



Public Health  
England



Duncan Selbie  
Chief Executive

## Friday message

8 March 2013

### Dear everyone

Tuesday saw the [publication](#) in the Lancet of a special analysis of the UK data from the Global Burden of Disease Study 2010. This was co-authored by Professor Kevin Fenton, our Director of Health and Wellbeing and Professor John Newton our Chief Knowledge Officer, among others. The analysis looked at how the health of the UK has changed since 1990 and how it compares with 14 other EU countries, Australia, Canada, Norway and the United States. The findings were both surprising and disturbing. Notwithstanding six decades of universal access to healthcare, some significant public health achievements and a decade of massive investment in health services, the UK has slipped back in the various GBD rankings when compared with these other countries. People in the UK are living a good deal longer now, but death rates in some age groups have hardly changed in two decades, some causes of death such as alcohol have shot up, and levels of disability (living with chronic conditions) have not shifted much in any age group. The NHS has made a difference but it has not delivered on prevention and early intervention, and the data on attributable risk are remarkably powerful support for health improvement moving to local government. Mental health problems including depression and anxiety remain a major cause of chronic disability while the top risk factor for death and disability is still smoking, followed closely by hypertension, obesity, physical inactivity and alcohol in that order. The study has coincided with the launch of the Secretary of State's [Call to Action](#) on reducing avoidable early death and the publication of the [Cardiovascular Disease Outcomes Strategy](#) for England. We will be finalising our priorities over the next few weeks and the Lancet study is of seminal importance in getting us focused on the right things.

In partnership with the recently launched Early Intervention Foundation, conceived and chaired by Graham Allen MP, we are organising a seminar in the House of Commons for Directors of Public Health to debate what more can be done on prevention and early intervention and the Secretary of State will be joining us. This is to be held on the afternoon of Wednesday 15 May and places will be allocated on a first come first served basis through [marie-claire.platt@parliament.uk](mailto:marie-claire.platt@parliament.uk).

And finally, last week I mentioned the presentation from Ben Page of MORI and his emphasis on the importance of social marketing and behavioural science and on Tuesday this week the National Executive spent time with Dr David Halpern who heads up the Behavioural Insight Team in Number 10 and his colleague David Albury. Their research based approach to influencing behaviour has been astonishingly successful in other areas of public life and they and we are keen to bring this to bear on the public's health. We will be working in partnership with them, the NHS and local government to design, implement and evaluate a number of pilot projects across England.

With best wishes