

# Closing Health Inequality: The local solution

## Policy Outline

Post-war Britain has seen an increase in health standards throughout the country, with citizens living longer and healthier lives. However recent evidence has shown that the inequality gap in health outcomes is widening between economic and geographical groups.

The Government's 2003 strategy to tackle health inequalities had set out to reduce this inequality gap and whilst there has been a reduction in cancer and heart disease deaths a review of the strategy in 2008 found that overall inequality continues to increase.

The gap in health inequality between local areas can be stark and a focus on centrally driven targets has been accused of hindering the ability of local health providers to focus on local priorities. Whilst a significant amount of research has been published on health disparities between different geographical areas there has been relatively little investigation into the social and demographic health inequalities within a particular local area.

The Government has sought to close gaps in health inequality by appointing Sir Michael Marmot to develop a Post-2010 strategy. The final report will be delivered to the Secretary of State and NLGN's project will seek not only to influence the Review but wider regulatory and legislative reforms that emanate from it.

## Local Government's Positive Role

There has been a long-standing recognition of the persistent relationship between low socio-economic status and higher mortality rates, but there has been little research undertaken into the role of elected local government in driving local health priorities to reduce inequality. Moreover, there remains a key question: could reform of local governance structures reform the way in which health resources are allocated and to whom they are accountable?

Local authorities and their local partners are recognised as being crucial to promoting better public health. There has been a growing recognition from the Department of Health and NHS of the role of local authorities in reducing health inequality, particularly through initiatives like Communities for Health and the IDeA's Healthy Communities Programme.

The introduction of Local Area Agreements led by local government, with specific targets around health inequalities and introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessment, which holds all local agencies accountable for improving health, have made public health issues a major part of local government's policy agenda

## The Project

NLGN intends to develop evidence and recommendations that can help to reduce the inequality gap in England and put local and community leaders at the heart of delivering reform.



We will focus on the following areas:

- The impact and future of the 2010 health equality and other relevant PSA targets with lessons to learn for future target setting
- Leadership in health equality: can Whitehall deliver a real improvement in health equality or should the responsibility be devolved? What should be the future role for PCT governance and budget allocation?
- Better ways of developing successful local partnerships when tackling health inequality
- The impact of challenging public finances on meeting health inequality targets.
- Improved ways in with the LAA system can improve health outcomes.
- Potential 'total place' solutions to health inequalities
- Potential regulatory and legislature reforms required to reduce health inequality
- Potential reforms to PCTs and other health outlets

## Methods and outcomes

The aim of the project is to:

- Influence the Marmot Review of Health Inequalities
- Bring together a steering group of health specialists, senior representatives in local and central government, academics and policy makers to explore how health equality can be delivered
- Undertake primary and secondary research to establish a sound evidence base on issues relating to health inequality. Research will include:
  - Full literature review
  - Analysis of case studies
  - Interviews with individuals and focus groups
  - Policy development meetings with the project steering group
  - Statistical analysis
- Undertake specialist seminars with key opinion formers to debate the research questions.
- Disseminate the evidence, conclusions and recommendations to an external audience, including through media coverage; marketing; submissions to Ministers and Shadow Ministers; submissions to leading figures in the local government family; submissions to Select Committee inquires and a range of events.
- Dedicate a high-profile launch at a central location attracting a specialist audience offering a high profile for sponsor involvement.
- Publish a fully-evidenced researched report with recommendations for Government, local authorities and the policy community

## Timescales

Beginning in autumn 2009, this report will take around four months to complete and will be published in early 2010.

## Budget

The total budget costs for this project will be £40,000+VAT, with cost and timescale breakdowns available on request. Co-sponsorship and association with the report is available for around £20,000 with the opportunity to input sponsor expertise into the project's research events and Steering Group.

*To find out more about the NLGN and our previous work, please contact James Kirkland (020 7015 1384, [jkirkland@nlgn.org.uk](mailto:jkirkland@nlgn.org.uk)) or visit [www.nlgn.org.uk](http://www.nlgn.org.uk).*