

Key Messages from Health Impact Assessments on the Mayor of London's Draft Strategies

Summary

It is widely accepted that many factors can affect health and well being. Some of the major factors, such as transport, the environment and poverty are influenced by local or regional government, and as such, will be significantly affected by a number of statutory policies.

Health impact assessment (HIA) is a tool used to ensure that all policies and practices are properly assessed in terms of how they will impact on health. The aim of HIA is to encourage decision-makers to build on the positive and reduce the negative health impacts of their decisions.

The London Health Commission is committed to carrying out health impact assessments on each of the Mayor of London's draft statutory strategies. To date, HIAs have been completed on all of the statutory strategies. These are: transport, economic development, air quality, bio-diversity, municipal waste management, ambient noise, spatial development (the London Plan) and culture. HIAs have also been completed on the draft energy and children & young people's strategies.

Each HIA has followed a similar three-stage process:

- 1 Review of research evidence relevant to the draft strategy
- 2 Policy appraisal workshop with participants from a range of sectors
- 3 Report to the Mayor and London Assembly on the findings of the workshop, with recommendations

From the HIAs carried out so far, some general observations can be made, based on the stakeholders' views at the workshops and recommendations made in the HIA reports:

Relationships between strategies

The strategies, and their potential role in improving health, overlap to a significant degree: for example, transport, economic development and spatial development need to be linked to encourage the development of economically and socially sustainable communities.

Engagement of partners

Development and implementation of plans rely upon the commitment of key partners. For example, improving transport requires involvement of local authorities; the NHS and major charities have a crucial role to play in the regeneration of deprived areas.

Setting targets and monitoring outcomes

It is important to include health-related indicators when monitoring strategies and major projects.

Key Messages

In terms of benefit to Londoners' health, the emerging key messages emphasise the importance of:

- Tackling economic inequality and promoting social inclusion
- Suitable employment or opportunities for volunteering
- Cleaner air and access to green spaces
- Increased cycling and walking and reducing reliance on private cars
- Providing good public transport and reducing unnecessary travel
- Tackling stress
- Ensuring community safety
- Access to affordable, nutritious food
- Minimising the amount of waste produced and recycling or composting where possible
- Energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty
- Controlling ambient noise
- Access to cultural activity for all
- Monitoring the impact of spatial developments
- Ensuring that improving some areas of London is not to the detriment of the health of people living in other areas

Tackling economic inequality and promoting social inclusion

Social and economic inequality have been shown to be among the principal determinants of health or ill health. There is a two-way relationship between health and economic development – a healthy workforce is a competitive one. Despite this association, not all wealth creation programmes consider their effects on health. Projects and businesses could be encouraged to carry out health impact assessment on their plans and programmes where appropriate. Small businesses may need advice and support on health-related matters.

Promoting social inclusion should involve working closely with local voluntary and statutory agencies to engage communities in identifying their own needs and developing initiatives to tackle them.

Suitable employment or opportunities for volunteering

Employment is a major determinant of health. Changes in legislation and ‘gateways to employment’ that allow easier access to work for disadvantaged people, such as asylum seekers and refugees, could generate the health benefits associated with being employed. Innovative recruitment practices and responses to training, development and educational needs, appropriate to London’s diverse population, could assist people in finding suitable jobs.

People in work also need adequate support, such as improved provision of childcare, so they can gain the health benefits associated with employment. Where people do have jobs, healthy working conditions are important, including strategies to deal with stress. However, paid full-time employment is not an option for everyone and alternative choices, including volunteering, can bring significant health benefits and should also be valued.

Cleaner air and access to green spaces

Reduced air pollution could produce a decrease in hospital admissions for respiratory and cardiovascular disease, and reduce the symptoms of asthma. Addressing indoor air quality, in part through tackling smoking in public places, is also important.

Green spaces benefit health. Londoners should be made aware of the capital’s green spaces and waterways and everyone should be able to benefit from these areas by the provision of good public transport links and sufficient safety measures. Children should be encouraged to value the outdoors and local environment as early as possible.

Increased cycling and walking and reducing reliance on private cars

Physical activity reduces the risk of cardiovascular disease – the biggest cause of premature death in the UK – and many other diseases, including diabetes and some cancers. In addition, walking can lead to improved social networking, greater ‘ownership’ of the community, a consequent reduction in social exclusion and a resultant improvement in well being and in mental and physical health.

