

## Written evidence submitted by People's Health Trust (PHS0422)

People's Health Trust is a charity addressing health inequalities in England, Scotland and Wales. Our work focuses on:

- ensuring the voices of those most marginalised are represented;
- funding and support for communities experiencing the greatest disadvantage;
- building evidence to support decision-makers.

We welcome the Committee's upcoming inquiry into prevention and the opportunity to share a proposal for a topic we believe should be in scope. **We propose that the inquiry includes an explicit focus on addressing health inequalities and the social determinants of health.**

It is proven that disadvantage and its consequences are a major driver of geographical variation in life expectancy<sup>1</sup> and since the first Marmot review<sup>2</sup> there has been a widespread recognition that people's health and wellbeing is shaped by the environment and conditions of our lives. Any consideration of prevention needs to start from a recognition that a healthy society requires tackling the social and economic determinants that drive these inequalities, for example housing, jobs and income, social connections, and community control, which act as the building blocks for health.<sup>3</sup>

The Marmot 10 Years On (2020) report showed that for the first time in more than 100 years, life expectancy failed to increase across the country, and for the poorest 10% of women it had declined.<sup>4</sup> Over the last decade health inequalities have widened overall, and the amount of time people spend in poor health has increased since 2010.<sup>5</sup> The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted and further exacerbated these inequalities.<sup>6</sup> There is now growing concern that the cost of living crisis will impact those already with the worst health outcomes, which risks further entrenching the growing gaps in life expectancy between the most and least disadvantaged communities.<sup>7</sup>

Measures that attempt to target individual behaviour change such as obesity and smoking cessation in isolation from the social, economic and environmental conditions of different communities do not result in the changes that close the gaps in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy for the most marginalised communities. As Professor Sir Michael Marmot wrote, "why treat people and send them back to the conditions that made them sick?".<sup>8</sup> Focus from Government on the social and economic determinants of health alongside healthcare is more likely to lead to upstream actions which will address the root causes of intractable diseases and conditions which blight many lives.

Housing is one of the socio-economic factors that positively and negatively affects mental and physical health. Unequal access to affordable and good quality homes means that many people suffer from short and long-term health issues that could have been avoided.<sup>9</sup> The tragic and avoidable death of

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<sup>1</sup> Woods LM, et al. *Geographical variation in life expectancy at birth in England and Wales is largely explained by deprivation*. J Epidemiol Community Health (2005)

<sup>2</sup> Marmot, M. *Fair Society Healthy Lives (The Marmot Review)* (2010)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Marmot, M. *Health equity in England: the Marmot review 10 years on*. Bmj (2020).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Marmot, M, et al. *Build Back Fairer*. Institute of Health Equity (2021).

<sup>7</sup> Iacobucci, G. *Rising cost of living is damaging people's health* (2022)

<sup>8</sup> Marmot M. *The health gap: the challenge of an unequal world* (2015)

<sup>9</sup> The King's Fund, *Sharp increase in hospital admissions related to homelessness* (2020)

Awaab Ishak from respiratory failure, caused by damp and mould in his social housing home, has highlighted the direct and serious negative health impacts of poor-quality homes on individuals.<sup>10</sup>

Developing a joined-up strategy to address health inequalities and the social determinants of health can only be done by government – delivery can be multi-agency, but the direction is the responsibility of government. The near 20-year gap in life expectancy in England and the flat-lining and declining life expectancy between those from the least and most disadvantaged emphasises the need for a cross-government approach to addressing health inequalities encompassing housing, education, jobs and income, discrimination, transport and air pollution.

People's Health Trust has an extensive network of funded partners who are working to address the social determinants on health in their communities. We would be delighted to arrange for members of the Committee to meet with partners who are addressing inequalities in their neighbourhoods, and/or to give oral evidence at a forthcoming session.

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IHE, *Fuel poverty, cold homes and health inequalities in the UK* (2022)

Gibson et al, *Understanding the psychological impacts of housing type* (2010)

<sup>10</sup> Courts and Tribunals Judiciary, *Awaab Ishak: Prevention of future deaths report* (2022)