

# The role of the NHS in prevention: a review of grey literature

Updated November 2018



## Background

The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) have launched a Public Health Funding Campaign. The campaign is intended to set out the Faculty's vision for the future of public health and make the case for increased investment in public health and prevention. As part of the campaign we are focusing on the role of the NHS in prevention and have secured funding from the Health Foundation to explore this.

Consequently, the FPH have commissioned The Evidence Centre to perform a rapid review of the peer-reviewed literature on the NHS role in preventing ill health. This document is intended as a supplement to that review, as a rapid review of grey literature on the NHS role in prevention.

The aim is not to be exhaustive, but rather to provide headlines about the type of prevention programmes that have been covered in grey literature.

## Methods

A grey literature review search strategy has been developed by the University of Birmingham and will be used to perform this review. This strategy involves a 3-pronged approach to discovering relevant grey literature.

1. Grey literature database searching (NHS Evidence, Health Management Information Consortium database)
2. Google Scholar search (not including peer-reviewed publications)
3. Searching specific websites (gov.uk, parliament.uk, nhs.uk, local.gov.uk)

Definition: For the purposes of this review, 'prevention' is defined as activities that may result in the primary (preventing disease from happening in the first place) or secondary (early detection and treatment of disease) prevention of illness.

The broad search strategy used for each of the searches was:

'prevention' OR 'public health' AND 'NHS'

This was refined based on the number of results this produced. The search was limited to results in the UK since the restructuring of the NHS following the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The reason for this was to find relevant examples of preventative work that have been successful within the current structure of the NHS. Any results found in published literature were excluded as they will be covered in the peer-reviewed literature review.

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Additional relevant papers were identified using more specific search terms and snowballing.

This work is intended as a scan or rapid search of the role of the NHS in prevention. It is not intended as a comprehensive search of preventative work in the NHS and as such both the search strategy and review of the literature are limited in scope.

## Results

1. Grey literature search
  - a. NHS Evidence – 473 results, 14 relevant publications
  - b. HMIC database – 91 results, 1 relevant publication
2. Google scholar search – 346,000 results, search refined then 67 results, no non-peer-reviewed literature identified
3. Searching specific websites
  - a. Gov.uk – 31,613 results found – ordered by relevance, first 100 results filtered by title and summary, 1 new relevant publication, 4 repeats
  - b. Parliament.uk – 16,700 results – ordered by relevance, first 100 results filtered by title and summary, 1 relevant publication
  - c. Nhs.uk – 4,540 results – ordered by relevance, first 100 results filtered by title and summary, no relevant publications
  - d. Local.gov.uk – 5,040 results – ordered by relevance, first 100 results filtered by title and summary, 4 relevant publications
4. Additional papers identified – 2 further relevant documents identified from non-governmental organisations

Table 1 below is a brief summary of the relevant publications found alongside the source, publishing organisation and publication title.

*Table 1: A summary of grey literature found as part of the rapid review.*

Source	Organisation	Publication Title	Summary of discussion on NHS prevention work
NHS Evidence	Royal College of Nursing	The case for healthy workplaces	131 million sick days in the UK in 2013. The NHS employs 1.7 million people in the UK. Promoting health and wellbeing amongst NHS staff is key to the nation's health.
NHS Evidence	Scottish government	<a href="#">A Healthier Future</a> - Action and Ambitions on Diet, Activity and Healthy Weight	Healthcare retail standard and Health living award have led to healthier food consumption within NHS settings in Scotland. Support expressed for NHS healthy living interventions and NHS child healthy weight programmes.

