Briefing note: Advancing our health – prevention in the 2020s

In July 2019, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Cabinet Office published the prevention green paper *Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s* as a consultation document. Below is a summary of some of the key points covered in the paper, with the full list of consultation questions presented on the final page.

Key messages:
- We must change the way we think about health to view it as an asset and shift the focus from one aiming to improve life span to one that focuses on health span – the number of years we can keep people living healthy, independent lives free from illness or disability.
- The commitments outlined in this green paper signal a new approach to intelligent public health, which is predictive and personalised.
- Tough action is needed on some of the biggest challenges of smoking, obesity and mental ill-health.
- A behavioural science approach is advocated, with steps outlined to make healthy choices as easy as possible for people.
- The green paper frames health as a shared responsibility – with key roles for individuals, communities and industry, as well as the NHS, local, and national government.

Opportunities and drivers of change

Digitally-driven prevention
- The green paper sets out the vision for the 2020s to be characterised by proactive, predictive, and personalised prevention, including:
  - a role for new technologies and using data to inform *"a new wave of intelligent public health";*
  - exploring the potential for data generated by patients to be used in "*a new era of evidence-based self-care*"; and
  - work by Public Health England (PHE), NHSX and partners to build a portfolio of projects that model and evaluate Predictive Prevention at scale.

Targeted support and precision medicine:
- The green paper sets out an ambition for future support and advice provided to people to be much more tailored, including:
  - making NHS screening easier to access, personalised, and risk-stratified;
  - reviewing the NHS Health Checks programme; and
  - unlocking the potential of genomics to deliver *"a new era of precision medicine"*, with the potential to transform early detection of many common diseases and cancers.

Tackling current and future threats:
- Antimicrobial resistance is one of the most pressing global challenges, and the government has already set out a 20-year vision for antimicrobial resistance, supported by a 5-year action plan.
- Another key challenge is declining vaccine uptake; a Vaccination Strategy will be launched by spring 2020 to increase uptake and enhance the use of local immunisation co-ordinators and primary care networks.

Addressing key risk factors of ill-health

Smoking

- The green paper sets an ambition for England to go 'smoke-free' by 2030 – including an ultimatum for industry to make smoked tobacco obsolete by this date, with smokers quitting or moving to reduced risk products such as e-cigarettes.
- Steps need to be taken to tackle inequalities in smoking rates as well as to discourage people from starting in the first place. Given the pressures on local authority budgets, the government is considering other potential funding mechanisms for smoking cessation – with funds going to those most in need, for example pregnant women and people living in deprived communities.

Obesity

- The green paper sets out an approach to reshape the environment to help people make healthy choices. It includes plans for the government to end the sale of energy drinks to children under the age of 16. A number of other areas are being considered, including improving nutritional labelling and limiting the advertising of foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt (particularly before the watershed), as well as extending the Soft Drinks Industry Levy.
- There is a focus on giving children the healthiest start in life, including supporting breastfeeding and publishing industry guidelines to improve the nutritional content of baby food and drinks.
- Based on evidence that patients are receptive to brief interventions for obesity, the government will work with NHS England to improve the quality of advice given on health issues, including weight management, in general practice. Quality improvement approaches will be explored, and innovative proposals can be tested through the new Primary Care Network Testbeds.
- Digital solutions will be supported, and the current digital weight management offer on the NHS Apps Library will be reviewed.
- PHE will work with NHS England and NHS Digital to explore how data from the National Child Measurement Programme can be shared directly with digital child health records and made consistently accessible to parents, carers and health professionals.
- The green paper also sets out steps to increase physical activity, including:
  - the publication of new physical activity guidelines in September 2019;
  - the launch of a second phase of the national Moving Healthcare Professionals partnership programme, which supports healthcare professionals to promote physical activity to their patients; and
  - working across government – for example to encourage local authority planning decisions to promote active lifestyles.

