

Government launches landmark reviews to tackle health disparities

- Government announces leads for two separate independent reviews to tackle health disparities
- Professor Dame Margaret Whitehead to lead review into ethnic inequalities for medical devices and Javed Khan OBE to lead review into tobacco control
- Findings will form part of wider plans to level up the country and reduce existing inequalities through the Health Disparities White Paper

Plans to enable people across the country to live longer, healthier lives are moving forward with the government's announcement of leads for two significant independent reviews to tackle health disparities.

A review into potential ethnic bias in the design and use of medical devices will be led by Professor Dame Margaret Whitehead, professor of public health at the University of Liverpool. The way medical devices and technologies are designed and used has raised concerns about the impact of ethnic background on a patient's diagnosis and treatment, exacerbating existing inequalities in healthcare.

Separately, Javed Khan OBE, former CEO of children's charity Barnardo's, will lead an independent review of the government's bold ambition to make England smoke free by 2030. Whilst the government has made good long-term progress in reducing smoking rates to their lowest ever level, there are an estimated 6 million smokers in England and smoking is still one of the largest drivers of health disparities.

Both independent reviews will form part of the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities' agenda to tackle inequalities in health and care, which will include the publication of a Health Disparities White Paper in spring and a Tobacco Control Plan later in the year.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, said:

The pandemic has shown the resilience of the British public and brought communities together to look after each other in the most challenging times. But it has also exposed chasms in our society – particularly in health.

Where someone is born, their background, their gender, or the colour of their skin should not impact their health outcomes.

Professor Dame Margaret Whitehead and Javed Khan OBE both have vast experience in tackling health inequalities, and I look forward to the outcome of their reviews so we can continue to level up across society and make sure everyone – no matter where they live or come from – can live a long, healthy life.

The far-reaching Independent Review into potential ethnic bias in the design and use of medical devices in the UK will:

- Identify systematic inequalities in registered medical devices
- Make recommendations on how these inequalities should be tackled
- Consider what systems need to be in place to ensure emerging technologies are developed without ethnic inequalities
- Improve global standards to better healthcare and tackle disparities

The NHS is an expert in providing the best possible care with the devices currently available, and this review will improve the quality and availability of devices to diverse communities.

The independent review into smoking will provide independent, evidence-based advice that will inform the government's approach to tackling the stark health disparities associated with tobacco use. It will also help the government decide on the most impactful interventions to reduce the uptake of smoking and to support smoking cessation. It will assess the options to be taken forward in the new Tobacco Control Plan, which will be published later this year.

This comes as the Health and Social Care Secretary today set out his vision to make England a world-leader in cancer care as we learn to live COVID-19 – with renewed attention paid to innovative treatment and early diagnosis to radically improve outcomes for cancer patients.

Tobacco is still the single largest cause of preventable mortality and 64,000 smokers died from smoking in 2019. Smoking causes a disproportionate burden on the most disadvantaged families and communities – rates vary dramatically across the country and remain very high in areas such as Manchester (20.8%) and Blackpool (19.8%), compared to Wokingham (5.5%) and Richmond upon Thames (6%). Rates are also persistently high amongst certain groups, including routine and manual workers (21.4%), and people with long-term mental health problems (25.8%). And although maternal smoking rates have recently fallen from 10.4% in 2019/20 to 9.6% in 2020/21, there is still work to do as nearly 1 in 10 women are smoking at the time of delivery.

Professor Dame Margaret Whitehead said:

There are growing concerns about the potential for racial bias in the design and use of some medical devices commonly used in the NHS, and that the treatment of patients from some ethnic groups may be less effective as a result. It is important that this review establishes the extent and impact of such potential racial bias and what can be done to remedy it.

Javed Khan OBE said:

I am very pleased to be leading this review into such an important

area of public health. My independent findings will help highlight key interventions which can help the government achieve its ambitions to be smoke free by 2030 and tackle health disparities.

Dame Margaret brings with her extensive experience in tackling inequalities in health, and for many years has led the work of the World Health Organisation Collaborating Centre for Policy Research on the Determinants of Health Equity.

As a leading figure in the UK public and voluntary sectors, Javed Khan has led Barnardo's for the past seven years. He is currently chair designate of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board. Javed was also a key member of the Independent Grenfell Recovery Taskforce and specialist adviser to the Justice Select Committee's Inquiry into prison reform.

Public Health Minister Maggie Throup said:

Tackling issues such as smoking and ethnic inequalities is a priority for OHID and a key part of the government's levelling up agenda.

These reviews will help determine what more can be done to reduce any ethnic bias in health diagnosis and treatment and drive down smoking rates, particularly in deprived areas, to support our bold ambition to be smoke free by 2030.

I look forward to working with both Dame Margaret and Javed to ultimately help people live longer, healthier and happier lives.

The pandemic has shone a light on the inequalities that exist across the country. As part of breaking the link between people's background and their prospect for a healthy life, the Health Disparities White Paper will look at the factors affecting people's health across the country, including risk factors, service access and experience and the biggest preventable killers such as cancer and heart disease, as well as the wider causes of ill health.

Background

- The potential ethnic bias in the design and use of medical devices review will be published within the next 18 months.
- The independent review into the government's tobacco policies will report back in April 2022.
- The 'SmokeFree 2030' target is defined as 5% smoking prevalence or less in England