



Delivering a healthy Scotland – meeting the challenges

Key issues

The Scottish Executive has issued a report on Health Improvement in Scotland which outlines a whole government approach to health improvement.

The report tracks progress across the Executive towards delivering a healthier Scotland.

The need for a practical approach to implementation of health concerns.

1. Introduction

The Scottish Executive has issued a report on health improvement in Scotland entitled 'Delivering a Healthy Scotland – Meeting the Challenge'.

The report outlines the challenges previously faced by the Scottish Executive, the Health Department, NHS Scotland, as well as the people of Scotland. Its main aim is to improve the health of the nation as it is believed that the range of health improvement activities led by the Scottish Executive within health improvement policy framework be continued.

The full document can be downloaded from www.scotland.gov.uk/publicationsText

2. Health improvement and social justice – closing the opportunity gap

The Scottish Executive remains committed to tackling poverty and disadvantage, as well as to promoting social justice. There are close links between poverty and poor health and they are taking strong action to change this.

'Closing the Opportunity Gap' is the Executive's approach to tackling social exclusion and providing sustainable routes out of poverty and disadvantage. It is believed that sustained employment is the best route out of poverty for the majority of people.

The Executive believe that improving people's life circumstances, including housing, education, employment and health, and addressing poverty issues, will improve health through a healthier physical environment. By having access to services, higher levels of confidence and self esteem should become more apparent.

In tackling social exclusion and improving the health of the most vulnerable in our society, the Scottish Executive hope to be able to reduce inequalities in health and to help them overcome the barriers that make it difficult for them to contribute to their communities.

3. Health improvement and educational achievement

It is clear from the report that the Executive want our children and young people to be healthy in order to take advantage of the opportunities which education offers to progress to happy, healthy and productive working lives. When children are fit and healthy, they are more able to concentrate, learn and do well in school.

According to the Executive, the Curriculum for Excellence proposes that learning is about preparing young people to be successful learners, more confident individuals and responsible citizens. Its aim is to create a single, coherent Scottish curriculum for those from the ages of 3-18. Health and Wellbeing is featured high on the agenda for the Executive who believe that this should ultimately equip children for the future.

The Scottish Health Promoting Schools Unit was set up in 2002 to champion, facilitate and support implementation of the health promoting school concept throughout Scotland. The unit has ensured that the general approach to health promotion reaffirms that health education is integral to the curriculum. The school community should work together to provide children and young people with integrated and positive experiences and structures to promote and protect their own health.

Since 2001, the executive have tried to ensure that the provision, presentation and nutritional content of school meals would help to improve the general health and well being of children in Scotland. This partnership involved the consultation of children and parents. Its aim is to offer access to nutritious and attractively presented food in school. The issuing of free fruit to Primary 1 and 2 also emphasised the commitment by those involved in creating a Healthier Scotland

4. Health improvement and economic growth

The Executive believe that a successful economy is key to future prosperity and a pre-requisite for building first class public services, social justice and a Scotland of opportunity. What is needed is a healthy and active population if this is to be achieved.

Workforce Plus: An Employability Framework for Scotland was launched in June 2006. It sets out actions at local and national levels which will ensure that a range of government agencies put together a set of integrated employability services. This should provide people, including those with mental health problems, with the right skills, knowledge and support to take up employment opportunities. Workforce Plus should also provide the collective leadership across the Executive to make sure that policies support the aim to help more people into employment.

While the UK Government leads on employment, the Executive state that Workforce Plus will harness the support of devolved and specialist services such as health and social care, which

can directly influence individuals' confidence, motivation and ability to work. It will drive forward co-ordinated and coherent employability services to provide individuals with support towards and into employment.

5. Health improvement and sustainable development – securing a healthier future

According to the Executive, Scotland is committed to building a sustainable future. Individuals, businesses, local authorities and communities are taking action to change the way we use resources, plan and develop services, and seize the economic opportunities that sustainable development presents. Policies and programmes are in place in order to drive change in key areas, transforming the way that waste is dealt with, capitalising on Scotland's sources of renewable energy and taking action on climate change.

To build on the progress and momentum already taking place in Scotland, radical changes are still required as a matter of priority, a view shared across the UK and the international community. Scotland has signed up to new UK shared framework for sustainable development. This framework sets out a common goal for sustainable development across the UK.

The Sustainable Development Strategy sets out the actions needed to secure the kind of Scotland the Executive want to be in the future. A Scotland where:

- People enjoy higher levels of wellbeing through increased opportunities, an Environment that provides the conditions for health and well being and a focus on the promotion of good mental health and well being.
- Communities thriving with well connected places, the regeneration of local Environments with people at the heart of change.
- By making an equitable global contribution, greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced and by reducing the ecological impact are contributing to the Millennium Development Goals.
- Our natural heritage and resources are protected for the long term and biodiversity has been halted. Natural resources are managed sustainably and the environment is protected effectively.