Wider factors

The green paper recognises the impact of a range of other factors that can impact health:

- *Alcohol:* Steps including working with industry to increase the availability of alcohol-free and low-alcohol products, and an evaluation of a 3-year programme to improve outcomes for children living with a parent who is dependent on alcohol (to be published in 2021/22).
- *Drug use:* The Department of Health and Social Care will work with partners to assess the adequacy of responses to cannabis and related mental health problems and will develop an action plan. The Department will also work with partners to develop policy around prescribed and illicit opioid use, and to develop a shared understanding of the current challenges facing the substance misuse workforce.
- *Sleep:* The government will review the evidence on sleep and health to inform the case for clear national guidance on the daily recommended hours of sleep and to raise awareness of key 'sleep hygiene' factors. The NHS will also determine what more can be done to ensure that patients in care settings are getting the amount of rest that they need.

Mental health

- Steps have been taken to try and close the 'treatment gap' between mental and physical health – we now need to close the 'prevention gap' and achieve parity of esteem for how conditions are prevented.
- Urgent action is needed to tackle the risk factors that can lead to poor mental health such as adverse childhood events, poverty, problem debt and social isolation. Similarly, investment is needed in the protective factors that provide a strong foundation for good mental health.
- The green paper sets out an ambition to improve mental health 'literacy' so that everyone has the skills, knowledge and confidence to improve their mental health and wellbeing throughout life.
- There is a focus on children and young people's mental health. In addition to the 2017 green paper, *Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision*, and having made mental health a mandatory part of the school curriculum, the Department of Health and Social Care will provide advice to young people on dealing with difficult emotions through the Rise Above programme.
- Other actions include encouraging all local authorities to put in place mental health promotion plans and investing up to £600,000 to support local authorities to strengthen suicide prevention plans.
- The *Every Mind Matters* campaign will be launched in October 2019, with the aim of making 1 million adults better informed and equipped to look after their mental health and support others. From 2020 this campaign will include advice to parents on supporting their children's mental health and wellbeing.
- Action will also be taken across other parts of government – including the establishment of a statutory Breathing Space scheme for people in problem debt.
- The Department for Education will take a number of actions, including developing training for new teachers on signs of mental health issues, backed up by updated statutory guidance to make clear schools' responsibilities to protect children's mental wellbeing.
- More people should be enabled to connect with nature to support their wellbeing, and potential to launch such a programme in 2020 via social prescribing and personalised care will be explored.

The need to build health as an asset

The green paper positions health as an asset which we should invest in throughout our lives.

- *Investment in early years:* Policy commitments include modernising the Healthy Child Programme, making it universal and personalised, with better linkages between the programme and other health records. The government will also look to improve the way perinatal mental health and the social and emotional development of babies and young children are supported, as well as taking steps to improve early speech and language outcomes and address unwarranted variation in children's oral health.
- *Creating healthy workplaces:* In addition to a recently published consultation, the government will explore how to align support for people with mental and physical health conditions across the NHS, employers and occupational health – so that responsibilities are clear and good information about support is available. Given the prevalence of musculoskeletal problems in the workforce, the government will take steps to ensure that businesses have the tools they need to manage this
- *Investing in homes and neighbourhoods:* The government is undertaking a review of the Fuel Poverty Strategy and will recognise the importance of a warm and safe home on health within its with work on the quality of homes. There will be investment in innovation in ensuring that homes are accessible and adaptable.
- *Green spaces and clean air*: The government will work with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to improve public awareness about pollution sources, and to improve data on the health impacts of air quality.
- *Active ageing:* The green paper sets out a vision for the 2020s to be a decade of active ageing and one where ageist stereotypes are replaced.

Prevention in the NHS

- The green paper reiterates commitments made in the NHS Long Term Plan, including action to tackle obesity, smoking, high alcohol consumption and health inequalities.
- The NHS needs to move from a national treatment service (focused on illness) to a national 'wellness' service (focused on creating good health). Steps to make this vision a reality are:
  - allowing people to connect their own data into the whole record if they choose;
  - giving people personalised advice based on aggregated data; and
  - giving people the tools and motivation to make informed choices.
- Social prescribing will play a key role, and a Social Prescribing Academy is being set up to help to support its spread across England. By 2020/21, over 1,000 trained link workers will be recruited.
- The green paper also emphasises the importance of community pharmacies, with the aim of them becoming the first port of call for minor illness and health advice. The new Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework will redefine this role from October 2019.
- Further options to achieve scale and pace include:
  - improving support options for people living with musculoskeletal conditions, and increasing the join-up across mental and physical health services; and
  - strengthening links with councils, charities and other local partners.

