

NICE support for local authorities on improving access to health and social care services

22 January 2014

Support for local authorities to improve access to health and social care services for people who don't routinely use them is the focus of a [new NICE local government briefing published today](#) (Wednesday 22 January).

The new briefing on improving service access covers a range of areas important in ensuring that services meet the sometimes complex needs of people in their local area. There are many reasons why some people might not use health and social care services. These can include services having opening times or being in locations that aren't convenient, and people living in an isolated area, being an asylum seeker, not having English as a first language, and being a carer.

The cost of treating illness and disease arising from health inequalities has been estimated at £5.5 billion per year in England. In the working-age population, it leads to productivity losses of between £31-33 billion each year. Making it easier for people to use health and social care services can help to address issues before they become more serious and require more resources in the future. Local authorities have a unique insight into the demographics and needs of their local populations which gives them an advantage in planning for local people. The briefing draws on a wide range of existing NICE guidance to highlight ways in which local authorities can tailor what they and partner organisations offer - all based on the effective actions which also provide the best value for money.

Professor Mike Kelly, Director of the Centre for Public Health at NICE, said: "Being able to, or feeling able to use local health and social care services is something that not everyone can take for granted. There might be logistical reasons - such as where the service is located or its opening times - which make it hard for people to go along when they need to. There are also a wide range of population characteristics that can make accessing health services more difficult, including being homeless, living in a rural area, not speaking English as a first language and having a learning difficulty. Behavioural characteristics that people may want to keep hidden - such as using illicit drugs can also mean that these individuals may avoid accessing health services.

"For some people, being a carer can mean that it's not easy to attend to their own health and wellbeing needs: a survey of carers reported that 71% had a reduction in the amount of

physical exercise they undertook, 61% reported experiencing depression, 92% felt more stressed because of their caring roles. This briefing will help local authorities across the country provide services which address scenarios like this, by catering for the needs of all people in their community, to improve health and wellbeing, save money and reduce health inequalities."

Examples of effective recommendations highlighted in the new briefing include:

- Considering the population characteristics of people who are not routinely accessing services and assess local need
- Planning and delivering accessible local services
- Partnership working and involving local communities
- Targeting interventions for those with complex need.

NICE Local Government Public Health Briefings are available at <http://www.nice.org.uk/>

1. The new Briefing is published on 22 January 2014, and will be available on the [NICE website](#). Embargoed copies of the briefing are available from the NICE press office on request.

2. Facts and figures:

- The 2011 census indicated that 138,000 people living in England and Wales speak no English. Data also indicated that 8% of the population in England and Wales do not have English as their first language
- Death rates from cardiovascular disease are approximately 50% higher than average among South Asian groups (Allender et al. 2007)
- It has been estimated that almost 1.2 million people living in England have learning difficulties

3. This new publication is part of a suite of briefing documents which NICE is producing to provide support to local government. This new area of work aims to help councillors and local authority staff find out which public health actions are most effective in improving the health of people in their area, while also providing the best value for money. Based on recommendations from existing NICE public health and clinical guidance, the briefings have been developed with input from the independent Local Government Reference Group. The group comprises councillors, local government officers, and others with an interest in community health and wellbeing. The new briefings are in addition to NICE's ongoing programme producing public health guidance. Topics covered include tobacco, physical activity and workplace health, alcohol, health inequalities and behaviour change.

4. NICE is publishing a further Local Government Briefing today on Body mass index thresholds for intervening to prevent ill health among black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, also available on the [NICE website](#).