6. Key health improvement programmes

The Scottish Executive has a wide range of programmes on health improvement. However, in November 2005 the Cabinet agreed that future action would focus particularly on the five key areas of alcohol, tobacco, diet, physical activity and health inequalities. In all key areas, the approach remains one of clear actions by the Executive and its partners to tackle the life circumstances and lifestyles which lead to ill health, but also building the capacity of individuals to take greater responsibility for their own health and that of their families. This should ensure that each member of society can make healthier choices in their everyday lives.

It is also recognised by Ministers that improving mental health is also a key underpinning theme for all health improvement actions as it is core to people's overall health and sense of well being.

Alcohol

Is widely used and enjoyed in Scotland, yet is the cause of much damage to health and many other aspects of our lives. What is needed according to the Executive is to reduce the harm that

alcohol causes in Scottish life and change cultures around drinking. The recent report by the Chief Medical Officer – Health in Scotland 2005- reinforced the need for a change of culture and attitude in Scotland towards excess drinking.

It is hoped that to be able to achieve this, the Executive will work in partnership with the alcohol industry to reduce alcohol related harm through jointly agreed initiatives. It is believed that by tackling binge drinking with a crackdown on irresponsible promotions, may curb the growing concerns surrounding alcohol misuse.

Tobacco

The Executive want a Scotland in which the harm caused by smoking is substantially reduced and to see a society in which everyone aspires to live a healthy, smoke free life and has access to the support required to realise this ambition.

Smoking remains the most important preventable cause of ill health and premature death in Scotland. It is also strongly associated with health inequalities with much higher proportions of people living in disadvantaged communities smoking than those in more affluent areas.

It is believed that with the implementation of smoke free public places and the development of a nationwide network of accessible smoking cessation services which are in place in Scotland, will assist the public in changing their lifestyles and health ethics.

Diet and Physical Activity

The links between diet, physical activity and obesity are increasingly well known and understood. The Chief Medical Officer highlighted increasing concerns and the need for action. Obesity can have a major impact on an individual's life and is recognised as a key risk factor in cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer. The Executive believe that Scotland has witnessed considerable rises in obesity levels in recent years and remain committed to reversing that trend.

Inactive life and bad nutrition lead to increased risk of heart disease and other major health concerns. The Scottish Executive has campaigned in order to change the way in which the people of Scotland live their lives. With the transformation of the provision of food in Scottish schools and nurseries through Hungry for Success, nutritional standards have been set and raised across the public sector to combat the growing concerns being raised regarding our health.

The Executive have invested in healthy eating in communities and raised awareness throughout Scotland to tackle the concerns being raised by other health officials regarding Scotland's future. Through the active schools programme, this too has ensured that children receive at least two hours of physical education per week. By increasing the availability of extra curricular clubs at school and leisure centres, this may well go some way in reducing the concerns felt by partner agencies.

Tackling Health Inequalities

The Scottish Executive sees this as a top priority. They remain committed to action with partners to reduce the health gap between our most deprived and most affluent citizens. Tackling health inequalities is a multi-agency and cross-cutting activity according to the Executive and recognises that there is more that the NHS can do to make a difference. The vision for the NHS in the 21st Century according to the Executive is to target and enhance primary care services in deprived areas to provide anticipatory care. Perhaps by targeting health improvement action and resources at the most disadvantaged areas, building capacity in primary care to deliver proactive, preventative care and providing early interventions to prevent escalation of health care needs will help to address the concerns expressed.

It is recognised by the Executive that they have an important role in wider strategies in order to improve life circumstances and changing health behaviours. They will actively seek out and

prevent illness by using innovative and new ways of contacting people but also taking services to where people congregate, e.g. in shopping centres or community centres.

7. Conclusions

This report according to the Scottish Executive, gives a flavour of a Scotland which is working hard to change its image to one of positive health and wellbeing. A Scotland in which clear leadership is being given by the Executive and its partners, but in which the people of Scotland are also increasingly recognising their role in making healthier choices which change their lives for the better.

The way forward is to hopefully move towards a position where everyone in Scotland enjoys the very best of health, increasing life expectancy, because the quality of life in terms of freedom from debilitating ill health is as important as the duration of life.

The Scottish Executive recognises the need to continue to strive for a healthier Scotland. The long term nature of health improvement means that the benefits of what we are doing now will take time to be fully realised. The work involved in, by the Executive in partnership with other agencies in local government, both voluntary and private sectors, will have far reaching implications for the health of future generations. Health improvement will remain at the heart of policy making and will continue to emphasise the need for people to make healthier choices for themselves and their families.

APSE welcomes many of the initiatives being pursued by the Executive with regard to improving Scottish health, especially in planning the role of local government at the heart of activity in this area.

Although Scotland is blazing a trail in health improvement initiatives in the U.K. it is worth recognising that it probably has the furthest distance to travel.

Pat Taggart
Principal Advisor