The importance of 'place' and collaborative working across local authorities and the NHS

- The role of 'place' will be integral to any prevention strategy, with a key role for local authorities, given their public health remit and ability to take action on many of the wider determinants of health.
- Health and Wellbeing Boards should form a key part of the local infrastructure on prevention, working with Integrated Care Systems. The green paper states that the tools needed to do this already exist – such as flexibility to pool budgets.
- The green paper sets an ambition for the NHS and local authorities to work more closely together, with more collaborative commissioning. Collaborative commissioning should become the norm in certain areas, such as sexual and reproductive health.
  - The green paper reiterated that local authorities will continue to be responsible for commissioning sexual health services, health visitors and school nurses – but the NHS and local authorities must work much more closely together in these areas – a solution that NHSCC advocated in our recent position statement on public health commissioning.
  - Noting some challenges in the area of sexual and reproductive health, the green paper also states that the Health and Social Care Committee's recommendation to develop a new Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy for England is being considered.
  - The move towards Integrated Care Systems creates the opportunity to co-commission integrated sexual and reproductive health services. The green paper highlights that there are different ways of doing this, for example, designating a lead commissioner or pooling budgets – however local areas need to be able to choose the most appropriate solution for them.

National action across government

- All of government should be 'pulling in the same direction' on prevention.
  - A new Composite Health Index will be developed to provide a visible, top-level indicator of health, that can be tracked alongside GDP, and can be used by the government to assess the health impacts of wider policies.
  - Work will also be done across government to improve the quality and coverage of health impact assessments of non-health policies.

List of consultation questions:

Please find below the full list of questions that are being consulted on through this green paper. Highlighted in **purple** are those questions that we would particularly welcome your views on. Comments on topic specific questions (for example on musculoskeletal health) are also welcome – however we appreciate not everyone will be best placed to comment on these.

1. *Which health and social care policies should be reviewed to improve the health of people living in poorer communities or excluded groups?*
2. *Do you have any ideas for how the NHS Health Checks programme could be improved?*
3. *What ideas should the government consider to raise funds for helping people stop smoking?*
4. *How can we do more to support mothers to breastfeed?*
5. *How can we better support families with children aged 0 to 5 years to eat well?*
6. *How else can we help people reach and stay at a healthier weight?*
7. *Have you got examples or ideas that would help people to do more strength and balance exercises?*
8. *Can you give any examples of any local schemes that help people to do more strength and balance exercises?*
9. *There are many factors affecting people's mental health. How can we support the things that are good for mental health and prevent the things that are bad for mental health, in addition to the mental health actions in the green paper?*
10. *Have you got examples or ideas about using technology to prevent mental ill-health, and promote good mental health and wellbeing?*
11. *We recognise that sleep deprivation (not getting enough sleep) is bad for your health in several ways. What would help people get 7 to 9 hours of sleep a night?*
12. *Have you got examples or ideas for services or advice that could be delivered by community pharmacies to promote health?*
13. *What should the role of water companies be in water fluoridation schemes?*
14. *What would you like to see included in a call for evidence on musculoskeletal (MSK) health?*
15. *What could the government do to help people live more healthily: in homes and neighbourhoods, when going somewhere, in workplaces, in communities?*
16. *What is your priority for making England the best country in the world to grow old in, alongside the work of PHE and national partner organisations?*
    a. *Support people with staying in work*
    b. *Support people with training to change careers in later life*
    c. *Support people with caring for a loved one*
    d. *Improve homes to meet the needs of older people*
    e. *Improve neighbourhoods to meet the needs of older people*
    f. *Other:*
17. *What government policies (outside of health and social care) do you think have the biggest impact on people's mental and physical health? Please describe a top 3.*
18. *How can we make better use of existing assets – across both the public and private sectors – to promote the prevention agenda?*
19. *What more can we do to help local authorities and NHS bodies work well together?*
20. *What are the top 3 things you'd like to see covered in a future strategy on sexual and reproductive health?*
21. *What other areas (in addition to those set out in this green paper) would you like future government policy on prevention to cover?*