



Public Health  
England



Duncan Selbie  
Chief Executive

## Friday message

Friday 23 May 2014

**Dear everyone**

As you know this is Dementia Awareness Week and our campaign with the Alzheimer's Society to recruit one million Dementia Friends is gathering pace. We are already more than a third of the way towards achieving this. Many large employers have committed to train their staff as Dementia Friends and I am glad to say, as of now, more than 80 local authorities and as many NHS organisations have too. Appropriately this week, Public Health England and the UK Health Forum, published a joint consensus statement on the need for action to promote brain health and reduce the risk of dementia. Fifty nine organisations and experts, including practitioners and researchers, also signed the [statement](#), known as the Blackfriars Consensus. This emphasises the importance of national and local action on the risk and protective factors that influence our rate of brain ageing. "Think heart, think brain" needs to become the way we think about health and wellness. Managing risk factors including smoking, drinking, sedentary behaviour and poor diet, not only reduces the risk of dementia in later life but that of other conditions such as heart disease, stroke and many cancers.

Alcohol misuse is the third highest preventable cause of ill health and death after tobacco and high blood pressure. Consumption has doubled in the last 50 years and the costs to the individuals concerned, to their families, to the NHS and more widely are huge. Preventing and reducing these harms requires action by individuals themselves and at national and local levels to implement those policies and interventions that the evidence tells us will have the greatest impact, for example, nationally on minimum unit pricing, and for local government, incorporating health into their judgments on alcohol licensing decisions. This week I met with Sir Leigh Lewis, the new Chair at Drinkaware, and Elaine Hindal, their Chief Executive. Drinkaware, though funded by the alcohol industry, have recently strengthened their independence and are determined to be evidence led. There is every opportunity for us to work together on helping people to have a healthy relationship with alcohol and we look forward to learning more from their pilot partnership with the Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Alcohol Action Area. This will evaluate how consumer communication can contribute to changing behaviour and builds on Drinkaware's research programme into excessive drinking in the night time economy.

NHS Health Checks are now being offered by every local authority. On Wednesday PHE brought together around 100 academic researchers, local authority commissioners, clinicians and representatives from the voluntary and community sector, to shape the content and direction of the first research and evaluation strategy for the programme. The aim is to ensure the greatest public benefit is gained from this programme and generate important new knowledge from what is the world's first at-scale prevention programme of its kind. We will consult on this over the summer.

And finally, I had a very productive and enjoyable morning with Staffordshire County Council this week and while there observed that Councillor Robbie Marshall, the cabinet member for health and wellbeing, only ever takes the stairs and if discovered in a lift gifts £1 to charity. I thought this was a brilliant message to staff and visitors and is something that I am also going to adopt in Wellington House and, if discovered in a lift, will contribute £1 similarly.

**With best wishes**