Walking could be promoted through safe routes to school, pedestrianisation and addressing the safety concerns of pedestrians. Accessibility of streets for all, especially those with mobility difficulties or visual impairments, will help to reduce social isolation. This may be achieved by improving conditions for walking, wheelchair users and those with pushchairs by having more dropped kerbs, improved lighting, better signage, and fewer broken paving stones.

Cycling could be promoted by improving cycle routes, segregating traffic, encouraging the provision of secure cycle parking facilities and showers, facilitating cheap insurance and help with purchase of equipment and encouraging train companies to allow greater access for bikes on trains.

Both cycling and walking need to be promoted in ways that minimise accidents. There is a need for accurate information about the balance between real and perceived risks of walking and cycling.

Providing good public transport and reducing unnecessary travel

Reducing Londoners’ need to travel by, for example, encouraging working from home or developing facilities such as community teleworking centres could benefit health. Economic development could reduce the need to travel as greater numbers of people use the Internet and telephone to order goods. Providing services and employment close to where people live could also reduce unnecessary travel.

Londoners should be encouraged to use public transport when they need to travel and cannot walk or cycle. Accessible, affordable public transport allows everyone to access general services, including health, leisure and education facilities and allows those on low incomes to access places of employment. Routes should be designed around the needs of users.

Public transport needs to be safe and convenient. Education initiatives for drivers, including bus drivers, about courteous, respectful behaviour on the road could encourage people to take public transport and to walk or cycle. Training for transport staff about the needs of older people and those with impaired mobility, mental illness and learning disability is important. More off-peak public transport services should be considered to benefit those working unsocial hours and others needing to travel at these times. Safety of late and very late services

needs to be addressed with visible frontline staff in public transport especially female staff, presence of conductors on buses and safety areas on trains at night.

Encouraging the use of the cleanest available fuels by buses and taxis could improve air quality. It may be helpful to consider the use of trams and electric powered vehicles in some areas.

Access to affordable, nutritious food

Diet is one of the determinants of coronary heart disease, cancer, diabetes and other major causes of ill health. However, healthy food including fruit and vegetables is not equally available to all. Some areas are 'food deserts'. The issue of unequal access to affordable, nutritious food needs to be addressed.

Tackling stress

Living in London can be stressful. The stress involved in travelling in London could be tackled through more efficient transport and better information. The stress associated with the intensity, competitiveness and complexity of life and work in London should be acknowledged. Employers and transport providers can have an important role in tackling stress.

Ensuring community safety

Safety issues are highlighted in use of green space and public transport, particularly for some groups of people including women. Tackling real and perceived safety issues is crucial to ensure all communities can benefit from the amenities London has to offer.

Reducing the amount of waste produced and recycling or composting waste where possible

Reducing waste depends upon complex social changes including individual choice about patterns of consumption. However, it seems clear that minimising the amount of waste produced should be the focus for first-line effort. Recycling and composting of waste should take place where possible. Every opportunity should be taken to lobby manufacturers and other organisations to develop more sustainable practices in the creation and disposal of waste.

Energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty

The health of London and its inhabitants is profoundly dependent on energy services and therefore the security of energy supply. Energy shortages can have serious impacts on health in both the short term and long term. Energy efficiency measures can improve health by increasing domestic warmth and reducing emissions of pollutants and greenhouse gases. Tackling 'fuel poverty' and the health inequalities associated with this could make an important contribution to the health of Londoners.

Energy is also a major cost to the NHS so improved energy management has the potential to release significant resources for healthcare.

Controlling ambient noise

Noise is part of life in a big successful city, but it can also reduce people's quality of life. The noise from road traffic, aircraft, construction sites, neighbours and late night entertainment are all important issues in London. Children and people with existing physical and mental illnesses are likely to be most susceptible to noise in the environment. The most widespread response to noise is annoyance, which may include fear and anger. There is evidence that noise exposure influences sleep and may lead to decreased cognitive performance and daytime drowsiness. Exposure to excessive noise is well-documented as a cause of hearing problems among workers in some occupations, particularly industry. Exposure to loud music in discotheques can result in noise induced hearing loss, and could be an issue in London. Potential conflicts between night noise-generating and noise-sensitive activities in London need to be resolved through the ways in which land use is planned and buildings are designed. This is of particular concern where high density, mixed-use developments are planned.

