

BELFAST HEALTHY CITIES
2010 Briefing



Working together for a healthier Belfast



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Gordon House
22-24 Lombard Street
Belfast
BT1 1RD

T: +44 28 9032 8811
F: +44 28 9032 8333

Dear

Belfast Healthy Cities is a dynamic partnership which seeks to promote the importance of health in public policy in Belfast and Northern Ireland. Through our membership of the World Health Organization (WHO) we are able to introduce new concepts and best practice examples from other cities and regions and to facilitate discussion of how to improve the health and the lives of local people.

As the election approaches we are writing to each of the local political parties setting out what we regard as our two key issues going forward: (i) health inequality in Belfast and (ii) the importance of including health considerations in all public policy development. The rationale and policy underpinning these issues is set out in the attached Belfast Healthy Cities '2010 Briefing' document.

As a WHO healthy city, we are asking each political party to consider the material herein and to prioritise these two issues as part of the development of cross-sectoral policy.

You can find more detail on Belfast Healthy Cities and our priorities by visiting www.belfasthealthycities.com and in the meantime I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss the matter in more detail. I can be contacted on telephone, 02890 328811.

Regards

Joan Devlin
Director, Belfast Healthy Cities



Addressing health inequality

Often the standard of living in a region is measured in terms of socio-economic factors. However the most important issue facing the citizens of Northern Ireland, like anywhere else, is their health. Health is a measure of quality of life, and it is also a yardstick of a healthy community, city or society. Health and wellbeing is shaped by our social environment and is impacted by a range of factors including income, employment and educational attainment. Health inequalities/inequities are differences in health which are avoidable and can be considered unjust.

According to Professor Sir Michael Marmot, Chair of the WHO Commission on Social Determinants of Health:

“health inequalities are caused by the unequal distribution of power, income, goods and services which creates unfairness in peoples lives – their access to health care, schools, and education, their conditions of work and leisure, their homes, communities, towns or cities – and their chances of leading a flourishing life”

“Equity in health implies that ideally everyone should have a fair opportunity to attain their full health potential and more pragmatically that no one should be disadvantaged from achieving this potential, if it can be avoided”

There is a responsibility on policy makers in Northern Ireland to create conditions which address and reduce inequalities in the health of our local population through action on the social determinants of health.

Examples of health inequality trends in Belfast and Northern Ireland over the last decade:

- Across Northern Ireland, 75% of households with an income under £7,000 were fuel poor in 2006, dropping to 25% of households with an income in the range £15,000-£19,999 and 8% of households with an income £20,000-£29,999.
- About 20% of people remain sedentary, and there has been an increase in the proportion drinking above sensible limits (over 21 units of alcohol per week for a man and 14 per week for a woman).
- Obesity is increasing among both adults and children, which reflects trends across the UK.
- Most importantly, the levels of economic inactivity have also remained high at about 30% in Belfast, which is one of the highest rates in the UK.
- There has also been limited change in the proportion of people who leave school with no GCSEs.
- In a UK wide perspective, Belfast continues to rank low on indicators such as life expectancy, long term limiting illness, child health and economic inactivity.
- Similarly, a European snapshot for 2004 indicates that Belfast has a comparatively high infant mortality rate, low employment rate and high proportion of young people who do not complete compulsory education.



Putting Health into Public Policy

All cities participating in the World Health Organisation (WHO) Phase V programme are committed to pursuing the theme, 'Health and Health Equity in all Local Policies'. It is recognised that the health of a population is determined not only by health sector policies and initiatives but by policies across all public sectors departments, central and local. Our overall goal is to generate health and health equity as a core value in all local policies and actions by working with organisations to seek solutions that meet their objectives in a healthy way; address the inequalities within their areas of work and in doing so address health inequalities.

Launch of Belfast Healthy Cities 'Health and Health Equity in all Local Policies' Lecture Series

Danny Broderick, Principal Policy Officer in the Public Health Directorate of the South Australian Department of Health pictured with Joan Devlin, Director of Belfast Healthy Cities and Dr Bernadette Cullen, Chair of Belfast Healthy Cities. Danny Broderick addressed the seminar on how to implement health in all local policies, highlighting the obstacles that need to be overcome when achieving health gain through implementing health in all policies.

We are seeking commitments from Government to:

- Develop cross departmental and inter agency co-operation supporting coherent policy development
- Strengthen understanding of health and health equity issues among policy makers
- Adopt a 'Health Equity in all Local Policies' approach using aspects of Health Impact Assessment on emerging policy
- Support and enable the development of healthy urban environments and promoting healthy urban planning
- Monitor and collate data/ evidence of effective interventions that help inform policy making and action to improve the health outcomes of the population

