

A HEALTH VOICE FOR SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL IN SCOTLAND

Briefing from Faculty of Public Health

12 September 2018

1. Who are we?

The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) is a membership organisation of nearly 4,000 public health doctors and other professionals across the UK, including several hundred in Scotland. Our role is to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities and national populations, including through advocating for healthy approaches to transport and physical activity.

As part of our commitment to this, FPH in Scotland recently became a Member of Transform Scotland. We intend, with Transform Members, to try and create the healthiest transport infrastructure we can in Scotland. We are keen to work with you all to achieve this aim in any way we can, and would love to hear about opportunities you see for that. We have two representatives who are leading this work, please contact them to catch up and share ideas about how we can work together.

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This briefing provides a short introduction to Public Health in Scotland, the health of the Scottish population and the coalition opportunities for the Faculty of Public Health as a member of Transform Scotland.

2. What is Public Health?

Public health is defined as *“the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society”*. It recognises that health and wellbeing cannot be improved by provision of healthcare alone. In fact, it acknowledges that significant historical health gains have been the result of environmental changes (e.g. better housing and reduced overcrowding), and enhancing the places and communities where people live and work is fundamental in improving the health and wellbeing of the Scottish population.

3. The Health of the Scottish Population – a relevant snapshot.

Although the life expectancy of the Scottish population has increased since the middle of the last century, the Scottish population has the lowest life expectancy of all the UK constituent countries, and one of the lowest in Western Europe. These differences cannot be explained by differences in material deprivation and socioeconomic status alone.

Additionally, there are considerable inequalities in life expectancy across different socio-economic and geographical groups in Scotland. People living in more deprived areas of Scotland have a shorter life expectancy than those living in less deprived areas. For females there is a gap of around 7.8 years in life expectancy between those living in the 20% (quintile) most and least deprived areas in Scotland, and 10.5 years for males.

Obesity levels and physical inactivity in Scotland also give cause for concern. 65% of adults in Scotland are overweight (including obese), 29% of adults are obese. This is one of the highest rates in western countries. Again, this prevalence is not distributed equally among different socioeconomic groups – 56% of adults in the 20% least deprived areas in Scotland are overweight including obese, compared to 71% and 65% in the second most and most deprived quintiles respectively. The prevalence of children at risk of being overweight including obesity is around 30%.

The Scottish Health Survey reports 64% of adults (69% men, 59% women) met the moderate/vigorous physical activity guidelines in 2016. This again varies depending on socioeconomic status with 74% of adults in the least deprived quintile meeting these guidelines compared to 54% in the most deprived. 68% of children met the physical activity guidelines (70% in least deprived quintile compared to 61% in the most).

4. Recent developments in Public Health in Scotland.

Recognising that the health of the Scottish population was incommensurate with that of our UK and European neighbours, the Scottish Government commissioned a review of public health services in 2014. One outcome from the review is the creation of a new national body 'Public Health Scotland' which brings together three important national components of public health work: Health Protection Scotland (HPS), NHS Health Scotland, and Information Services Division (ISD). This new body will officially begin to operate in 2019.

Since the review there has been an extensive engagement process to identify the public health priorities for improving health and wellbeing in Scotland. The [six areas of action](#) were published by Scottish Government and COSLA in June 2018. There is an overarching appreciation throughout the report that health is created in our homes and communities, and commitment in this area is necessary to improve the health and wellbeing of the Scottish population.

The six priority areas for action are:

- **Healthy places and communities**
- Early Years
- Mental Wellbeing
- Harmful Substances
- Poverty and Inequality, and
- **Healthy Weight and physical activity.**

Separately but concurrently, the FPH in Scotland recognised that advocacy was an area of the public health landscape in need of development. Public health professionals engaged in an extensive process

to identify advocacy priorities and developed a manifesto. [Health Lives, Fairer Futures](#) sets out some of the actions the FPH and its members believe should be taken to address health inequalities for best effect in Scotland. The eight priorities are challenging, and require concerted action as society as a whole as well as government action. One priority identified was to:

'Increase investment in integrated public transport and active travel, and prioritise walking and cycling in the built environment'.

The FPH recognises active travel and greener modes of transport as vitally important for protecting and improving the health of the population. There are the detrimental impacts on health from climate change related events and poor air quality. We know that these consequences are and will be unequally distributed among the population. Additionally, we recognise the significant physical, mental and social health benefits of active travel.

We know that initiatives that target individual behaviour change alone will not lead to significant change and will widen inequalities. We believe that substantial, equitable and sustained improvements in active travel infrastructure is necessary to make active travel (integrated with sustainable public transport) the easiest and most enjoyable travel option for the Scottish population, especially those in the most deprived areas of Scotland.

In our everyday roles public health professionals will be working locally with partners to increase active travel in communities, including to workplaces, as part of the national public health priorities. As the FPH in Scotland, we wish to be a leading health voice pressing for substantial and equitable investment in a safe and integrated active travel/public transport infrastructure. We believe we can have a greater impact if we advocate in coalition with partner organisations in Transform Scotland. We welcome opportunities to work together.

¹ Acheson. Acheson Report. Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health Report. Stationary Office. London. 1998.

² Scottish Public Health Observatory (ScotPHO). Population Dynamics. Available at <https://www.scotpho.org.uk/population-dynamics/deaths/key-points/> (Last accessed 30.08.2018).

³ National Records of Scotland. Life Tables for Scotland 2014-2016. Available at <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/life-expectancy/life-expectancy-at-scotland-level/scottish-national-life-tables/2014-2016> (Last accessed 30.08.2018)

⁴ Scottish Government. Scottish Health Survey (2016). Edinburgh, October 2017. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/10/2970> (Last accessed 30.08.2018).

⁵ Scottish Government and COSLA. Scotland's Public Health Priorities. Edinburgh. June 2018. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/Publications/2018/06/1393> (Last accessed 30.08.2018).

⁶ Faculty of Public Health in Scotland. Healthier Lives Fairer Futures. 2017. Available at <https://www.fph.org.uk/media/1168/healthy-lives-fairer-futures-final.pdf> (Last accessed 30.08.2018)

Scotland's alliance for sustainable transport

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We campaign for walking, cycling and public transport to be the easiest and most affordable options for everyone. Our diverse membership brings together public, private and third sector organisations from across Scotland. We are a registered Scottish charity (SC041516).