

New era of public health to tackle inequalities and level up the UK

- New body will tackle health disparities across the UK which mean men in the most deprived areas in England are expected to live nearly 10 years fewer than those in the least deprived
- Preventing health conditions before they develop will reduce pressure on the health and care system
- Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty, will provide professional leadership to OHID

Health disparities across the UK will be tackled through a new approach to public health focused on stopping debilitating health conditions before they develop, as the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) launches today (Friday 1 October).

OHID marks a distinct shift in focus at the heart of government in addressing the unacceptable health disparities that exist across the country to help people live longer, healthier lives and reduce the pressure on the health and care system as work is done to reduce the backlog and put social care on a long-term sustainable footing.

The latest figures show clear trends, based on geographical location, of a person's life expectancy and the years they can expect to live a healthy life. For example:

- men in the most deprived areas in England are expected to live nearly 10 years fewer than those in the least deprived. Women in the same areas can expect to live 7 years fewer
- smoking is more prevalent in more deprived areas and one of the leading causes of inequalities in life expectancy; an international study found it accounts for half the difference in mortality between the least and most deprived men aged 35 to 39
- Obesity is widespread but more prevalent among the most deprived areas; prevalence is almost 8% higher among those living in the most deprived decile of local authorities (66.6%) compared to those in the least deprived areas (58.8%)

OHID has been set up to change this – it will co-ordinate an ambitious

programme across central and local government, the NHS and wider society, drawing on expert advice, analysis and evidence, to drive improvements in the public's health.

Preventing illness before it develops will help to reduce the pressure on services, saving significant money and resource, and ensuring our record investment in the health and social care system goes as far as possible.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid said:

The pandemic has laid bare the health disparities we face not only as a country, but as communities and individuals.

This must change and this body marks a new era of preventative healthcare to help people live healthier, happier and longer lives.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities will be the driving force across government, supported by communities, academics, industry and employers, to level up the health of our nation, which will reduce the pressure on our NHS and care services.

The Health and Social Care Secretary has today written to community leaders, charities, industry experts and key employers to join the OHID's mission to act on wider factors that affect people's health, such as work, housing and education.

With around 80% of a person's long-term health dictated not by the care they receive but by these wider factors, tackling the problem will be a cross-government effort.

Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty, will provide professional leadership to OHID. New Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Jeanelle de Gruchy, will advise government on clinical and public health matters as the co-lead for OHID, alongside the DHSC Director General for OHID, Jonathan Marron.

Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty said:

Health inequalities in England are stark and they are challenging to address but it is important we do so.

People across the country can live in better health for longer. OHID will support people to do so with an evidence based approach.

Reducing health inequalities and keeping people in better health for longer is in everyone's interest – it is good for the individual, families, society, the economy and NHS. That's why OHID will work collaboratively across the national, regional and local levels as well as with the NHS, academia, the third sector, scientists, researchers and industry.

The biggest preventable killers, such as tobacco, obesity, alcohol and recreational drugs, cost the taxpayer billions of pounds each year to fund treatment and long-term care, as well as putting bed capacity pressure on the health service.

To change course on these preventable issues, OHID will work with the rest of government, the NHS, local government and the wider public health system and industry to improve detection and prevention for people at risk of ill health, as well as applying cutting edge science, technology, evidence and data to target support where it is most needed.

The pandemic has demonstrated the vital importance of having a strong public health system. As Public Health England is replaced, the new UK Health Security Agency will have a laser-like focus on health protection, while OHID will improve health and tackle disparities in health outcomes across the country. The government will continue to work as a system and with our partners in the NHS and local government to deliver.