NHS Evidence	House of Commons	<a href="#">The five year forward view for mental health</a>	Improve 7 day crisis response service for suicide prevention. Secondary prevention for people with severe mental health issues, especially stopping smoking.
NHS Evidence	Health Education England	<a href="#">Facing the facts, shaping the future</a> - A draft health and care workforce strategy for England to 2027	Training clinicians in population medicine and prevention should be the first priority. If prevention or service transformation are not used to reduce demand, 190,000 more clinical posts will be needed by 2027. Nurses and midwives to receive training in prevention and self-care.
NHS Evidence	Department of Health Northern Ireland	<a href="#">A fitter future for all</a> – Framework for preventing and addressing overweight and obesity	A progress report on Northern Ireland's attempts to curb obesity. A number of successful prevention initiatives are running, however only one mentions NHS involvement.
NHS Evidence	Quality Watch	<a href="#">Focus on public health and prevention</a>	Concerns over the loss of public health input on NHS commissioning has led to less of a focus on prevention.
NHS Evidence	Public Health England	<a href="#">Using the world leading NHS prevention programme to prevent CVD</a>	Optimising anti-hypertensive and atrial fibrillation treatment saves £274.2 million and £241.6 million over 3 years, highlighting the value of prevention. Increasing uptake of NHS Health Checks and referrals for lifestyle management can prevent CVD.
NHS Evidence	Public Health England	<a href="#">The prevention challenge one year on</a> - A self-assessment review of progress by NHS Provider Trusts in the East Midlands	NHS Provider Trusts have made progress in certain areas such as making themselves completely smoke-free. Other aspects still need work such as Making Every Contact Count and linking with external partners. A key point is that prevention work does not seem to be prioritised or performed systematically across the all organisations.
NHS Evidence	Public Health England	<a href="#">The prevention challenge one year on</a> - A self-assessment review of progress by Clinical Commissioning Groups in the East Midlands.	All CCGs had a strong commitment to prevention but reported a lack of resources in order to be able to deliver prevention. CCGs did not link their prevention work with others or with NHS England and failed to capitalise on public health expertise. Prevention comes lower on the list of priorities, there are no national incentives for prevention.
NHS Evidence	Public Health England	<a href="#">The NHS Health Check – Stock take and action plan</a>	NHS Health Checks result in early diagnosis of disease and offers opportunities for secondary prevention. Over 6 million people have had a health

			check though this is not evenly distributed across local authorities.
NHS Evidence	Public Health England	<a href="#">Health matters – preventing type 2 diabetes</a>	NHS Diabetes Prevention Plan aims to deliver weight loss and reduce the incidence of Type 2 diabetes. Aims to refer people to appropriate services e.g. weight management classes to prevent Type 2 diabetes.
NHS Evidence	NHS	<a href="#">Next steps on the NHS five-year forward view</a>	Call for expansion on the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme. CQUIN payments to NHS trusts for offering smoking and alcohol advice. NHS Health Check delivery and uptake to be improved. A 'wellbeing premium' trial in the West Midlands to encourage employers to look after their employees' health. NHS RightCare to work with CCGs to improve prevention of CVD.
NHS Evidence	Department of Health	<a href="#">Government response to the Lords Select Committee report on Long-Term Sustainability of the NHS and Adult Social Care</a>	Government responses to Health Committee concerns about public health funding outlining the next steps on the NHS five-year forward view and giving examples such as the NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme as ongoing preventative work.
NHS Evidence	Public Health England	<a href="#">Cardiovascular disease: getting serious about prevention</a>	Discussion of various NHS prevention programmes for cardiovascular disease e.g. Abdominal Aortic Aneurysm Screening Programme.
HMIC database	Public Health England / NHS England	Sustainable, Resilient, Healthy People & Places: A Sustainable Development Strategy for the NHS, Public Health and Social Care system	Proposes to develop modules including 'Building social capital as a core role of health and care system' to develop social value between the NHS, partner organisations and communities.
Gov.uk	Public Health England	<a href="#">Local health and care planning: menu of preventative interventions</a>	Comprehensive coverage of preventative interventions and their evidence. 6 interventions were identified that could deliver cost savings within 5 years: identification and brief advice offered in primary care to those with a high alcohol intake; alcohol care teams in secondary care; tobacco screening, advice and referral in secondary care; improved management of hypertension in primary

			care; increased uptake of long-acting reversible contraceptives; implementing a fracture liaison service in secondary care.
Parliament .uk	House of Commons – Health Committee	<a href="#">Impact of physical activity and diet on health</a>	Brief advice to increase physical activity in primary care settings is cost-effective. Lifestyle weight management service referral can also be effective. The NHS is this country's largest employer and has a crucial role to play both in terms of promoting the health of its workforce, and in setting a wider example.
Local.gov.uk	Local Government Association	<a href="#">Government and NHS integration in Worcestershire County Council</a>	Examples of local authority and NHS integration in Worcestershire include: the south Worcestershire Integrated Recovery programme, social impact bond to tackle loneliness and isolation.
Local.gov.uk	Local Government Association	<a href="#">Government and NHS integration in Richmond upon Thames</a>	Introduction of systematic commissioning to focus on outcomes and focusing on prevention rather than treatment.
Local.gov.uk	Local Government Association	<a href="#">Prevention: A Shared Commitment - Making the case for a Prevention Transformation Fund</a>	Call for a prevention transformation fund. Examples of preventative work between NHS and local authorities given in the document.
Local.gov.uk	Local government association	<a href="#">Public Health's role in local government and NHS integration</a>	Highlighting how public health can be used to integrate prevention work in the NHS and local authorities e.g. through influencing commissioning.
Broader search	Nuffield trust	<a href="#">Cuts to public health: why spending less will cost the NHS more</a>	Public health interventions offer good return on investment but the pay-off is longer term therefore public health funding is seen as an easy target for cuts.
Broader search	British Medical Association	<a href="#">Prevention before cure Securing the long-term sustainability of the NHS</a>	Much of ill-health is preventable should population health be focused upon. Alcohol, diet and obesity, and tobacco are some areas on which targeted prevention would benefit population health.
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Broader search	Department of Health and Social Care	<a href="#">Prevention is better than cure</a>	Sets out vision for 'putting prevention at the heart of the nation's health'. Describes why prevention is important and the government's vision for prevention. States there will be a green paper on prevention in the first half of 2019.

