



Faculty of Public Health: briefing for prospective MSPs

Background

The Faculty of Public Healthⁱ is the authoritative and independent voice of public health experts in Scotland, the UK and in many other parts of the world. This briefing is made available to inform the political debate with public health values, data and evidence, in order that the health and wellbeing of the Scottish population improves and health inequalities are reduced.

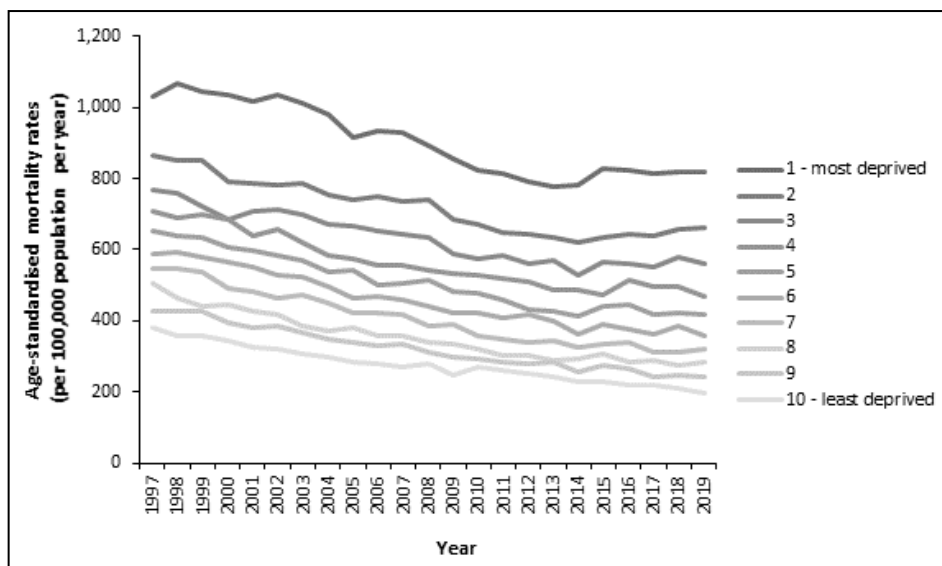


Figure 1. Trends in premature deaths (age-standardised mortality rates under 75 years) by income-employment deciles in Scotlandⁱⁱ

Scotland faces many stark public health challenges. Improvements in life expectancy have stalled since 2012, and health inequalities in mortality are widening (Figure 1).^{ii,iii,iv} Women in the least deprived areas can expect to spend 85.1% of their life in good health; for the most deprived, this is only 65.5%.^v Drug-related deaths are rising exponentially.^{vi} Almost 1 in 4 Scottish adults report depressive symptoms – with 13.3% having suicidal thoughts in the last week^{vii} – and the long-known issues of heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes and obesity continue to challenge.^{viii} These pre-existing problems have made us more vulnerable to the effects of the pandemic, and COVID-19 will further increase health inequalities in Scotland unless action is taken to protect those who have borne the most adverse effects.^{ix}

Scotland has already shown it can lead the world with the ban on smoking in public places, Minimum Unit Pricing for alcohol and the Child Poverty Act. We call for you, as a prospective MSP, to support decisive action to improve the future health of the people of Scotland.

Call to action

1. Include health in all policies

Across all areas of policy, we recommend the introduction of detailed and meaningful consideration of the impact of decision-making on population health and health inequalities at the design phase, with changes to maximise health gains. Well established tools like Health Impact Assessment can be used to do this in a systematic way.

2. Reduce health inequalities and return to improving healthy life expectancy

The central causes of the worsening health inequality and stalled life expectancy trends in Scotland are economic: they are underpinned by the rise in inequalities in income, wealth and power across Scotland.^{x,xi} This has been intensified by the introduction of austerity policies over the last decade,^x with poor families also likely to be hardest hit by the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic.^{xii} A commensurate response should avoid further austerity and include the following actions:

- a. Make taxation more progressive
- b. Define and publicise a Minimum Income for Healthy Living,^{xiii} then monitor the proportion of the population that has at least this income level and set targets to improve this proportion within one electoral cycle
- c. Commit to protecting high quality universal public services
- d. Take radical action to address drug-related harms
- e. Take radical action to tackle modifiable risk factors for non-communicable diseases - tobacco, alcohol and unhealthy food and drink.^{xiv} This should include further action to restrict promotion of unhealthy commodities, which have been heavily marketed throughout the pandemic.^{xv}

3. Improve health for future generations

The health of future generations is our responsibility. Experiencing poverty and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have lasting impacts on health.^{xvi} Children and young people have also borne disproportionate adverse impacts from the pandemic.^{xvii,xviii,xix,xx} We therefore urge you to support the following measures:

- a. Reduce child poverty and mitigate its adverse impacts
- b. Prevent and mitigate impacts of ACEs by taking a public health approach
- c. Prioritise investment in early years support and education, and in the provision of high quality play space for children and young people
- d. Invest in enhanced provision of mental health and wellbeing services for children and young people

- e. Establish and fund a national action plan to reduce educational inequalities

4. Create healthy places

The places in which we live, work, grow up and grow old are important to our health and wellbeing. Human health is also inextricably linked to the health of the planet, which is facing unprecedented shifts in climate and degradation of natural resources.^{xxi} Our places should therefore be redesigned to support our population to flourish whilst protecting and enhancing nature and mitigating the threats of climate change. We are calling for the below actions:

- a. Ensure the transport budget follows the sustainable transport hierarchy, with increased investment in integrated public transport and in safe, inclusive infrastructure for walking, wheeling and cycling^{xxii}
- b. Ensure spatial planning policies and plans are assessed for their contribution to Health and Wellbeing Outcomes^{xxiii}, and their contribution to enhancing nature and minimising carbon emissions or maximising carbon absorption potential
- c. Increase the proportion of people able to access their daily needs within a walkable distance, including high quality greenspace and play space
- d. Commit to a long term programme of investment in affordable homes, based on housing need, which provide high standards of energy efficiency, facilitate use of renewable energy and are located in high quality, walkable neighbourhoods with good public transport links
- e. Ensure the health aspects of climate change and sustainability are articulated at COP26 in Glasgow this year, maximising this opportunity to place Scotland in a world-leading position in prioritising and acting on the connections between human and planetary health

5. Develop and support a world-class public health system

A world-class public health system provides expertise and leadership not only to meet immediate health threats like the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to support a healthy recovery and help address the broader challenges as outlined here. This will require investment and long-term commitment to the profession. We therefore ask you to:

- a. Support investment and strengthening of all branches of the public health workforce, and value the independent evidence-based voice of the profession
- b. Integrate public health advice into all relevant areas of policy and practice

References

- ⁱ Faculty of Public Health (2021). *About the Faculty of Public Health [Online]*. Available from: <https://www.fph.org.uk/about-fph/>
- ⁱⁱ Scottish Government (2021). *Long-term monitoring of health inequalities: January 2021 report. Supplementary Tables [Table 2]*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/long-term-monitoring-health-inequalities-january-2021-report/>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ National Records of Scotland (2020). *Life Expectancy in Scotland 2017-2019*. National Statistics. Available from: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/life-expectancy-in-scotland/17-19/life-expectancy-17-19-report.pdf>
- ^{iv} Scottish Government (2021). *Long-term monitoring of health inequalities: January 2021 report*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/long-term-monitoring-health-inequalities-january-2021-report/>
- ^v National Records of Scotland (2019). *Healthy Life Expectancy in Scottish Areas 2015-2017*. National Statistics. Available from: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/healthy-life-expectancy/15-17/healthy-le-15-17-pub.pdf>
- ^{vi} National Records of Scotland (2020). *Drug-related deaths in Scotland in 2019*. National Statistics. Available from: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//statistics/drug-related-deaths/2019/drug-related-deaths-19-pub.pdf>
- ^{vii} Scottish Government (2021). *Scottish COVID-19 Mental Health Tracker Study: Wave 2 Report*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-covid-19-mental-health-tracker-study-wave-2-report/pages/2/>
- ^{viii} The Scottish Public Health Observatory (2019). *Health, wellbeing and disease: overview [Online]*. Available from: <https://www.scotpho.org.uk/health-wellbeing-and-disease/>
- ^{ix} Douglas, M., Katikireddi, S.V., Taulbut, M., McKee, M., and McCartney, G. (2020). *Mitigating the wider health effects of covid-19 pandemic response*. *BMJ* 2020; 369 :m1557
- ^x The Scottish Public Health Observatory (2020). *Recent mortality trends [Online]*. Available from: <https://www.scotpho.org.uk/population-dynamics/recent-mortality-trends/>
- ^{xi} The Scottish Public Health Observatory (2020). *Health inequalities: introduction [Online]*. Available from: <https://www.scotpho.org.uk/comparative-health/health-inequalities/introduction/>
- ^{xii} Whitehead M, Taylor-Robinson D, Barr B (2021). *Poverty, health, and covid-19*. *BMJ* 2021; 372 :n376
- ^{xiii} Morris JN, Donkin AJM, Wonderling D, et al. (2000) *A minimum income for healthy living*. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* 2000;54:885-889
- ^{xiv} ASH Scotland, nd. *Non-Communicable Disease Prevention - A manifesto for the next Parliament: Addressing Scotland's biggest killers through action on societal factors that cause ill-health*. ASH Scotland. Available from: <https://www.ashscotland.org.uk/media/838464/ncd-paper-final.pdf>
- ^{xv} Collin J; Ralston R; Hill SE, Westerman L (2020). *Signalling Virtue, Promoting Harm: Unhealthy commodity industries and COVID-19*. NCD Alliance, SPECTRUM. Available from: https://ncdalliance.org/sites/default/files/resource_files/Signalling%20Virtue%2C%20Promoting%20Harm_Sept2020_FINALv.pdf
- ^{xvi} Public Health Scotland (2021). *Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) [online]*. Available from: <http://www.healthscotland.scot/population-groups/children/adverse-childhood-experiences-aces/overview-of-aces>

^{xvii} Scottish Government (2020). *The impacts of COVID-19 on Equality in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available from:

<https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/research-and-analysis/2020/09/the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-equality-in-scotland/documents/full-report/full-report/govscot%3Adocument/Covid%2Band%2Binequalities%2BFinal%2BReport%2BFor%2BPublication%2B-%2BPDF.pdf>

^{xviii} Public Health Scotland (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on children and young people in Scotland: 2 to 4 year olds*. Available from: <https://publichealthscotland.scot/media/2881/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-children-and-young-people-2-4-year-olds-nov2020-english.pdf>

^{xix} NHS Digital (2020). *Mental health of children and young people in England, 2020: Wave 1 follow up to the 2017 survey*. Available from: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2020-wave-1-follow-up>

^{xx} Viner R, Russell S, Saull R, et al. (2021) *Impacts of school closures on physical and mental health of children and young people: a systematic review [preprint]*. MedRxiv 2021.02.10.21251526

^{xxi} The World Health Organisation (2018). *Climate change and health [Online]*. Available from: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

^{xxii} Transport Scotland (2020). *National Transport Strategy 2*. Available from: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/national-transport-strategy-2/>

^{xxiii} Scottish Government (2015). *National health and wellbeing outcomes framework*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. Available from: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-health-wellbeing-outcomes-framework/>