

The health of children and young people in Lambeth

Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2016/17



Executive Summary

This year's APHR focuses on Children and Young People (CYP), what influences their health, and how to ensure they have the best start to life, and go on to lead full and thriving lives. It is in two parts. This first part identifies the current main health issues CYP, and makes recommendations on how to improve their health. The second part (*After Tomorrow*) looks ten years ahead and is the subject of a separate report.

Influences on CYP health

The health of children is influenced by many factors and these are traditionally described as those circumstances in which they are born, live, play and work. Of these, deprivation has a substantial and lifelong negative impact on health. Whilst the proportion of children in poverty may be reducing in the borough, inequalities within the borough are rising. There are now more households in both deprived and more well off circumstances compared to a few years ago. In addition, national public spending policies have a disproportionate impact on children and young people. This is one example of the many changes, or 'forces', affecting health like technological and cultural shifts. This report considers them in more detail.

Some important health issues in Lambeth by life-course

In the early years (conception to five years old):

- Infant deaths have reduced significantly
- average school readiness has improved, but there remains substantial inequality, as children in deprived circumstances and from some ethnic groups do less well

In children of school age:

- In primary school children, emotional health may be improving, but the opposite is likely in secondary school and it is worse for girls
- Obesity may be reducing or at least stabilising

In adolescents:

- Admissions for self-harm have increased
- Sexual health remains a substantial issue, although there is some improvement
- Alcohol misuse is reducing

For all children:

- Safeguarding is a mixed picture: there are fewer children in care but there are important issues like child sexual exploitation; there is also an increase in children in temporary accommodation
- Large numbers of children have a long term condition.

The benefits of a life course approach

Public Health advocates the use of a life course approach to analyse and identify key areas of need, and to then develop mitigating actions to maximise positive developments and mitigate negative effects. This means in essence to analyse a child's life from conception onwards. The benefits of this approach are many:

- Acting in the early years is sound science and sound finance: good child health improves the health of everyone and investing in child wellbeing is effective, reduces inequalities, and leads to big social and economic returns for all
- A good start in life builds resilience and a healthy foundation for adulthood, and there is good evidence for promoting health and wellbeing in early life: improving school readiness and using a whole school approach to health and wellbeing and integrated action across services to promote good health and healthy relationships in young adults is key to success
- Safeguarding children from harm is one of the most effective ways to prevent long-term damage to a child's mental and physical health. Therefore, it must be at the heart of all initiatives across the system for all population groups.

Public health recommends adopting a Health and Wellbeing in All Policies approach, as it is a practical framework for maximising the health benefits of all local plans and investment.

Child health programmes in Lambeth

The Public Health department has been integral to some successful programmes in Lambeth that have improved the population's health and wellbeing, and reduced inequalities. Examples include reducing teenage pregnancy and childhood obesity. The factors that contributed to the success of these programmes should be used to inform future ones:

- Analysing the health and wellbeing of the whole population (not just groups who are known to be particularly vulnerable, already ill, or receiving services) to be able to identify opportunities for health improvement, and groups who also have poor health outcomes, but whose needs were currently unknown. This population segmentation will then allow for more precise use of resources
- Focusing on the wider societal, economic, environmental, policy and political influences and forces that determine health, not just on the individual risk factors or behaviours
- Being rigorous about how local services compare with best practice and identifying any gaps in services, and providing additional evidence on what works to support providers in achieving their goals
- Ensuring objective monitoring, evaluation and learning by collecting good and timely information from different sources
- Promoting, building and working with extensive partnerships between the people who need to benefit (CYP, their parents and carers) and statutory and voluntary organisations that allow beneficiaries equal voice and leadership (Co-design and co-production)
- Creating a collective understanding and agreement of the common goals and how to achieve them among all partners, and securing sustained investment over many years
- An explicit commitment to fairness and reducing inequalities.

Conclusion: dealing with complexity and the future

In many respects, health and wellbeing in children and young people in Lambeth is improving; children are more ready for school, and infant deaths, childhood obesity at reception, and teenage conceptions are reducing. However, average health measures mask important differences between population subgroups. There are substantial inequalities in all the measures reviewed in this report which means that many Lambeth children are missing out.

Austerity measures are disproportionately affecting children who are already vulnerable, especially the large number of children living in poverty in the borough. For a healthy, fair, and economically productive society, the health and wellbeing of children needs to be at the heart of policy making and investment plans.

Successful initiatives that benefit the whole population in Lambeth are based on partnership, addressing complexity, sustained commitment and long-term resourcing.

To make further progress and to reduce inequalities, Lambeth needs to focus more strongly on:

- Bringing together all relevant services into an **integrated early years programme**
- Ensuring the **London Healthy Schools programme** covers all schools
- Developing holistic and effective **integrated Young People's services** with a 'no wrong door' approach that place the relationship with young people at their heart
- A **whole population approach to safeguarding**, where safeguarding happens at every stage and in all settings for all children, thus reducing risk across all groups, leading to less harm and reduced need for support
- **Knowing the CYP population better** through improving data sharing between services to identify those at higher risk of poorer outcomes, inform priorities, and enable prompt action
- **Engaging, informing and empowering communities** to take action on their own account in line with their priorities
- A strong emphasis on health and wellbeing of children and young people within the council's commitment to **Health and Wellbeing in All Policies**.

After Tomorrow: towards a better future with the second part of this report

Decisions tend to be made over a one to four year time frame in line with financial and electoral cycles. Using such short time frames risks overlooking the potential impact of slower-acting forces that impact on health – be they positive or negative. This is especially concerning for child health. Taking a much longer view of CYP health over a ten year horizon will allow partners greater ability to respond effectively to today's and tomorrow's complex environment to the benefit of the population. The next part of the Annual Public Health Report uses the data and information from this report alongside extensive interviews, focus groups and workshops to develop scenarios to inform how partners might plan more effectively to promote and protect the health and wellbeing of children and young people over the next ten years.