Broader search	Public Health England	<a href="#">Making prevention a priority for the next generation of health professionals</a>	Outlines PHE's All Our Health framework designed to embed prevention into every healthcare professionals day to day practice.
Broader search	Public Health England	<a href="#">A new vision for prevention</a>	Calls the new prevention vision a 'seminal moment' for public health. Advocates for integration of services, and a person-centred approach empowering people to take charge of their own health.

Table 1 highlights that prevention is seen as the foundation for ensuring a sustainable, functioning NHS. Most of the documents found were policy documents or strategies rather than examples of preventative work happening in the NHS. As such, they reflect the perspectives of the people writing them and are not necessarily evidence-based.

A few key themes emerged from the grey literature:

- There is agreement on the value of prevention long-term however prevention funds often appear to be reallocated to cover acute care within the NHS.
- There is broad consensus that increasing preventative work within the NHS is needed.
- Initiatives such as the NHS Health Check and the NHS National Diabetes Prevention Programme are the biggest examples of preventative work in the NHS (outside of the screening and immunisations programmes).
- NHS Health Checks are highly variable in their delivery and uptake across the country.
- There appears to be an appetite for increased public health involvement in commissioning both in NHS and local authority settings. This is thought to lead to more of a focus on prevention in the commissioning of services.
- The NHS is one of the largest employers in the world and promoting the health of the NHS workforce in terms of both physical and mental health could be an example to all other employers.
- Additionally, ensuring that healthcare workers are trained about prevention and promoting health could help improve public health.
- Multiple examples of integration between local authority and the NHS were found at the local level.
- Collaborative and partnership working across the NHS, public health and local authorities appears to be a successful method for promoting prevention.

The Public Health England Chief Executive, Duncan Selbie, has recently set out the following priorities for the NHS: 'We need to remove smoking from England – for good, address our appalling obesity levels in both adults and children and tackle the high rates of avoidable deaths from cardiovascular disease.' There are nationally mandated preventative programmes addressing each of these: NHS Stop Smoking services, NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme and the NHS Health Check. Clearly there is scope for improving these programmes and supplementing them with further preventative work.

This grey literature review highlights national prevention programmes backed by the NHS or Public Health England. Examples of local preventative programmes may either not have been published or there may be a few published examples in the peer-reviewed literature. It is also important to note the limited scope of this grey literature search which focuses specifically on interventions that are self-defined as 'prevention' and occur using NHS funding.

## **Summary of findings**

There is a large amount of grey literature exploring the NHS' role in prevention and how prevention could benefit the NHS. Most of these documents originate from governmental organisations or third sector organisations with an interest in healthcare. Everyone appears to agree on the importance of prevention work and how it could save the NHS money and reduce the burden of disease.

There are some examples of successful preventative interventions in grey literature, especially national initiatives designed to prevent disease. Much of the success or failure of these initiatives is down to implementation, buy-in and collaborative working with other organisations such as local authorities.

The main barrier to preventative work seems to be investment. Numerous different organisations write about 'making a case for prevention' in economic terms. The main facilitator appears to be Department of Health backing, for instance in the nationally driven Health Check and Diabetes Prevention Programmes.

This does not mean that nationally driven prevention programmes are the 'best' way to deliver prevention, just that grey literature tended to focus on these programmes. It is likely that more local preventative programmes will be uncovered in the peer-reviewed literature search and/or may not have been published about at all.

With the upcoming prevention green paper in the first half of 2019 backed by both the Department of Health and Social Care, and Public Health England, there appears to be a recent shift in focus towards prevention in policy documents. It remains to be seen whether the rhetoric around prevention will result in a positive impact on the public's health.