

Learning from Area Based Initiatives

Mainstreaming action to tackle health inequalities

Introduction

Reducing health inequalities is a major challenge for the capital and a priority area of work for the London Health Commission. However, improving the health and well being of Londoners requires co-ordinated action to improve the determinants of health, such as employment, housing, income and education. The Health Inequalities Implementation Group, responsible for leading the Commission's work on this priority, has undertaken a series of activities to support local initiatives to tackle health inequalities. As part of this programme, the group hosted a conference that focussed on learning from current area based initiatives (ABIs) and ensuring good practice is incorporated into mainstream activities. This paper summarises the key points that emerged from the day and highlights a number of the local projects showcased at the event that are currently making an impact at a local level.

This event successfully brought together key agencies from the voluntary sector, the NHS, and local government to hear from practitioners how particular initiatives have benefited the health and well-being of local communities. The ABIs providing the key learning points during the day were Sure Start, Health Action Zones and Single Regeneration Budget funded projects. Speakers set the scene by providing information on national policy, academic research, and the impact that these initiatives have made. Local champions of good practice informed delegates about local approaches that are making a difference.

A series of workshops addressed:

- how area based initiatives have made a difference;
- how the learning gained from them can be taken forward, and used in mainstream services;
- how local champions tackling health inequalities can be supported;
- how those leaders who do not have health inequalities on their agenda can be influenced.

The collective experience of the participants helped identify and build on the learning from area based initiatives and clarify key messages to be disseminated to local leaders.

Key messages

- **Local networks are needed, through which area based initiatives can collaborate, co-ordinate and exchange key points of learning. Other innovators looking for ideas and support should also be able to tap into these networks**
- **There should be greater emphasis on tackling the inequalities experienced by black and minority ethnic communities**
- **Central and local government need to invest in ensuring that learning from area based initiatives is absorbed into mainstream service delivery**
- **The Commission should use its influence to ensure tackling health inequalities becomes part of mainstream activity**
- **Local Strategic Partnerships need to have shared priorities related to health inequalities, and ensure that decisions are shared with local people**
- **There needs to be a broader understanding of the wider determinants of health and their importance**
- **Greater shared ownership, responsibility and involvement are essential when developing activities that contribute to tackling health inequalities**
- **Investment in training is vital to developing local skills and capacity and ensuring that those who would not normally take part are able to do so.**

Taking forward learning

The experiences and knowledge of area based initiatives that have tackled inequalities needs to be widely disseminated and absorbed. Taking forward key learning should be made a priority, so that good practice can be replicated and mistakes avoided.

Learning should be across organisations at the local level and up from the local level to sub-regional, regional and national government.

Lessons should be pulled together from across projects and programmes. For example, many Health Action Zones have found that the initiatives that were most successful at addressing health inequalities were those which cut across all other areas of work, and built on existing partnerships and inter-agency arrangements.

In particular, there is a case for ensuring that the learning about what has and has not worked in area based initiatives is shared widely. Pressures on Health

Addressing the wider determinants of health

Enabling children from deprived backgrounds to access medical courses

The Access to Medicine Programme at Guy's, King's and St Thomas' Schools of Medicine, Dentistry and Bio-medical Sciences aims to increase the participation of local students from educationally and socially disadvantaged backgrounds in medicine and related careers. In doing so, it aims to train health professionals who better reflect the social and cultural diversity of the inner boroughs in which the School of Medicine is located.

Achievements:

- 30 young people placed in health-related work experience placements
- over 250 young people benefiting from activities designed to enhance attainment
- over 150 young people receiving vocational advice
- 29 young people commencing medical training (~66% from social classes III-IV)
- a student mentoring scheme established to offer peer support to sixth formers considering a career in medicine

Contacts:

Professor Susan Standing
Susan.Standing@kcl.ac.uk
 Gavin Brown
gavin.p.brown@kcl.ac.uk

Providing food access in East London

In an area where there is poor access to nutritious food and a high incidence of disease, Health Action Zone funding promoted projects that provide healthy food to local people. As well as promoting a healthy diet, the projects brought communities together.

