

Best buys for preventing poor health

A new study released today by NHS Health Scotland identifies cost effective approaches to preventing poor health that are also likely to narrow health inequalities.

The study 'Best preventative investments in Scotland – what the evidence and experts say' sets out the principles and specific areas for action for policy makers to consider. These go beyond the health and social care sector and include actions on employment, incomes and the environment.

The study brings together a wide range of research results, and the views of panels of experts, and reinforces research issued last week by ScotPHO, 'Informing investment to reduce health inequalities'. That research showed the extent to which regulatory and tax measures that redistribute income are more effective at reducing health inequalities than interventions focused on individual health behaviours.

Neil Craig, Health Economics expert at NHS Health Scotland said: "In general, interventions which use taxation, regulation and legislation to reduce income inequalities and reduce exposure to unhealthy products such as tobacco are the best investments – cost-effective and most likely to reduce inequalities. This offers a potential 'win-win' scenario – the policy works, pressure on public services is relieved slightly, and we tackle health inequalities in a cost-effective way."

The paper identified a range of programmes of work and policy priorities. These include:

- Ensuring adequate incomes that reduce income inequalities
- Reducing unemployment in vulnerable groups or areas
- Improving physical environments, such as traffic calming

schemes

- Targeting vulnerable groups by investing in more intensive services and other forms of support for such groups, in the context of universal provision
- Early years programmes
- Using regulation or taxation, such as the introduction of minimum unit pricing, to reduce risky behaviours.

Neil Craig continued: “Investment in prevention within and beyond the health care system is a good buy. Although financial savings from prevention are sometimes hard to measure and hard to achieve, prevention has the potential to help reconcile the high demands on public services, squeezed resources and Scottish Government’s goal of reducing health inequalities and achieving a fairer healthier Scotland.”

o The full report ‘Best preventative investments in Scotland – what the evidence and experts say’ is available to download from NHS Health Scotland’s website

<http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/24575.aspx>

Submitted by [Kerry Teakle](#)

