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Investing in a Healthier Wales: prioritising prevention

Executive
Summary



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Executive Summary

Good health is a fundamental human right

Achieving good health and well-being enables people to lead fulfilling lives, build meaningful relationships, contribute to their communities and enjoy a higher quality of life well into old age. Without it, we struggle to thrive, resulting in significant personal and societal costs.



Health is shaped by foundational building blocks, including safe and warm homes, stable relationships, access to education and services, purposeful activity, and opportunities for healthy behaviours. Unfortunately, achieving and maintaining good health is becoming increasingly difficult, and differences in health between communities (health inequalities) are increasing.

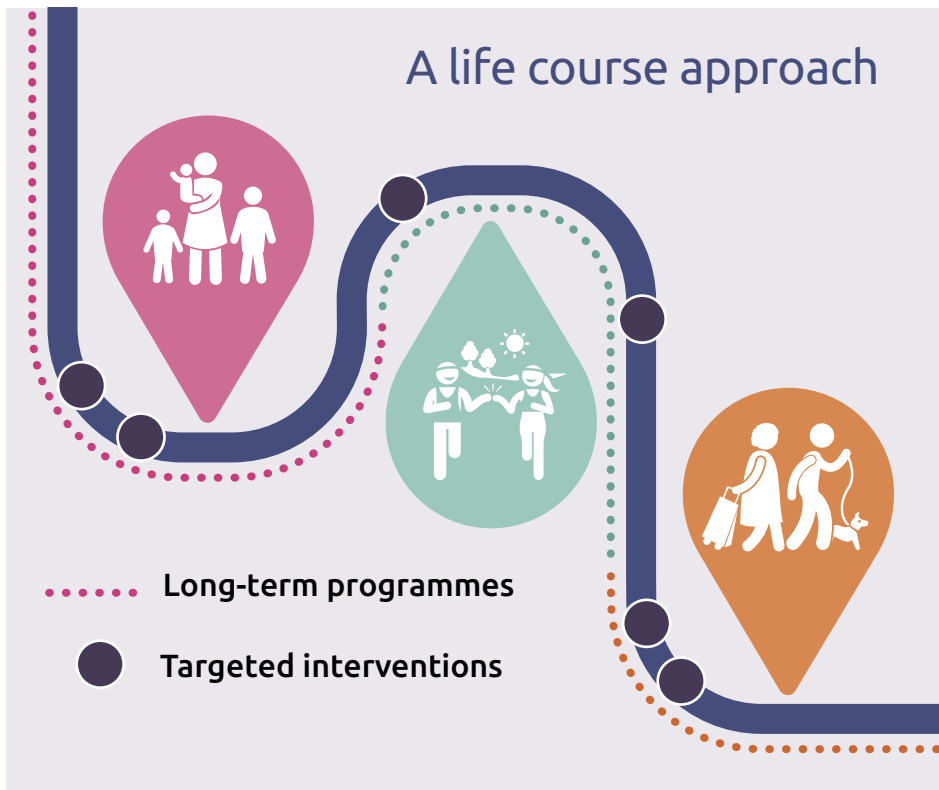
Investing in health and well-being is essential

Despite the fragility of public sector finances, now is the time to prioritise investment in people's health and well-being. Such investment can reverse the decline in the nation's health, address the root causes of health inequalities and enable the people of Wales to live longer, healthier and happier lives. A strong sustained commitment to prevention can reduce the burden and costs of ill health to the health and care system, with public health interventions offering a return of £14 for every £1 invested ⁽¹⁾. We need to invest in prevention, not just despite the challenging financial position of public services in Wales, but because of it.



A route map for impactful change

This report outlines how investing in prevention sets the foundation for good health throughout people's lives, showcasing areas that could have the greatest impact. It focuses on both long-term programmes and targeted interventions that aim to improve health outcomes, reduce inequalities and lessen the financial impact of poor health on the NHS and wider society in Wales. The report adopts a life course approach, emphasising interventions that reduces the cumulative impact of health risks throughout life and across generations.



Our findings

We have summarised the latest evidence on where investment in prevention can have the greatest impact in the early years and children, for healthy adults and for healthy ageing.



Early Years and Children

The child death rate in Wales is 70% higher for children living in our most deprived communities compared with their most affluent neighbours ⁽²⁾

Programmes to support parents and the early years are effective and set the foundation for good health and well-being in the longer term, bringing substantial return on investment. Addressing inequalities enable all children and young people to maximise their capabilities and achieve their potential into healthy adulthood.

Example of evidence identified with a positive impact and positive return on investment include:

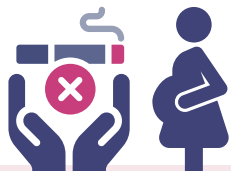
Integrated services for maternal and parental mental health



Early years education programmes especially for low-income families



Programmes supporting women to quit smoking during pregnancy



Healthy Adults

People living in the most deprived areas have a much higher chance of death from avoidable causes (3.7 times for males and 3.8 times for females) ⁽³⁾

The findings emphasise the need to support healthy behaviours, mental well-being and addressing the wider determinants of health. The programmes reflect a cross-sector approach providing effective services and supportive, enabling environments.

Example of evidence identified with a positive impact and positive return on investment include:

Multi-component approaches to reducing self-harm and suicide



Physical activity programmes to mitigate against obesity and associated diseases such as diabetes.



Data sharing between organisations reducing the costs associated with violence





Healthy Ageing

There is a 17-year gap in healthy life expectancy for women living in the most and least deprived areas of Wales. This gap is 13 years for men ⁽⁴⁾

A holistic approach is required to ensure healthy ageing with a recognition of the value of older people and their contribution to society. Social return on investment provides evidence for the wider social value of healthy ageing.

Examples of evidence identified with a positive impact and positive return on investment include:

Programmes and interventions to promote independent living of older people



Programmes to address loneliness and isolation



Prediabetes management programmes



Investing in prevention cannot be done in isolation; it needs to be part of a wider drive to reduce health inequalities through strategies and policies that have a focus on early years and poverty reduction. It is essential that public spend benefits Wales' most deprived communities, with a focus on high impact interventions with significant, scalable potential. Investment needs to be part of a long-term commitment that not only results in rapid outcomes but also allows time for the full impact to be realised (over 5 years) ⁽¹⁾.

The scale of the challenge we face necessitates prioritising prevention, working across sectors and boundaries, involving our population and integrated solutions to complex problems, ensuring that our actions embody the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015) ⁽⁵⁾ to achieve sustainable change and a sustainable health and care system for the future.

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