Achievements:

- City and Hackney projects delivered healthy eating and cooking sessions within the African-Caribbean community and promoted local food growing and distribution.
- Tower Hamlets project provided regular healthy lunches to isolated, low-income communities
- Newham projects developed food co-ops in partnership with four community organisations, provided school fruit tuck shops and healthy breakfasts in seven schools

Contact:

Paul Nethercott (Principal Health Promotion Advisor)
Paul.Nethercott@newhampct.nhs.uk

Promoting local employment in health care

North Middlesex University Hospital identified low levels of the necessary skills for employment among potential recruits from the local population, and poor representation of the local ethnic minority population among its staff. To address its vacancy problem, the Trust used Single Regeneration Budget funding to create a flexible employment access programme and training pathway for local people.

Achievements:

- Improved communication within the Trust
- Participants gained concrete employment opportunities
- Some recruitment problems solved

Contact:

John Comparini (Project Manager)
John.Comparini@nmh.nhs.uk

Improving learning opportunities in pre-school children

The Sure Start programmes in Southwark and Aylesbury ensure that families with young children are actively engaged in planning and developing services and provides training for local parents to assess health and education services. This enables the programme to be responsive to the needs of the diverse communities it serves.

Achievements:

- A Sure Start pack delivered to all families after the birth of a new baby helps raise awareness of the range of services and opportunities in the area. A visit from a Sure Start speech and language therapist is offered to all parents to help raise awareness of how to promote early language and communication skills. Culturally sensitive ante- and post-natal support programmes promote positive relationships between parents and children. A team of bi-lingual parents has been trained to carry out evaluation of the health visiting service with 200 local parents.
- The development of strong local networks of service providers and the promotion of a culture of learning and understanding of services across professional boundaries enabled the inclusion of service users in decision making and service development processes.

Contact:

Kate Miranda (Programme Director)
Kate.Miranda@southwarkpct.nhs.uk

Action Zones to report successes, however, have worked against this in the past.

Ensuring that key representatives from area based initiatives have links into Local Strategic Partnerships may help ensure that the learning is not lost. In London, there is a sense of excitement at the opportunities becoming available as Local Strategic Partnerships develop. One of the opportunities that should be taken is for these partnerships to ensure that a range

of agencies, and not just the NHS, takes this work forward.

Sharing decisions with local people i.e. using local expertise as well as “experts”, was regarded as a useful learning to be passed on. Engaging communities on an ongoing basis is vital; socially excluded groups should be supported into meaningful engagement by providing training and remuneration.

Public engagement and participation to influence decision-making and service redesign

Promoting public participation

Brent Health Action Zone (HAZ) has used an community involvement project – Brent Citizens Panel – to evaluate the impact of the HAZ. The panel of 11 residents on Brent Citizens Voice heard evidence from expert witnesses such as HAZ managers, academics, health and social care directors and chief executives to form conclusions and recommendations about the HAZ.

Achievements:

- Engagement and empowerment of all participants
- The HAZ is better equipped to make informed decisions regarding services
- Useful model for the PCT on community involvement and participation

Contact:

Marco Inzani (Head of Health Promotion)
Marco.inzani@brentpct.nhs.uk

Involving parents in health

Sure Start in North West Kensington and Haringey integrated parents at all levels of decision-making by adapting decision-making processes, meeting parents and investing time and resources in contacting people who didn't speak English, using faith groups and community leaders.

Achievements:

- Training parents to help other parents, perform appraisals and assess services
- Joint training for parents and paid workers in breast feeding and baby massage

Contact:

Trudi James (Programme Manager)
TrdJan@aol.com

Influencing health service delivery to young people

Youth Rising aims to be the voice of young people in health related services. It adopts a bottom-up approach to ensure real advocacy for the young people it involves, as well as encouraging young people to take responsibility for their own well-being, as well as that of others.

It works to establish partnerships with statutory and voluntary agencies in order to achieve real progress. It advocates the principles of ownership and empowerment as the best way to achieve positive results. The project began its life in the NHS but has since moved into the voluntary sector with Waltham Forest Family Service Unit after local Health Authority organisational changes.

Achievements:

- The Lifestyle Surveys have uncovered a massive amount of information on young peoples' health needs. This information is available to planners to encourage them to be responsive to the voice of young people.
- The Health Champions project has set up a network of young people to “champion” health promotion in their colleges, schools and communities. Recently the project has made links with the Teenage Pregnancy and Intergenerational projects to extend the health champion role.

