



Public Health
England



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Chief Executive

Friday message

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Dear everyone

At this week's Associate Parliamentary Health Group seminar on public health killers which I contributed to, together with Professor Sir Ian Gilmore, Chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance UK, Deborah Arnott, Chief Executive of Action on Smoking and Health, and Dr Rachel Pryke, the RCGP's clinical lead for nutrition, by far the hottest discussion topic was alcohol and the harm it can cause to individuals, their families and the wider community. In particular, the group focused on the easy availability of cheap, high-strength alcoholic drinks and the effectiveness of minimum unit pricing (MUP) in helping to halt the rising tide of alcohol abuse. Tobacco and alcohol are the two biggest killers, claiming tens of thousands of early deaths. And there is unarguable evidence that price is the biggest single factor in determining how much a population drinks and how much health and social harm it suffers – for example in British Columbia, Canada, the introduction of MUP saw a 30 per cent fall in deaths directly attributable to alcohol over 12 months. Of course no single measure will put an end to all the harm and misery alcohol abuse causes, it is the combination of a range of approaches, local and national, that delivers the greatest chance of permanently reducing premature death and damage to health and wellbeing. MUP is an excellent example of how lives can be saved and much misery reduced through joined up national-to-local action. National action around pricing plus innovative local action such as the trailblazing approach taken by Ipswich in calling time on super strength alcohol in its off-licences would, on the evidence of the Canadian experience alone and there is much more than this, achieve a step reduction in avoidable harm and, at the same time, significantly reduce the burden on the NHS.

We very much welcome today's launch of the [School Food Plan](#). It will provide a hopefully helpful resource for teachers, catering managers and those who work with children in their often remarkable efforts to ensure children are properly nourished during the day. Up and down the country – for instance in [Tower Hamlets](#), Leicester, Doncaster, Brighton & Hove and Suffolk – we see how important a role the school can play in the quality of what children eat and in helping young people make healthy choices. But as recent Ofsted reports have highlighted, there is still much to do and this Plan will help those who manage the service on the ground to sustain healthy and productive schools. For our part, we are absolutely committed to supporting local health and wellbeing boards in their efforts to improve children's diets in schools. We will share our evidence on what works in tackling childhood obesity and ensure that Change4Life, our flagship social marketing campaign which encourages everyone in England to 'eat well, move more, live longer', includes messages about the benefits of healthy eating in schools.

And finally, PHE has contributed to Defra's recently published [National Adaptation Programme](#), which aims to promote climate resilience within the NHS, public health and social care to ensure services are not disrupted and there is sufficient resilience to deal with the increased demand for services associated with extreme heat or cold. In May I referred to the publication of our Heatwave Plan, which together with the Cold Weather Plan forms part of this programme, and we were deluged with rain. I hope not to take the shine off this lovely weather by daring to mention it again.

With best wishes