

The social determinants of health and the role of local government

The **'Social Determinants of Health and the Role of Local Government'**, has been published by the Improvement and Development Agency's Healthy Communities programme. The document provides a consideration, through the views of different writers, of the role of local government in addressing health inequalities through action on the social determinants of health.



The publication in 2008 of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Commission on the Social Determinants of Health, and the subsequent commissioning by the Secretary of State for Health of the Review of Health Inequalities Post 2010 in England (the Marmot Review) has raised the profile of the social determinants of health and of the importance of addressing the conditions of everyday life that lead to health inequities.

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Illustrated with practical examples and sources of further information and support, the **'Social Determinants of Health and the Role of Local Government'** takes the form of a collection of articles by distinguished practitioners of public health, academics and local government professionals. Some of the articles are deliberately challenging and provocative; some of them present a picture of what is already happening in local government; some look to what more local authorities could do, either with additional powers or by using their existing powers and remit. All will challenge and extend your current thinking.

In an exploration of the issues which local government needs to grapple with if it wants to make a positive impact on the health of the citizens it represents and on reducing inequalities in health:

- Professor David Hunter gives an overview of the social determinants of health and the potential role of local government

- Professor Danny Dorling takes apart the much discussed concept of 'place', looking at it with a geographer's eye, and discusses what it would really mean for local authorities to be the 'place-shapers' they aspire to be
- Mike Kelly and Tessa Moore look at sources of evidence to which local government can refer to when devising effective interventions and emphasise the importance of local authorities collecting and evaluating their own evidence
- Professor Alan Maryon-Davis looks at the developing roles of directors of public health and other public health professionals as they come almost full circle to take their place at the heart of local government.

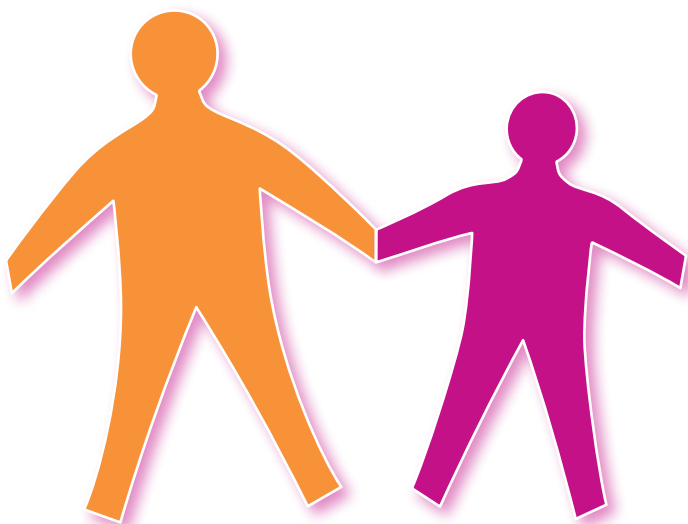
The **'Social Determinants of Health and the Role of Local Government'** further considers the strategic and operational implications for local authorities and individual service areas:

- John Nawrockyi discusses a pioneering course in Greenwich which takes literally the mantra that 'health is everyone's business' in the local authority
- Dr Tony Hill describes his experience of seconding the whole public health team from the PCT to the local authority
- Martin Seymour looks at practical implications of the 'Total Place' programme for health, in bringing together all the resources for an area.



In the concluding section, a number of different, but not necessarily incompatible approaches to the work of local government are considered in relation to their potential role as tools for health.

- Professor John Ashton asks us to re-imagine traditional approaches to community development, based on experience in the USA which have influenced President Obama.
- Clive Blair-Stevens explores how marketing approaches initially devised in the commercial world can be harnessed by local government and its public sector partners to meet health objectives.
- Charles Loft discusses some of the new and imaginative ways in which local authorities are using their enforcement roles in licensing, trading standards and environmental health as tools for health improvement.
- Adrian Davis describes the important and increasing use of health impact assessment as a means both of raising awareness of health issues and of evaluating interventions for their effects on health.
- Su Turner considers the increasingly creative ways in which local authority health overview and scrutiny committees are carrying out their work.
- Finally, there is a reminder that local government is in a position to have a direct impact on citizens' health through its role as a major employer across the country.



In 2008, I was asked by Secretary of State for Health to chair an independent review to propose the most effective strategies for reducing health inequalities in England from 2010.

In undertaking this review, we identified evidence and made recommendations in the key policy areas – the social determinants of health – where action is likely to be most effective in reducing health inequalities. These are:

- early child development and education
- employment arrangements and working conditions
- social protection
- the built environment
- sustainable development
- economic analysis
- delivery systems and mechanisms
- priority public health conditions
- social inclusion and social mobility.

In every single one of these areas, local government has a significant role to play. Local authorities make a very important contribution to weaving the social fabric of their areas and seeking to create and sustain healthy places for people to be born, grow, live, work and age. No review of health inequalities and measures to reduce them in this country can afford to ignore the role of local government.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot

Chair, World Health Organisation
Commission on Social Determinants of Health
Chair, Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England post-2010

When we focus on the social determinants of health rather than the medical cause of some specific disease, we see that local government services are health services. It is no exaggeration to say that without local government, adults and children would die sooner, would live in worse conditions, would lead lives that made them ill more often and would experience less emotional, mental and physical well-being than they do now.

'Social Determinants of Health and the Role of Local Government' shows something of the vast range of possibilities that awaits those with the imagination and energy to harness local government to the service of the population's health – the public policy issue that most people care most about.

'Social Determinants of Health and the Role of Local Government' is available now in PDF format at www.idea.gov.uk/determinantsofhealth

Printed copies are available upon request.

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The Local Government Association is the national voice for more than 400 local authorities in England and Wales. The LGA group comprises the LGA and five partner organisations which work together to support, promote and improve local government.

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