Access to cultural activity for all

Cultural activity is beneficial to the health of communities and individuals within them because of its significant contribution to the development and maintenance of social capital. There is evidence that higher levels of social integration are associated with personal well-being, higher life expectancy and lower death rates and that better social support is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression. Sport and leisure activities are particularly important given the role they can play in reducing major causes of ill-health such as heart disease and diabetes. Children need open spaces and places where they can play. However, cultural and leisure activities are not equally accessible to all. Particular barriers to participating in cultural activities exist in terms of cost and physical access for some groups of people. Important issues for London are ensuring that access is improved for disadvantaged groups and balancing the needs of high profile national cultural events with the needs of local people.

Culture also has an important role to play in the delivery of health and social care services. Improving the environment of hospitals and clinics through artworks and conveying health-related information through art and drama are good examples.

Monitoring the impact of spatial developments

The Mayor's draft Spatial Development Strategy (the draft London Plan) sets out plans to accommodate a projected growth in the population of London of over 700,000 people and the resulting growth in jobs, by 2016. This requires a major programme of regeneration and development to provide housing and services, such as

continued on page 4

continued from page 3

schools and health and social care services to meet the predicted demand. The economic, social and health impacts of these developments will need to be monitored as part of on-going processes to ensure that potential benefits to public health are maximised and potential harmful effects are minimised. Much of the growth in jobs is anticipated to be within the financial sector. This should not be at the expense of promoting employment in the public sector, as the hospitals and schools providing services to an increasing population will need to be staffed.

Ensuring that improving some areas of London is not to the detriment of the health of people living in others

Area-based initiatives, including regeneration, can have complex effects. Health inequalities can be reduced through bringing in capital investment and creating jobs and social networks for local people, however simultaneously exacerbated through highlighting the situation of disadvantaged individuals and communities living just outside regeneration zones or in deprived 'pockets' within more affluent areas. The NHS, local authorities and major charities all have a crucial role to play in the regeneration of deprived areas of London, both as employers and contractors.

Similarly, those planning major new schemes need to consider the impact on those living outside the area. For example, congestion charging should reduce traffic, provide funds for improving public transport and generally improve the areas within the charging zones. Nevertheless, for those living just outside the boundary of the charging zone, possible negative impacts on health resulting from increased traffic, noise and pollution need to be monitored and action taken to mitigate against these impacts if they occur.

Evaluation of the HIAs

An independent evaluation of the health impact assessments on the draft mayoral Strategies has been completed. The evaluation shows that participants were impressed that the Greater London Authority had allowed the London Health Commission to undertake health impact assessments of the Mayor's Strategies at the draft stage and that decision makers believed that the health impact assessments had made a difference. Several areas for potential improvements in the process used for the assessments were suggested in the report. A document summarising the findings of this evaluation is available online at www.londonhealth.gov.uk/hia.htm

Further information	
<p>The London Health Commission has produced a number of publications on HIA, including evidence summaries and reports on the HIAs of the Mayor of London's draft strategies. All documents are available from the Commission's website at www.londonhealth.gov.uk/hia.htm</p>	<p>The London Health Observatory currently facilitates training in conducting health impact assessments. E-mail: register@lho.org.uk</p>

The London Health Commission seeks to improve the well-being of all Londoners and reduce inequalities in health. The LHC promotes a co-ordinated approach to the factors that influence health in London, and will do this by:

- Building partnerships involving the health sector, local and national government, the private sector, community and voluntary groups
- Influencing decision-makers
- Providing support for local action

Based on "Update on key messages from and future plans for Health Impact Assessments on the Mayor's draft strategies", an original report to the London Health Commission (November 2001) written by Lesley Mountford, Specialist Registrar in Public Health, Greater London Authority

Editing and Production: Donna Carr, Involvement and Communications Manager, London Health Commission

August 2003

ISSN: 1478-4440

LONDON
HEALTH COMMISSION

City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

Tel: 020 7983 4120

Website: www.londonhealth.gov.uk

Email: health.commission@london.gov.uk