Contact:

Dave Brown (Youth Rising Project Lead)
shad@hats3.freesevice.co.uk

Using resources differently – commissioning for change

Giving asylum seekers a voice

The Centre for Armenian Information and Advice (CAIA) provides advisory services for Armenian refugees and asylum seekers in West London. It also provides a playgroup, a youth club for teenagers and specific services for elderly people.

Achievements:

- Health advocacy and outreach project helped statutory decision makers understand the health needs of refugee communities.
- Refugee Forum in West London brought refugees together and gave them a stronger voice.

- Six West London Refugee Forums together with the statutory agencies formed the Renewal SRB 6 partnership, which has funded several new health advocacy projects.

Contact:

Misak Ohanian (General Secretary, Centre for Armenian Information and Advice)
info@caia.org.uk

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New ways of HAZ commissioning

Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham (LSL) Health Action Zone has developed and piloted a different model of commissioning to make it more equitable and inclusive for voluntary, community and black and minority ethnic (BME) groups. It aims to move away from a competitive open tendering process to a brokered or facilitated partnership process.

Achievements:

- Legal advice has verified the approach as an appropriate framework for commissioning health and social services
- Learning from the pilot phase has informed how the model is being rolled out and performance managed across the South East London sector
- Feedback from BME community groups that have been partners in the pilots have said that they have found the developmental commissioning process far more inclusive and accessible than the competitive tendering model of commissioning. All partners have found the approach a valuable tool for ensuring that services reach out to socially excluded communities.

Contact:

Julia Mason (HAZ Development Manager, South East London Strategic Health Authority)
julia.mason@southwarkpct.nhs.uk

Mainstreaming

The challenge is to bring about real change in mainstream services, so that action to tackle inequalities is not based on short-term projects. Area based initiatives have learned that external projects bolted on to mainstream services are not ultimately an effective way of modernising services. Although they often fill gaps in services and add value, a change in mainstream services is required.

If inequalities are to be tackled in the mainstream, the messages concerning local good practice must get to

budgets holders and decision-makers. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) therefore have a key role to play in promoting and enabling mainstreaming of action to tackle inequalities through ensuring that their budgets contain an amount earmarked for programmes intended to reduce health inequalities. When partners have built up shared health priorities they are difficult to ignore, even when short term funding ends. LSPs need to support a different attitude towards risk taking, as a key and overriding barrier to change is attitude towards both corporate and personal risk.

Possible role for the London Health Commission

The Commission is committed to bringing together the work of champions and facilitating opportunities for agencies committed to reducing health inequalities. The Commission can also promote dialogue at strategic regional level, to encourage Local Strategic Partnerships to bring good practice into the mainstream. It can support and encourage black and minority ethnic minority groups and other socially excluded groups to be fully involved in tackling the health inequalities agenda.

Health provision in London is organised on a locality basis, but there are many cross cutting themes that are not being co-ordinated, managed or communicated. The London Health Commission has an important role to play in managing this and ensuring cohesive communities across London. There has also been substantial change within the NHS. The London Health Commission can explain and clarify the changes to a range of partners, including the voluntary sector and community groups. It can also clarify the role of public health.

The London Health Commission is committed to pressing for action on the wider determinants of health to reduce health inequalities. This focus, rather than one of health service improvement, will involve working with a range of partners and not just the NHS.

Further information	
<p>Collaboration and Co-ordination <i>Reaching Out</i> http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2000/regions/default.htm <i>Regional Coordination Unit</i> http://www.rcu.gov.uk <i>PAT 17 – Joining It Up Locally</i> http://www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/pat17/index.htm <i>Local Strategic Partnerships</i> http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/partnerships.asp</p>	<p><i>New Deal for Communities/Neighbourhood Management Evaluations</i> http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk</p> <p>Health inequalities across London <i>Health in London – 2002 review of the London Health Strategy high-level indicators</i> http://www.londonhealth.gov.uk/pdf/hinl2002.pdf <i>Mapping health inequalities across London</i> http://www.lho.org.uk/pubs/pdf/ineq/map_hilond.pdf</p>