



Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive

Friday message

Friday 4 November 2016

Dear everyone

Speed is key in dealing with public health emergencies and on Tuesday the Government launched a specialist team of health experts who will be ready to deploy to tackle a health crisis anywhere in the world within 48 hours. The [UK Public Health Rapid Support Team](#), run jointly by PHE and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, consists of clinicians, scientists and academics who will be on call to respond to urgent requests, such as disease outbreaks, where they happen. The Ebola crisis highlighted the need for the international community to develop the capability to help low and middle income countries respond to and control disease outbreaks before they develop into a global public health emergency. Halting diseases at source is the most effective way of keeping people in the UK safe at home and the Government has made £20 million available to fund the team over five years.

Tobacco remains the leading cause of early death and still today accounts for half of the difference in healthy life expectancy between the poorest people and the most affluent. Our [Local Tobacco Control Profiles](#) were updated this week, including a new indicator of smoking prevalence in adults with serious mental illness. Tackling variation is going to be our focus for the next phase of tobacco control, for example among the most deprived people with a serious mental illness, where smoking rates are nearly three times as high as the national average at 45.4%. Also this week we made a number of updates to the [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#), providing the latest data on progress against many different health-related indicators at national and local authority level.

On Monday the Government published [Improving Lives: Work, Health and Disability](#), a green paper that proposes a new plan to halve the disability employment gap by 2020 including for those with long-term conditions. There are now over 300,000 more disabled people in work than two years ago, yet a 32% gap between the employment rates of disabled and non-disabled people remains. The evidence shows that work is generally good for health, and people out of work have worse health. The green paper gives PHE a number of actions in support of this ambition and a three-month [consultation](#) is now open.

The fire and rescue service has led the way on prevention over the past 10 years, moving from putting fires out to stopping them happening in the first place and halving the numbers of fire-related deaths over that period. Learning from this experience, the police service across England, very much on the front line in working with the most vulnerable people, came together on Monday with senior leaders across the health family to consider how we might work better together to address the wider determinants and focus more on prevention. There are already many examples of great partnership working between health and the police – from suicide prevention, to reducing alcohol-related harm and raising awareness of dementia. A recent [paper](#) published by PHE highlights some of this excellent work, presenting case studies from across the country that demonstrate a clear commitment to improving outcomes for local people through innovation and collaboration. We have committed together to prepare a concordat with the police service and more on this to follow as the work develops.

The Five Year Forward View for Mental Health recommends that every local area should have a suicide prevention plan in place by 2017, and PHE has the national responsibility for this. These plans have the potential to reduce suicides by 10% by 2020 and last week we published [updated guidance](#) to support their development, reflecting the latest evidence and best practice. Today Secretary of State for Health Jeremy Hunt wrote to all local authorities to encourage them to use the guidance to develop or update multi-agency suicide prevention action plans and we are organising workshops across the country from now through to March 2017 to help local areas implement this.

With best wishes