

## LETTERS



## HEALTH AND GOVERNMENT POLICY

# Directors of public health are pivotal in tackling health inequalities

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*The BMJ* reports on plans for government policy to tackle health inequalities.<sup>1</sup>

The health select committee's report is clear about why public health is important and the key roles the NHS has to play.<sup>2</sup> However, many doctors and nurses will need training and time to deliver additional preventive advice.

The committee's report also highlights the needs assessment skills that public health specialists can bring to commissioning. To enhance capability and capacity, we strongly believe that each clinical commissioning group must include a public health specialist on its board.<sup>3</sup>

We welcome the report's focus on data. However, instead of concentrating on negative indicators, such as deaths, positive indicators are also needed.<sup>4</sup> These could be used for planning, evaluation, and promoting health.

We agree that "cuts to public health are a false economy." Furthermore, we think that funding should increase to be commensurate with the considerable issues facing the country.<sup>3,5</sup> We have previously mentioned that directors of public health are pivotal to the health of our communities.<sup>6</sup> However, if they are to have a substantial level of influence, they will need to be given both the power and the resources.

When the government responds to this report, it should be ambitious and should develop an evidence based, long term public health strategy that not only focuses on priorities including smoking, sensible drinking, and mental health but also prioritises the reduction of inequalities. Coordinated action in hospitals, primary care, workplaces, schools, and other settings is required. Well resourced and robust public health departments will be vital to effective action.<sup>6</sup>

Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: [www.bmj.com/content/354/bmj.i4715/rr](http://www.bmj.com/content/354/bmj.i4715/rr).

- 1 Torjesen I. Health must be embedded across all government policy, MPs say. *BMJ* 2016;354:i4715. doi:10.1136/bmj.i4715 pmid:27587190.
- 2 House of Commons Health Committee. Public health post-2013: second report of session 2016-17. Sep 2016. [www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee/news-parliament-2015/public-health-report-published-16-17/](http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee/news-parliament-2015/public-health-report-published-16-17/).
- 3 BMA. Public health and healthcare delivery task and finish group: final report. Jan 2015. <http://bit.ly/2cpiHlp>.
- 4 Watson MC, Watson EC. Time to focus on positive health indicators to reduce health inequalities. *BMJ* 2013;347:f4210. doi:10.1136/bmj.f4210 pmid:23820524.
- 5 NHS England. Public Health England, Monitor, Care Quality Commission, Health Education England. Five year forward view. Oct 2014. [www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/5yfv-web.pdf](http://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/5yfv-web.pdf).
- 6 Watson MC, Lloyd J. *BMJ* 2013. [www.bmj.com/content/346/bmj.f4242/rr/652995](http://www.bmj.com/content/346/bmj.f4242/rr/652995).

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