

Overview

By making health inequalities a system priority, Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership (HCP) has ensured that it is core business for all organisations and achieved significant progress in addressing inequalities across the region. The partnership has also taken experience from the COVID-19 pandemic to imagine a better future, which addresses the deep-rooted inequalities that the virus has amplified.

What the partnership faced

The Cheshire and Merseyside (C&M) region has a population of 2.5 million and health inequalities are mixed. Areas such as Liverpool, St Helens, the Wirral and Knowsley experience some of the highest levels of deprivation in England, including higher-than-average death rates from cancer, heart disease and stroke. Elsewhere, Cheshire East and West have much higher life expectancy, but have different challenges such as meeting the needs of an ageing population. Almost half (47 per cent) of adult residents in Cheshire and Warrington who claim employment and support allowance suffer from mental and behavioural disorders. While the proportion of residents who cannot work due to chronic illness (17.6 per cent) is lower than levels in the north west and the wider UK (22.3 per cent), local research shows that over 70 per cent of those reporting worklessness in the region also report some degree of limiting long-term illness or disability, including mental illness.

What the partnership did

To tackle inequalities in the HCP's area, the partnership knew that it would need to make health inequality 'everybody's business.'

Building a strong case

Critical to this was making a strong case for putting health inequalities at the heart of the region's health economy and wider economy. Building on work by economist James Hickson around the importance of employment and economic regeneration, the HCP's business plan put action on health inequalities at the top of its priority list.

If a programme or project doesn't have health inequalities at its core, it doesn't get approved. This has infiltrated work around mental health, learning disabilities, cancer, and particularly work to improve the health of black, Asian and minority ethnic populations.



Key people driving the agenda

The buy-in of senior, influential figures in the HCP, including its new chair Alan Yates and new chief officer Jackie Bene, was achieved early. By focusing on the impact of health inequalities on younger people, the HCP won the backing of Steve Rotherham, Metro Mayor of the Liverpool City Region, who is a strong champion of a fair wage for young people. Support was also gained from Andy Burnham, Mayor of the neighbouring Greater Manchester region and a great advocate on tackling health inequalities. Involving local government has also ensured that the focus is as much around regeneration, housing and income levels of poorer families as it is around health, and has helped drive a more sustainable prevention agenda.

Innovative partnerships

At the heart of C&M's approach is an ethos that tackling inequalities is not exclusively the province of the NHS, but is closely linked to the economic prosperity of the region. The HCP has tapped into the capacity of the private sector, engaged in corporate social responsibility and the apprenticeship programme, and been able to partner with major companies such as Nike, who have donated trainers to young people. The HCP has calculated the value of the region's corporate social responsibility at a huge £850 million, so there is further work to be done with big businesses.

Utilising a social value asset-based approach

Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership has been identified as a social value accelerator site, to embed social value at scale within health and local authorities as anchor institutions. In addition to health providers and local authorities, its local approach to social value has been expanded to explore the potential of establishing business and industry and the voluntary community, faith and social enterprise (VCFSE) sector as anchor institutions, and to build opportunities for corporate social responsibility.

- These organisations have signed up to a Social Value Charter, launched in July 2019, which outlines the partnership's vision and principles for maximising the potential of social value across Cheshire and Merseyside.
- A number of Social Value Champions, who will lead the development of social value and corporate social responsibility within their organisations and local areas, have already been identified.
- Additionally, a social value training programme is being rolled out from January 2020.

Public health champions

The Champs Public Health Collaborative (Champs) has developed a comprehensive and systematic approach to improving public health priorities by large-scale action and working together as system leaders across Cheshire and Merseyside. Champs has enabled multi-agency working, providing public health expertise to key strategic groups and delivering innovative projects to improve health and wellbeing. Examples include:

- Happy Hearts – a web information resource, delivered with British Heart Foundation health services, local authorities, and other partners across Cheshire and Merseyside to provide practical local information on healthy living, cardiovascular disease and where people can get their blood pressure checked for free.
- The NO MORE Suicide Strategy has recently received Suicide-Safer Community status by Living Works, the world's leading suicide prevention training company, for its achievements on training, suicide bereavement, leadership and mental health promotion.

Whole-system working across the community

One of the major benefits the HCP sees in transitioning towards a partnership is the ability this gives the system to make connections across the constituent organisations and build partnerships, including an integrated care partnership contract. Through adopting wider goals around fairer wages and green economy, the HCP has been able to use its social value (eg social prescribing procurement mechanisms) to ensure that 20 per cent of funding goes back into the community. They've been able to harness the personalised care agenda and funding to deliver improvements and bring communities together.

Tackling inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic

The partnership has been proactive during the pandemic, using the crisis to imagine a better future as the recovery and rebuilding work gets underway. It is working to build a shared recognition that COVID-19 is accelerating and amplifying a set of interconnected, long-standing, and deep-rooted challenges: entrenched deprivation, environmental degradation and health inequality. This vision for a better future is based around three principles:

- **Living together** – designing homes and neighbourhoods and public spaces that promote wellbeing and reduce carbon emissions while reimagining public spaces to align with a healthy community.

- **Working together** – using social value and community wealth building. Leveraging the power of public spending and the leadership of anchor institutions to support well-paid, secure, and meaningful employment and apprenticeship opportunities; sustainable and ethical local businesses; and the development of thriving communities.
- **Innovating together** – developing a ‘living lab,’ working within and across communities, organisations and systems to test and trial new solutions to the key challenges people and places face. Embedding the levels of ambition, and willingness to do things differently seen during the pandemic across everything the partnership does, adopting a ‘people first’ approach.

Challenges

While there has been challenges from some people not buying into the vision, the work of the champions in demonstrating results has been extremely compelling. Being proactive in linking the health inequalities agenda to economic regeneration puts the region on a stronger footing in the face of economic downturn, and leaders feel that the COVID-related crisis will not hugely affect their progress.



Contact details

Dave Sweeney, Implementation Lead,
Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership

dave.sweeney1@nhs.net



Supported by

The NHS Reset campaign is part funded through
sponsorship by Novartis Pharmaceuticals UK Limited