

Community Practitioners' and Health Visitors' Association response to:  
'A Healthier Future' A Twenty Year Vision for Health and Wellbeing in  
Northern Ireland 2005-2025

**Q1. Does the vision adequately describe the health and social services that will meet our future needs and aspirations?**

Response

The vision outlined in the document is very comprehensive. We particularly welcome the emphasis on prevention and having health needs met increasingly in communities rather than in the acute setting. We hope that this will be followed through by having adequate resources put in place to make this a reality.

**Q2. A Healthier Future focuses on five major themes: Investing for Health and Wellbeing; Involving People; Responsive Integrated Services; Teams which Deliver; Improving Quality; and Making it Happen. Do you agree that it is appropriate to focus on these themes and are there any others that should be addressed by the regional strategy?**

Response

The five major themes outlined in the document are inter-linked and provide a comprehensive framework to focus activity to achieve the overall aim of the 20-year vision.

**Q3. A Healthier Future identifies 16 future Policy Directions. Do you believe these are the right Policy Directions to achieve the vision set out in the document?**

Response

There is not enough emphasis placed on the importance of a healthier environment and the regulation of food labelling in supermarkets. There is also a need to put more emphasis on the impact of food on our health. This is particularly important for children in the various setting both in the home and in the school setting. There should be a major rethink of the quality of food provided both in pre-schools and school canteens. The regulation of unhealthy snack food vending machines in school settings should also be considered

Although it is important to focus on particular health targets and vulnerable groups this tends to put more of a slant towards secondary rather than primary prevention. There is a need to emphasise more the role of early support and intervention for parents, children and young people. This approach will lend itself to ensuring a good foundation for healthy lifestyles at the beginning of life rather than trying to intervene when bad habits are more firmly established. The development of a Family and Parenting Strategy outlined in the document should assist in achieving the necessary support for parents but all stakeholders, especially parents themselves, should be allowed to input into this strategy so that a comprehensive range of services are provided that will meet the needs of all parents.

**Q4. A Healthier Future identifies a number of key actions and outcomes. Do you believe that these are the right actions and outcomes to achieve the vision set out in the document?**

Response

Older people are an important part of our society and as such their contribution needs to be recognised and valued. They need to be given an adequate income to maintain a healthy lifestyle if they have been unable to make proper financial provision for themselves throughout their working life as has often been the case particularly with women who gave up employment to look after children or care for relatives. Those staff working with older people who need care should have appropriate training and remuneration for the valuable work that they do. High standards of care should apply to all forms of care provision of older people whether in private nursing homes, domiciliary care or in the acute settings. The recommendation of identifying an advocate/champion for older people is laudable but they must have the authority to be able to effect change as appropriate in the interest of improving care.

The **key outcomes for children and young people** incorporate a range of important issues relating to the welfare of this group. However there is a strong emphasis on negative aspects of child welfare and in particular on child protection. There needs to be a more positive slant in terms of intervening at an early stage before things go wrong. As such more emphasis should be placed on prevention and early support of parents by a range of service providers including health visitors, school nurses, voluntary agencies e.g. Lifestart, Surestart Community Mothers etc.

The importance of a healthy balanced diet is first introduced by the health visitor at the weaning stage for babies and should be further reinforced by school nurses for the school age population. However there is little mention of childhood obesity and how this might be reduced by simple preventative measures. The number of school nurses in Northern Ireland is very low per head of population compared to the rest of the United Kingdom. Despite the growing pressure for them to undertake much needed public health roles in schools e.g. prevention and early intervention in a wide range of areas such as obesity, child protection, teenage pregnancy, underage drinking, children with special educational needs and young people's mental health this will not become a reality without a major increase in staffing levels.

**Q5. A Healthier Future identifies the need to reduce smoking as a key element in improving the health of people in Northern Ireland and sets out three main options.**

- a. Should restrictions on smoking in public places and in workplaces be a matter for self-regulation and should Government simply act to encourage and support smoking cessation? or
- b. Should smoking generally be prohibited in most enclosed public places and workplaces, but allowed in certain settings such as pubs that do not prepare and serve food and in private clubs where the members decide to permit smoking? or
- c. Should legislation be introduced to ban smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces?

Response

It is the overwhelming view of our membership that legislation should be introduced to ban smoking in all enclosed public places and workplaces.

**Q6. Are the proposals for taking the strategy forward adequate?**

Response

The proposals for taking the strategy forward appear to encompass a broad range of structures and processes to enable it to be implemented effectively. However, adequate funding by government will be crucial to the success of the strategy.

**Q7. Are the equality issues adequately addressed?**

Response

It appears that the impact of the strategy as indicated by the IIA tool suggests that equality issues have been addressed.