

## Introducing Public Health England to ADEPT

Public Health England (PHE) was formed in 2013 and works to protect and improve the nation's health and reduce health inequalities. PHE is guided by a number of aims:

- our first duty is to keep people safe
- we want to prevent poor health
- we work to narrow the health gap
- we support a strong economy

PHE works with national, regional and local partners including local government to create healthy communities. By working closely together in a place, local authorities, the NHS and community organisations can secure better outcomes for the people who live there.

The most important contributors to a life in good health, including mental health, are to have a job that provides a sufficient income, a decent and safe home and a support network. More simply put – a job, a home and a friend.

PHE has recently published a new strategy for 2020-25 which sets out the direction for the next five years. This includes setting out 10 priorities where we believe PHE can deliver the biggest impact for the public's health:



## Improving and protecting the nation's health through planning healthy places

There are many factors influencing our long-term health, including the environment we live, work and spend our leisure time in. Buildings, transport, access to green spaces and our local shops and services can all impact both our physical and mental health.

This means our environment can reduce or improve our chance of living a long and healthy life – people in the least deprived areas live around 20 years longer in good health than those in the most deprived.

This inequality has a serious impact on the NHS. Many illnesses, such as cardiovascular disease, type-2 diabetes, poor mental health and some cancers, could be largely prevented if we lived and worked in places that supported our health.

The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) has prevention at its core and creating places that support healthy choices is an essential part of this.

#### **Unhealthy places – the cost to the NHS:**

- Poor housing in England costs the NHS £1.4 billion each year and makes up 8% of the total cost to society (BRE's 'The full cost of poor housing', 2016).
- 21.5% of annual excess winter deaths are attributable to cold homes.
- Overheating affects 20% of homes and households – there are 2,000 heat-related deaths each year.

Calculations by Transport for London show that if everyone in the capital walked or cycled for 20 minutes a day, we would save the NHS £1.7bn in treatment costs over the next 25 years, including:

- 85,000 fewer people being treated for hip fractures;
- 19,200 fewer people with dementia; and
- 18,800 fewer suffering from depression.

Our physical environment can contribute to ill health in many ways. For example, the layout of streets and the location of schools, shops, services, homes and workplaces can promote sedentary lifestyles, loneliness and poor diets.

Conversely, healthy places can support good physical and mental health by encouraging walking and cycling, reducing air pollution, improving access to healthier food and green spaces, and encouraging social connections through well-connected neighbourhoods.

The NHS is no exception – as healthcare leaders and employers, we all have a responsibility to consider how our working environment impacts the health of staff, patients and visitors, and to make changes where we can to encourage healthy lifestyles.

For example, by promoting active travel (such as walking and cycling) within the NHS and achieving a 3% increase in uptake, the [Sustainable Development Unit](#) (funded by NHS England and Public Health England) estimates that alongside improved staff health, the NHS would save over £265m in avoided health treatment costs.

To help create healthy places within and around a place, some key questions we should all ask are:

1. Does our environment make walking to work a viable, appealing option?
2. Can young and older people cycle easily and safely around the neighbourhood?
3. Do residents have access to affordable, fresh and healthy food?
4. Do residents have access to green spaces?
5. What are we doing to encourage staff and residents to access public offices in a sustainable way?
6. How are we supporting our staff to live healthy lives – for example, do we offer cycle to work schemes?

It's crucial that everyone – including the NHS, Environmental Health Officers and local government, such as councillors, traffic and spatial planners – works together to create a shared understanding of what shapes a healthy place. This could be part of a [Whole Systems Approach](#), where local partners work together in stages to address all aspects of the environment and improve a health issue, such as obesity.

### **The benefits of a healthy place:**

- Investment in modernising and repairing housing would pay for itself in 7 years through savings to the NHS and deliver £17.2 billion of wider savings to society per year<sup>1</sup>.
- Improving features such as electrics, windows and doors, wall insulation and garden paths in the homes of people aged 60 and over is associated with up to 39% fewer hospital admissions.
- The total number of quality-adjusted life years (QALYs) saved by improving England's housing stock is 175,000.

There are a number of useful resources – for example, PHE’s [spatial planning and health evidence resource](#) is a key tool examining the links between health and the built and natural environment, to help inform policy and support local action.

Understanding and implementing a ‘healthy places’ approach means reducing health inequalities through the way places are planned, designed and operated – for people now and for future generations. Across the country, we all deserve an environment that supports a long and healthy life.

### **The PHE healthy places team**

PHE’s [Healthy Places](#) team sits within the newly formed Priorities and Programmes division of the Health Improvement Directorate. Our focus is to translate evidence into both policy and practice by working across the national and local systems and engaging with the development industry and the NHS.

**John Newton** is Director of Health Improvement, Public Health England

For more information, contact [HealthyPlaces@phe.gov.uk](mailto:HealthyPlaces@phe.gov.uk)

---

<sup>1</sup> BRE’s ‘The full cost of poor housing’, 2016