



Choosing Health?

A consultation on action to improve
people's health

SUMMARY

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Good health is fundamental to us all, enabling us to live active, fulfilled lives. Our aim is to achieve better health for everyone, supporting individuals to lead longer and healthier lives.

The Government has put record levels of investment into the NHS and led a programme which has made real progress in improving health. But making people healthier is about more than just treating people when they become ill. Just as vital is taking action to safeguard health and prevent illness and disease, promoting healthier and longer lives. We all know that there are some simple things that we can do to improve our own health, like eating a healthy diet and being more physically active – many people are already taking these steps. We need to understand the barriers that prevent more people taking these steps, and understand how to remove those barriers. We want your support to identify not just *what* we can do to improve health, but *how* to do it, and *how* we will know when we have achieved it.

These issues are not just for the NHS, but are the responsibility of us all. The whole of society has a role to play. Central government, local government, the public sector, individuals, the public, industry, businesses, the media and voluntary organisations can all have an impact. The consultation is an opportunity for everyone to get involved.

This summary is part of a resource pack that has been prepared to help you to take part in a national consultation on improving health. The consultation is the first step in a national debate about what we can do to improve our health. As part of the consultation, we want to hear from individuals, communities, organisations and health professionals throughout England about what you think would make the most difference and about the respective roles and responsibilities of individuals, Government, public sector and industry.

Did You Know?

- 1 in 5 children does not eat any fruit in a week.
- Men in Manchester are likely to die on average 8½ years earlier than men in Rutland.
- 1 in 10 sexually active young women are infected with Chlamydia, one of the most common sexually transmitted infections.
- In 2001/02 33 million working days were lost due to work related ill health.

Why now?

Despite record investment in the NHS we face a number of worrying trends and health inequalities, such as the trebling in the incidence of obesity in just 20 years. If we fail to address these challenges we will pay the price with more illness and an increase in premature death.

The Government already has a number of programmes under way which are developing new approaches to promote better health. We understand what's wrong and individual awareness of health has never been higher. But the barriers remain and inequalities are increasing. The Government alone cannot tackle this problem. We want to use this consultation to start a national debate and develop a coherent action plan for Government, other organisations and individuals so that we can work together to improve health.

"It is clear from the current debate on public health that we all have a stake in the future of our health and the health of our children. Real progress will depend upon the concerted efforts of the NHS and other public bodies, local government, industry, the media and the voluntary sector. Above all it will depend on working with people's own desires to lead better, healthier lives".

John Reid, Secretary of State for Health, 10 February 2004.

The Consultation

The Government is launching this consultation to hear from organisations and from individuals what needs to be done to influence the choices people make about their health and what role they want central government and other organisations to play in improving health. The consultation is aimed at everyone, including those in the groups and areas experiencing the worst health outcomes.

We want to hear the views and ideas of the general public, community groups, the voluntary sector, the NHS, the wider public sector, public health professionals, clinical experts, people involved in the management of health and social care, media commentators and major employers and industries with a key role to play, such as food, alcohol, leisure and hospitality.

We want to hear from you what priorities you attach to action, and the relative priorities for individuals and organisations. This will mean considering:

- Are the proposals for change practicable?
- Is there evidence that they will work?
- How do we overcome barriers to implementation?
- How will they impact on inequalities?
- Do the benefits outweigh the costs?

There are several strands to the consultation:

- Local consultation and events led by Primary Care Trusts and Local Authorities. Strategic Health Authorities will be providing leadership and support across their areas so that there is full engagement from the NHS;
- Regional consultation led by Directors of Public Health, focussing on local inequalities;
- National consultation around eight identified themes led by task groups
 - better health for children and young people
 - working for health/opportunities in employment
 - consumers and markets
 - leisure
 - maximising the NHS contribution – in primary care
 - maximising the NHS contribution – across the NHS as a whole
 - working with and for communities
 - focusing on delivery
- National activities and events to feed into the consultation process led by the Department of Health and other Government Departments;
- Invitations to the public to contribute their views and ideas directly; and
- The opportunity for stakeholders, including the public sector, voluntary organisations, professional organisations, industry and the media, to contribute to the debate.

The formal consultation period will run from 3 March until 28 May 2004. We want everyone with an interest to be involved. Details about how to contribute can be found at www.dh.gov.uk/consultations/liveconsultations or by telephoning 0207 210 5343.

The questions

We have suggested a number of questions to help stimulate the debate, with questions for individuals and communities, for organisations, for Government, Public Health professionals, universities, the NHS and PCTs.

Key questions for individuals are:

1. What you eat and how you spend your time at home, school, work, leisure make a difference to your health.

What would make most difference to the choices you make:

- do you want more, or different, information about what matters?
- are there choices you would like to be able to make which aren't available to you now?
- what would help you to make healthier choices, for example to engage in more physical activity?

In your list of things to be done what should come first, and why?

2. Everyone should be able to make their own choices

What in particular would make a difference to choices that children, young people, pregnant women, people with disabilities and older people make? What would make most difference and why?

3. People in some groups and areas experience health that is worse than the average

How are your circumstances affecting your health?

What would support you or your community to be healthier?

- Who could help you?
- What should they do?
- What are the barriers that would need to be overcome?

What could local services do to support healthier lifestyles? What would be better done by the community itself?

4. One person's choice may spoil the chances of good health for others

Have we got the balance right when it comes to:

- smoking in enclosed public places and work places, e.g. shops, factories, offices, hospitals, public transport, restaurants, clubs and pubs?
- anti-social behaviour?
- using condoms to prevent sexually transmitted infections?

5. The role of regulation

Should central and local government take more of a role in supporting people to make healthier choices by making it:

- easier to access the things that would improve people's health e.g.: fruit and vegetables, safe walking routes, safe cycling, better communal spaces, access to gyms, swimming pools, sun protection, access to contraception?
- more difficult to access the things that can be harmful, e.g. cigarettes and alcohol?

Should the rules be changed on:

- what gets advertised: on television, in newspapers and magazines, through promotions?
- availability of tobacco, alcohol, drugs to children and young people?
- how products such as sweets, snack foods and tobacco are promoted and displayed in shops?

6. Working together to support healthy choices

What opportunities are there to influence healthy choices through action by:

- parents?
- friends?
- schools and higher education?
- employers?
- faith communities?
- health and social care professionals?
- local government, including housing, education and the environment?
- voluntary and community organisations?
- retailers?
- industry?
- trades unions?
- the media?
- leisure organisations?
- national government?

What should be given priority? Where could more be achieved by working together?

All questions are available on the website at www.dh.gov.uk/consultations/liveconsultations

Next steps

Ideas and proposals should reach the project team at the latest by **28 May 2004**. The Department of Health would welcome contributions throughout the consultation. In particular, if there are emerging issues or contributions earlier in the process, we can feed these into the meetings of the task groups.

Responses to the consultation will be used to develop a new White Paper to be published by the Department of Health in the summer. This will set out what the Government will do to achieve change in the public sector and in partnership with other organisations.

“So now is the time to move on to a focused debate about what will help make the most improvements to the health of the public, individuals and communities over the next 5 years; and what are the most important actions for the longer term. This debate must generate some real momentum...in response to the huge individual and public appetite for progress.”

John Reid, Secretary of State for Health, 3 February 2004

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