

Written evidence submitted by the Health Equalities Group (PHS0347)

Overview and solutions

Health Equalities Group (HEG) is a registered public health charity based in the North West of England. Over the last decade we have developed an assemblage of prevention frameworks for NHS and local authorities that address the structural and environmental factors that can influence the health and well-being of local communities. Specific examples include:

- [NHS Prevention Pledge for Cheshire and Merseyside](#)
- [Cheshire and Merseyside Cancer Alliance - Overweight and Obesity Programme](#)
- The [Food Active](#) healthier weight programme for North West local authorities, including the [Local Authority Healthy Weight Declaration](#)

A renewed focus on prevention will help people live longer, healthier lives, stop thousands of people developing life threatening or limiting conditions and contribute to a vibrant economy. The NHS cannot achieve this alone however, and a collaborative approach working across sectors, organisational boundaries and with communities is required.

Priorities

HEG would like to see a focus on tackling health inequalities and disparities, in particular regional inequalities within North West England.

HEG is a member of the Obesity Health Alliance and would like to express support for the Alliance's separate submission with a specific focus on overweight and obesity.

We are happy to be contacted about this response and provide oral evidence: info@hegroup.org.uk

Why the Health and Social Care Committee should consider this issue as part of its Prevention inquiry

As a nation we continue to experience widespread preventable illness and inequalities in health outcomes across our regions, with health inequalities inextricably linked to relative levels of prosperity and deprivation as measured by IMD. Specific health inequalities for the North West of England include:

- **Health inequalities status:** Inequality in life expectancy at birth for females in the North West is the highest in England (10.0); inequality in life expectancy at birth for males in the North West is the second highest in England (11.6)¹
- **Access to care:** People living in the most deprived areas experience a poorer quality of healthcare than those living in less deprived areas² with healthcare needs the greatest for these groups. People living in North West England have some of the highest health care needs due to long-term illness³.
- **Behavioural risks to health:** For example, unhealthy weight and poor oral health. People living in areas of higher deprivation are less able to consume diets in line with dietary recommendations owing to the cost and low availability of healthier foods, and are more likely to have overweight or obesity⁴. These differences are associated with poorer health outcomes and contribute to deepening health inequalities across the country⁵. Concerning

oral health, the episode rates for tooth extraction for children and young people living in the most deprived communities was three times that of those living in the most affluent communities⁶.

- **Wider determinants of health**, for example, increased access to less healthy food and drink outlets. Takeaway outlets can become increasingly clustered in low-socioeconomic areas⁷. The density of fast-food outlets is much higher in the North than the South of England, and varies widely across local authorities in England – in the Isles of Scilly 6% of food outlets are fast food outlets but in Blackburn with Darwen it's as high as 39%⁸.

Why the Committee should look at it now: in particular, whether there is an opportunity for it to add value to existing research and evidence:

It is imperative to focus on health inequalities as part of this inquiry. The lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and has hit the country unevenly with a disproportionate effect on the North of England – increasing regional health and economic divides⁹. The ongoing cost of living crisis is further worsening the inequalities in health the most deprived areas are facing, affecting public health outcomes and economic productivity.

Why this area would benefit from scrutiny:

Withdrawal of the Health Disparities White Paper means a national strategy and commitment to address health inequalities is now absent. A National Audit Office report concluded that the Government were significantly off track to meet these targets and has had limited impact¹⁰.

Why the Government needs to take action in this area:

Tackling health inequalities will support several of the Government's priorities.

1. **“Levelling up”**: A recent report¹¹ has shown that productivity is lower in the North of England with health inequalities cited as a key driver for this disparity.
2. **“Get Britain working again”**: It is recognised that long-term health conditions lead to economic inactivity. Working-age illness resulting from health inequalities can lead to productivity losses if individuals are less capable of work. This represents an overall cost to the economy. It also results in lost taxes and increased welfare payments due to worklessness.
3. **“Put our health service on a firmer footing”**: The additional costs incurred by the health services in treating illnesses and disease arising as a result of health inequalities is significant. Frontier Economics estimates that the NHS spends £6.5 billion annually on treating obesity-related ill health alone ii, with Government analysis in 2017 projecting this to reach £9.7bn by 2050¹². IPPR predict that excess weight amongst the current cohort of children will cost the NHS £74 billion over their lifespan¹³.

¹ OHID Public Health Outcomes Framework: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/public-health-outcomes-framework/data#page/1/gid/1000049/ati/6/iid/90362/age/1/sex/1/cat/-1/ctp/-1/yr/3/cid/4/tbm/1> (Accessed 07/02/23)

² The Nuffield Trust. (2020). Quality and inequality: digging deeper. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/resource/quality-and-inequality-digging-deeper#what-did-we-find>

-
- ³ The Health Foundation (2022) Major study outlines wide health inequalities in England [online] Available at: <https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/news/major-study-outlines-wide-health-inequalities-in-england>
- ⁴ Løvhaug AL, Granheim SI, Djojoseparto SK, Harrington JM, Kamphuis CBM, Poelman MP, Roos G, Sawyer A, Stronks K, Torheim LE, Twohig C, Vandevijvere S, van Lenthe FJ, Terragni L. The potential of food environment policies to reduce socioeconomic inequalities in diets and to improve healthy diets among lower socioeconomic groups: an umbrella review. BMC Public Health. 2022 Mar 4;22(1):433.
- ⁵ The Kings Fund (2021) New analysis reveals stark inequalities in obesity rates across England [online] Available at: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/press/press-releases/new-analysis-stark-inequalities-obesity-england>
- ⁶ Hospital tooth extractions of 0 to 19 year olds 2021; Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) dataset <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hospital-tooth-extractions-of-0-to-19-year-olds-2021> (Accessed 07/02/23)
- ⁷ Burgoine, T., Sarker, C., Webster, C. et al. Interplay of takeaway food outlet exposure and income on diet and obesity: a cross-sectional study in UK Biobank. The Lancet. Volume 388, Special Issue, S28, (2016).
- ⁸ The Food Foundation (2021) The Broken Plate [online] Available at: <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-10/FF-Broken-Plate-2021.pdf>
- ⁹ NHS (2021) A year of COVID-19 in the North: Regional inequalities in health and economic outcomes [online] <https://www.thenhsa.co.uk/app/uploads/2021/09/A-Year-of-COVID-in-the-North-report-2021.pdf>
- ¹⁰ National Audit Office (2020) Department for Health and Social Care – Childhood Obesity [online] Available at: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/childhood-obesity.pdf>
- ¹¹ Bamba, Munford, Brown et al (2018) Health for Wealth: Building a Healthier Northern Powerhouse for UK Productivity. Available at: http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/146595/1/NHSA_REPORT_FINAL.pdf (Accessed on 21/09/20)
- ¹² PHE (2017) Health matters: obesity and the food environment <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment/health-matters-obesity-and-the-food-environment--2>
- ¹³ IPPR (2020) The Whole Society Approach <https://www.ippr.org/files/2020-08/a-whole-society-approach-aug-2020.pdf>

February 2023