



Public Health  
England



Duncan Selbie  
Chief Executive

## Friday message

Friday 20 December 2013

### Dear everyone

This has been a fast moving and productive first year. My overwhelming wish is to convey a warm thank you to everyone for all that you do in the interest of improving the public's health and, as we get ready for future years, the foundation has been set and it is a good one. Our next phase will be characterised by ambition and delivery and that we match what we say with what we do, both directly as the national agency for the public's health but, crucially, through our partners in Local Government, the NHS and the voluntary and community sector. 'Making things happen' will certainly include accelerating the take-up of the NHS Health Check programme, introducing a preventative strategy for tackling vascular dementia, and in publishing a 'Longer Lives' tool for addressing variation in primary care, again in close collaboration with the CQC and NHS England. The new year will also see us submitting evidence to the independent review on standardised packaging for tobacco. Some may say, and perhaps unfairly, that the public health system has been good historically at saying what the matter is but less so at making improvements happen, and I am determined, given the creative and awesome talent that we together have, combined with our national voice, to see this perception change. The public health system will be at the heart of making England the world's healthiest nation, something we can, with concerted effort, achieve within 15 years.

Today we have had the [announcement](#) of the outcome of the competitive exercise to establish research partnerships between PHE and leading academic centres, creating 13 new Health Protection Research Units. These cover 12 themes ranging from gastroenterology and novel viruses through to innovations in methodology. The in-depth strength in our health protection research has been nationally recognised and will now feature even more prominently in the health and clinical research arena. We are incredibly grateful to the National Institute for Health Research and Professor Dame Sally Davies, Chief Medical Officer, for guiding us through this, and of course, to the successful university applicants.

At last week's annual Modernising Medical Microbiology workshop in Oxford the focus was on the impact of genetic sequencing on infectious disease and the implications for diagnostic testing and clinical care. Presentations focused on whole genome sequencing in the management of TB, *Staphylococcus aureus* and *C. difficile*, and France, Germany, Ireland and Canada are collaborating with us on this – they see, as we do, the potential for this to transform clinical care. This work was initially funded by the Wellcome Trust and MRC through a UK-CRC award and has now attracted support from the Health Innovation Challenge Fund.

We are once again working hard ahead of the rush on New Year's resolutions. To support the two thirds of smokers who want to quit the habit, we will be launching a new media campaign on 29 December, this time raising awareness of the harm smoking does to your body. Change4Life is back again in early January, with a new healthy swaps campaign to encourage families to make one small swap in what they eat and drink, for example swapping to sugar-free and lower fat versions of their favourite foods and drinks.

And finally, I wish everyone a very happy and peaceful festive season. I will be with my family over the Christmas period and my next Friday message will be on 10 January.

With best wishes