



Faculty of Public Health

of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

Please reply to:

Dr Janet Little
Convenor, NIAC
EHSSB
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16th March 2005

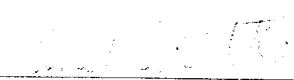
Mr Seamus Camplison
Evaluation & Equality Unit
Block C
Castle Buildings
Stormont Estate
Belfast

Dear Mr Camplison

Re: NIAC Response to 'A Healthier Future – The 20 Year Vision for Health and Wellbeing in Northern Ireland'

Please find attached response following the Plenary Session of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

Yours sincerely



Dr Janet Little
Convenor

c.c. Dr A Jordan
Mrs E O'Doherty

***Summary of Views from the NIAC Workshop on
“A Healthier Future” – The 20 Year Vision for Health and
Well-being in Northern Ireland***

28 February 2005

Members of the Faculty of Public Health in Northern Ireland generally welcomed the Strategy and supported its overall aim to improve the physical and mental health and social well-being of the people of Northern Ireland.

The following points were made in response to the 7 consultation questions.

Question 1

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

- Some concern was expressed that the vision was utopian in places. It was felt that comprehensive implementation plans will be needed in order to address the lack of detail in many areas of the Strategy.
- A number of gaps in the vision were identified. The Strategy should include a chapter on the needs of ethnic minorities, including new European Community arrivals who may come from countries with a different burden of disease. For example, some new EC countries have a very high incidence of TB.
- There was concern that the Strategy was placing too much emphasis on “the expert patient” approach. To date, this has only been developed in a research setting. There may be more gains from adopting peer support programmes.
- The vision should strongly articulate the HPSS’s role in advocating for healthy public policies, particularly when engaging in partnership working.

- More detail is needed in relation to the vision for children and young people. Addressing their needs is key to tackling health inequalities. A Service Framework for Children is required to bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK.
- There needs to be a stronger focus on the service element of prevention, particularly in relation to sexual health services and screening. There is a danger that the prevention services may fall into a gap between the Investing for Health theme and HPSS core business.
- Protection of personal information and the need to introduce Section 60 or an equivalent process; here is also an issue requiring urgent attention within the Strategy.

Question 2

A Healthier Future focuses on major themes: Investing for Health and Well-being; 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?

- Overall, the major themes were welcomed. Some concern was expressed that the principle of 'Involving People' could be misused as an excuse for delay or inaction. The theme 'Improving Quality' should incorporate patient safety issues.
- As highlighted in the response to the previous question, it was felt that the practical implications of the themes were unclear and that comprehensive implementation plans will be required.
- Other themes that should be included are:
 - leadership to drive the agenda proactively;
 - research to enhance the evidence base; and
 - links with the rest of the UK and Europe to keep abreast of standards and developments.

Question 3

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?

- While there was general satisfaction with the Policy Directions outlined in the document, it was felt there was a need for a total Government reaffirmation of the Policy Direction of Investing for Health. At present, this is too traditional in approach. There is a need to be more creative in how we engage with alternative settings, such as Healthy Living Centres, both for the provision of outreach services and alternative services in order to be more accessible to deprived communities.

With an increased emphasis on community services, it is vital to acknowledge the need for increased education and training of community-based professionals, as they are required to manage more complex conditions.

- There needs to be more emphasis on the importance of a secondary screening programme in health improvement.
- There also needs to be a Policy Direction relating to an evidence-based approach, especially for policies. Information support will be required for this.
- Policy Direction No. 10 needs to be expanded to include ethnic minority groups.

Question 4

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?

- There needs to be a key action relating to folic acid for the prevention of neural tube defects.
- There needs to be a stronger emphasis on fluoridation.
- There needs to be a key action in relation to screening. This requires more effective management at regional level, as proposed in the Review of Public Health Function.
- Outcomes based on consumer satisfaction are not direct measures of service quality. Concern was expressed about the appropriateness and desirability of these outcomes.
- Concern was also expressed that the targets were ambitious, with a high risk that they were unachievable. It was felt that it will be impossible to improve services and deal with an ageing population and make the required efficiency savings. It was also felt that many of the factors which will affect the outcomes of the Strategy lie outside the control of the HPSS.

Question 5

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

- There was unanimous support for Option C. It was felt that there is clear evidence that environmental tobacco smoke is directly harmful to health, with those in the hospitality industry, such as pubs and restaurants, being at particular risk because of the extent of their exposure. There is no safe level of exposure to the carcinogens contained in cigarette smoke and ventilation does not adequately protect people. It was felt that legislation should be introduced immediately to make all public places and workplaces smoke-free in order to protect the health of all workers in Northern Ireland.

Question 6

Are the proposals for taking the Strategy forward adequate?

- It was felt that a major communication programme would be required to inform the whole of the HPSS. This is needed in order to secure involvement and commitment in implementing the Strategy. The communication programme should also include other agencies who will have a role to play in implementing the Strategy. For example, the goal of promoting independent living for people who require care will require the collaboration of other agencies for full implementation.
- There is a need for a comprehensive implementation plan, setting out what needs to be done, by whom. This should include year on year sequential targets linked to the 20 year goals.

Question 7

Are the equality issues adequately addressed?

- It was felt that a full, formal equality impact assessment should be undertaken for a significant document such as the 20 Year Strategy.