

## Developing a new Public Health Strategy for Northern Ireland – Update September 2011

A review of the 10-year public health strategy for Northern Ireland “*Investing for Health*” was completed last year. The review concluded that there is a clear need for a strategy based on the principles of *Investing for Health* but that it needed to be updated to take account of social, economic and legislative developments changes as well as new evidence and data which is available since the *Investing for Health* strategy was published.

While the general health of the Northern Ireland population shows signs of improvement as measured by life expectancy, too many people still die too young, or live with conditions that could have been prevented. A recent report by the Office for National Statistics showed that the proportion of life spent free of from chronic illness or disability was 3 years lower in Northern Ireland compared with England. We also recognise that there are still clear gaps between the health status of some population groups and individuals.

The process for developing a new strategy has begun and this short newsletter is to update you on progress and thinking so far.

### Scope of New Strategy

What the new strategy should include was discussed at a meeting of the Ministerial Group on Public Health (MGPH) in September. This MGPH is made up of representatives of all 11 Government Departments in the Northern Ireland Assembly and is chaired by the Minister for Health, Social Service and Public Safety.

The intention is that the new strategy will be -

- a high-level cross-government, outcome-based strategic framework;
- built on the broad aims, values and principles of the previous strategy, but reflecting changes which have taken place since, and providing strategic direction for the next ten years.

It will -

- continue to focus on improving the overall health and well being of the NI population whilst aiming to reduce those health inequalities which are clearly evident today;
- focus on those determinants the evidence base has shown are most powerful in reducing health inequalities;

- adopt the lifecourse approach, focusing on what has been shown to be effective interventions for key life stages;
- seek to align with and enhance other strategies and government policies to make the best use of available resources.

In respect of what has been shown to be effective, particular notice will be taken of the analysis of the “Marmot Review” – the Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England 2010.

### Project Arrangements

In support of MGPH, a cross-sectoral Project Board chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, and comprised of representatives from the health and social care sector, the community and voluntary sector, local government and academics who work in public health, will provide guidance and direction to two working groups. These two groups – a Drafting Group and a Data and Research Group will research, liaise with key stakeholders and partners, draft and provide recommendations to the Project Board.

In order to have a new strategic framework in place by the end of 2012 it is intended to publish a document for public consultation in Spring 2012.

### Challenges

There will be challenges involved in this process. The new framework must be set within the current financial and economic climate. There are also increased expectations about a more coherent, cross-Government approach to tackling a wide range of issues in Northern Ireland. It will also need to address the new Programme for Government and the expectations of the wide range of Government Departments and stakeholders to meet the recognised health and social wellbeing needs of the Northern Ireland population.

Further updates on progress will be issued. Should you have any comments to make at this early stage please email Health Development Policy Branch, DHSSPS at: [hdpb@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:hdpb@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

### Useful References

***Investing for Health 2002:***

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/show\\_publications?txtid=10415](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/show_publications?txtid=10415)

***IfH Review report (2010):***

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health\\_development-final\\_report\\_-\\_september\\_2010.pdf](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/health_development-final_report_-_september_2010.pdf)

***Marmot review report:***

<http://www.marmotreview.org/AssetLibrary/pdfs/Reports/FairSocietyHealthyLives.pdf>