-deprivation>

²<https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/quantifying-health-inequalities>

³<https://nam.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Social-Determinants-of-Health-101.pdf>

a systems lens that looks beyond healthcare services in order for it to tackle the short and long term pressures on the health and care system.

6. Integrated Care System (ICS) structures in England present an opportunity to establish the governance and funding structures that shift investment towards preventative care and incentivise equity improvement. Prevention, integration and equity need to be embedded in local systems and not add-ons. With reducing health inequalities as one of their four core purposes, ICS leaders in our membership tell us they are committed to this component of their role as statutory bodies.
7. However, a recent NAO report found within a survey of ICS staff, 77 per cent reported their ICS intended to invest in prevention but only 33 per cent felt they had the capacity to do so in the current context for services.⁴ The focus of prevention within the NHS has historically been aimed at better management of existing conditions and little emphasis on the factors causing poor health, and the role for the NHS in working with partners to address this.
8. This was echoed in the recent Public Accounts Committee (PAC) report which expressed concern ICSs may struggle to make progress on their longer-term aims to prevent ill-health, given pressure for progress on immediate national priorities, for example, the need to reduce elective care backlogs and bring down A&E and ambulance waiting times.⁵
9. ICSs must be enabled and supported by government to incentivise primary and secondary prevention and allocate resource that corresponds to the level of deprivation in the area they cover.
10. Local leaders are best placed to set priorities for the communities they serve, based on coproduction and using an asset-based approach that creates the conditions for communities to thrive. The government must make use of the structural and regulatory levers at its disposal, such as taxes and levies, to create a society where the healthy choice is the easy choice for everyone.
11. In terms of primary care, prevention was one of the four pillars of the Fuller Stocktake⁶ and as such will be a key focus for the NHS Confederation's primary care network over the next 12 months. It is clear that primary care is critical to shifting the health and care system towards a meaningfully preventative approach.
12. The stocktake recommended the development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams (INTs) which include general practice, pharmacy, dentistry, optometry, local authorities, and the voluntary sector to engage key local partners in prevention work and intervene early through a population health management approach. Upstream interventions, as well as better early intervention services to effectively address mental health problems when they first emerge, are critical but need more central funding.
13. The NHS Confederation strongly advises the Health and Social Care Select Committee to take a system-wide approach to their inquiry in order to capture the range of partners who need to be involved in driving the shift to make health and care services truly preventative.
14. Whilst we appreciate the scope of the Committee covers issues in the domain of the Department for Health and Social Care we would encourage it to work in partnership

⁴ <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/introducing-integrated-care-systems-joining-up-local-services-to-improve-health-outcomes/>

⁵ <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/127/public-accounts-committee/news/185951/latest-nhs-reforms-will-not-succeed-until-government-fixes-longstanding-problems/>

⁶ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/next-steps-for-integrating-primary-care-fuller-stocktake-report/>

with other committees to explore how embedding prevention can be a truly cross-Whitehall endeavour.