



Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive

Friday message

Friday 14 October 2016

Dear everyone

In February, I was asked by the North East Combined Authority and the local NHS to chair an independent Commission for Health and Social Care Integration, and this week we published our report, [Health and Wealth - Closing the Gap in the North East](#). The title has been carefully chosen. Health and wealth are two sides of the same coin – closing the health and wealth gap in the North East, compared to the UK as a whole, was the Commission's number one priority. Poor health and shorter life expectancy are both consequences and causes of the fact that average Gross Value Added (GVA) per capita in the region is only three quarters of the national average. The Prime Minister has said that inequality in healthy life expectancy is unacceptable and that she wants social and economic reform that will establish an 'economy that works for everyone'. Our report sets out how the North East can lead the way on this. The region has strong NHS and social services and increases in life expectancy along with reductions in smoking have been greater than elsewhere. But there is no hiding that health outcomes are stubbornly poor, the NHS and social care services are, by English standards, overused, and health inequalities are far too great. That's why our first recommendation is that the entire system needs to shift its priority towards prevention. We saw this through two lenses: risk assessment and life cycle. By far the greatest risk is smoking, which is why we support intensifying the focus on programmes to reduce smoking. But the other key focus should be improving outcomes across the life cycle from school readiness, through good and fulfilling employment to healthy and independent old age. This commitment to prevention must be backed by accurate and transparent data on spending across the system, and so the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy was commissioned to undertake the first public sector balance sheet review for any English region. Local partners now have a methodology for identifying spend and can review the extent to which the ambition to increase preventive expenditure is being met.

Nowhere is the link between health and wealth more important than in relation to work. Good work is both the best route out of poverty and the surest basis for good health. Our recommendations will improve support for keeping people in work, and put in-work progression at the heart of the North East Strategic Economic Plan. These include: training and support for primary care staff to get people back to work quickly; addressing mental health across the system; and encouraging employers to improve workplace wellbeing. This report is a call to action. Devolution, population based health improvement, and the drive to improve life chances across the North East, are long term imperatives. The Commission report sets out a clear agenda for closing the health and wealth gap, and I commend it to everyone as a worthwhile read.

Monday was World Mental Health Day, with a host of celebrities supporting a new anti-stigma campaign from NHS England, the Department of Health and the YMCA. [#IAMWHOLE](#) seeks to normalise mental health issues among young people and provide a platform for people to share their stories. Half of all mental health problems appear before the age of 14, and this week PHE partnered with the Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families to launch the first-ever [resource](#) to help schools and colleges in the UK to measure and monitor children and young people's wellbeing.

I would like to warmly welcome Clara Swinson, who has been appointed Director General for Global and Public Health at the Department of Health. Clara will be known to many of us and is currently the Department's Director for Social Care, Ageing and Disability. She brings a wealth of professional experience to this role and will take up post in early November.

And finally, next week I am in China with the International Association of National Public Health Institutes and my next message will be on Friday 28 October.

With best wishes