

The Government's public health agenda must champion cancer prevention

The Government must be ambitious in its plan to drive improvements in cancer services and patient experience to make the UK's cancer outcomes and care equal to the best in Europe in the next decade.

To this end the Cancer Campaigning Group (CCG) is calling for change in six priority areas. This briefing sets out the CCG vision for public health and prevention.

One in three people will develop cancer during their lifetime, and experts estimate that up to half of cases could be prevented by lifestyle changes. Public health and prevention should form a key strand of a comprehensive cancer strategy. The CCG wants the Government to promote healthier lifestyles by empowering people to make healthier choices and utilising policies to 'nudge' people away from unhealthy choices. As public health commissioning becomes the responsibility of local authorities, it will be vital that bodies such as Health and Wellbeing Boards pay due care and attention to issues around lifestyle and cancer prevention.

Tobacco control: Smoking kills one in two long term users,ⁱ and is the single largest preventable cause of cancer.^{ii,iii,iv} It is crucial that a comprehensive tobacco control strategy forms a key element of any public health and cancer policy. Smoking accounts for one in four UK cancer deaths,^v and causes nine in ten cases of lung cancer.^{vi} An

estimated eight out of ten smokers start before the age of 19 and each year approximately 340,000 under 16 year olds try cigarettes for the first time.^{vii,viii} It is therefore important that steps are taken to reduce children and young people's perceptions of smoking as a social norm. Key steps to take to protect children from tobacco marketing include the removal of tobacco point of sale displays in shops and the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco products.

We welcome the Government's 2011 Tobacco Control Strategy with its commitment to removing these displays in large shops in April 2012 and small shops in April 2015, and urge it to also use the complementary measure of introducing plain packaging. The CCG calls for the implementation of the Strategy at a local level. Over two-thirds of smokers want to quit, but smoking is highly addictive.^{ix} Smokers should be supported in their attempts to quit and smoking cessation services are a highly effective way of achieving this, as are mass media campaigns.

Obesity: After smoking, obesity is the second most important cause of cancer which can be prevented.^x Current levels of overweight and obesity in the UK could lead to around an estimated 19,000 cases of cancer every year.^{xi,xii} A comprehensive strategy for obesity is needed which includes clear and consistent food labelling, restrictions on the promoting and marketing of

foods high in fat, salt and sugar, initiatives that increase levels of physical activity, and well funded public education campaigns about the importance of diet and exercise.

Sunbeds: The use of sunbeds, especially by those under the age of 35, significantly increases the risk of developing skin cancer later on in life.^{xiii} The WHO has recently re-classified sunbeds, putting them into its highest risk category alongside tobacco,^{xiv} as carcinogenic to humans. We also know that in 2008/09, a quarter of a million children used sunbeds in England.^{xv} From April 2011, under 18 year olds have been unable to use sunbeds. To ensure that this welcome measure is as effective as possible, the CCG urges the Government to implement all the secondary legislation measures in the Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010. This includes ensuring all sunbed salons are staffed and that accurate health information is provided and displayed in all salons.



Alcohol: It is estimated that 6% of cancer deaths are caused by alcohol in the UK and that accounts for at least 9,000 deaths each year.^{xvi} The WHO has classified alcohol into its highest risk category, alongside tobacco, as carcinogenic to humans. Consumption of alcohol has risen sharply as alcohol has become more accessible and affordable in the UK.^{xvii} The CCG is calling on the Government to introduce a strategy to tackle the consumption

levels of alcohol across the UK. This strategy should include steps to increase the cost of alcohol and restrictions on the marketing of alcohol. Awareness of the link between alcohol and cancer risk is low, and therefore public information campaigns to raise awareness of the long term health risks are crucial.

Importance of physical activity: In the UK changes to our diet, combined with a sedentary lifestyle, contribute to levels of obesity. Adults who are physically active have a 20-30 per cent reduced risk of premature death, but we know that levels of physical activity are low, with about two thirds of men and three-quarters of women doing less than the recommended levels.^{xviii} A former Chief Medical Officer recommended that adults should aim to achieve 30 minutes of moderate activity on five days of the week, and 60 minutes every day for children and young people.^{xix} The CCG calls on the Government to encourage the take-up of physical activity, for instance through promoting walking and cycling routes. It is also important that the Government increases the number and range of safe and accessible facilities available for sport and physical activity, alongside further promoting physical activity in schools.

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