



Public Health
England



Duncan Selbie
Chief Executive

Friday message

Friday 21 June 2013

Dear everyone

On Wednesday, the Home Secretary led a discussion on gang and youth violence with Professor Kevin Fenton, Professor Mark Bellis and me, along with Professor Steve Field, NHS England's lead director on inequalities. Although often seen solely as a problem for criminal justice services, violence is very much a public health concern. Treating the direct consequences of violence costs the NHS nearly £3 billion every year – about the same as smoking – but the hidden costs are far greater. Individuals who have grown up in violent, abusive households are more likely to smoke, drink to excess and use drugs as adolescents and as adults they are at increased risk of obesity, cancer and many other health problems. Like many public health problems, violence harms the poorest the most. Victims' physical and mental health suffer while at a community level the fear of violence can undermine efforts to increase outdoor exercise, create a sense of community and improve mental well-being. Worse, violence is infectious so those exposed to violence, especially during childhood, are more likely to become violent themselves as they grow up. The good news is that violence is not inevitable and is amenable to early intervention to break the cycle. We already know a lot about what works from the research of Professor Bellis and others and the key is coordination across agencies, sharing data and acting together rather than separately. The Home Office has [identified](#) 33 local areas with high levels of violence, 20 of them in London, and we will be working with them alongside the police and crime commissioners, the NHS and local government to improve and better target our interventions.

I was glad to join about 35 public health consultants from London local authorities when they met this week to think about how to make the most of being embedded in local government and how to thrive within a public health system now led by locally elected members. The Government's decision to create health and wellbeing boards, bringing together local government with the NHS to set priorities that make sense locally, and to pool resources to make things that matter happen, along with the new legal duty placed on upper tier and unitary local authorities to improve the public's health will, I am certain, prove to be the enduring legacies of the Health and Social Care Act. Recognising the personal upheaval for the public health staff moving from the NHS into local government, it was my opportunity to say thank you for having the courage to make this work and to give my personal commitment to support them as part of the wider public health family that PHE exists to serve and nurture.

This week also, we welcomed the launch of the new front-of-pack food labelling system to make it hopefully much easier for the public to understand what they consume. This has been negotiated with businesses and other partners, and has been embraced by all the major supermarkets and a number of the major food manufacturers, and the hope is that the remainder will now follow suit.

And finally, warm congratulations to Jonathan Taylor, deputy director of our Pandemic Influenza Programme, and also of our Olympic and Paralympic Health Programme who received a CBE and nurse consultant Joanne Bosanquet who received an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

With best wishes