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Wales

# Our Approach to Health Inequalities

## A framework for action in Public Health Wales

Public Health Wales



# 1. Health Equity action areas and checklist

## Purpose of framework

This framework provides evidence based approaches to support work across Public Health Wales in addressing health inequalities. This framework can be used during decision making, planning processes and monitoring and evaluation. It can be used alongside other tools such as impact assessments. Some elements of this framework will already be familiar and second nature to staff. Our aim is that it supports more systematic and critical thinking when addressing health inequalities.

Our vision is health equity, defined as the absence of avoidable inequalities in health between groups of people. These are systemic, socially produced and unfair arising from the unfair distribution of resources in our society. Health equity is achieved when everyone can attain their full potential for health and well-being.

## Vision and ways of working for health equity

**In Public Health Wales, our overarching objective is to increase healthy life expectancy and narrow the gap in healthy life expectancy between the least deprived and the most deprived.**

**The Well-being of Future Generation Act requires public bodies, including Public Health Wales, to carry out sustainable development in accordance to the 5 ways of working: long-term, prevention, integration, collaboration, and involvement.**

### Evidence based health equity action areas for your teams

- **Develop a leadership and culture committed to tackling health inequalities**
  - ◆ Use shared and widely understood language around health equity
  - ◆ Actively combat stigma and discrimination and promote social justice
  - ◆ Use a health in all policies approach in your work, supported by tools like health impact assessments
  - ◆ Ensure leaders have access to training on inclusive, systems leadership
  - ◆ Consider developing health equity strategies for your teams
  - ◆ Consider developing dedicated champions, time and funding for health equity in your teams/services
- **Use a public health approach in your work**
  - ◆ Account for building blocks of health, like income and housing
  - ◆ Aim to prevent health problems developing or getting worse
  - ◆ Use data and evidence to properly understand communities and solve health problems
  - ◆ Collaborate with partners across the system
  - ◆ Target solutions at populations and groups, not individuals
- **Assemble a diverse, well trained and sustainable workforce**
  - ◆ Ensure regular training for your team on health equity
  - ◆ Better support for recruitment and retention practices that support equality, diversity and inclusion
  - ◆ Advocate for local recruitment from disadvantaged communities, using tools like targeted recruitment, paid internships and apprenticeships
- **Deliver high quality services that are widely accessible**
  - ◆ Carefully incorporate services into communities and locations with a focus on addressing access barriers, such as transport, cultural or social factors
  - ◆ Ensure your communications are accessible, culturally sensitive, user friendly, person-centred, and evidence-based
  - ◆ Consider the use of co-design and public involvement
- **Collect and publish high quality health equity data and knowledge**
  - ◆ Collect data at both the individual and population level, disaggregating key demographics and health behaviours
  - ◆ Improve data for inclusion health groups affected by your work and consider possible digital exclusion in your work
  - ◆ Collect data on unmet needs, including qualitative data from people with lived experience
  - ◆ Invest in your team's data capabilities and capacity if possible

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- **Work closely with groups and communities in Wales through the use of networks and effective engagement and involvement**
  - ◆ Raise awareness of people's rights and responsibilities around healthcare and public services
  - ◆ Establish long-term relationships and trust between your team and other teams, services and communities, using the principles of co-production and a place based approach.
  - ◆ If/when you procure goods and services, aim to support local communities, especially disadvantaged ones
  - ◆ Develop specific engagement mechanisms with groups with poor health outcomes or access existing ones in Public Health Wales
  - ◆ Develop or access links with the voluntary and community sector
  - ◆ Consider using existing models for improving community working, such as leadership networks and expert reference groups

## Health equity checklist for planning and decisions

**How are you working towards the Public Health Wales Long Term Strategy and performing relevant actions: informing, advocating, mobilising and delivering in relation to health inequalities?**

**Are you collaborating with all of your key partners, such as local authorities, health boards, and public services boards?**

**Have you considered impacts of your work on:**

- Groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010
- Inclusion health groups, such as people experiencing homelessness
- Social and economic circumstances, especially deprivation and child poverty
- Places where people live, work and play, including rural, coastal and Welsh-speaking communities
- The interplay of the above factors with each other (intersectionality)



**Have you considered the impacts on the building blocks of health?**

- Fair work
- Good education and skills
- Well-designed and sustainable transport
- Strong communities and relationships
- Safe and nurturing childhoods
- Affordable and high quality housing
- Sufficient money and resources
- And healthy physical environments and surroundings



**Have you considered the impacts on mental health and traumatic stress?<sup>1</sup>**

**Have you considered the impacts throughout the life course (Early years and children, working age adults, older adults, and generational cycles)?**

**Have you considered how you will measure and evaluate the impacts of your work?**

## Further reading and resources

There is an enabling policy landscape in Wales to support action on health equity, including the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, socio-economic duty and the forthcoming health impact assessment (HIA) regulations. Tools such as HIAs are also available to help you. Read the supplementary document for more information.

1 <https://acehubwales.com/trauma-framework/>

# 2. Our approach

**In Public Health Wales, with our partners, we aim to increase healthy life expectancy, improve health and well-being, and reduce inequalities for everyone in Wales, now and for future generations. We can make a powerful and lasting difference if we actively and consistently consider health equity in our work. If we fail to consider health equity, we risk reinforcing - or even widening - existing health inequalities through business as usual approaches.**

This framework has been compiled with input from all of Public Health Wales and is relevant for everyone working throughout the organisation, but could be particularly useful for those involved in planning, strategy and decision-making. We recommend integrating it into those processes. A health equity narrative is available for everyone too and gives an overview of our approach to health inequalities. A supplementary document is available for the framework which offers more detailed information, tools and resources.

The framework can be read at any time. We especially recommend reading it when you're making important decisions, especially ones of a strategic nature. These are crucial opportunities to shape teams and services for health equity so make sure you dedicate some time to this. You may also use this framework to develop a dedicated health equity strategy for your team/service.

Our vision is health equity, defined as the absence of avoidable inequalities in health between groups of people. These are systemic, socially produced and unfair arising from the unfair distribution of resources in our society<sup>2</sup>. Health equity is achieved when everyone can attain their full potential for health and well-being.

Addressing health equity requires coordinated action across the health and care system with local, regional and national partners working together. This will include service users, local communities, third sector organisations, local authorities and health and social care.

## Our Approach to Health Inequalities

The five ways of working within the Well-being of Future Generations Act guide our approach to health inequalities<sup>3</sup>. These include:



1. **Long-term thinking** – Balancing short term gains with the need to sustainably increase healthy life expectancy and related gaps for future generations



2. **Prevention** – Acting to stop health inequalities occurring or getting worse



3. **Integration** – Considering how our health equity work interacts with and complements the well-being goals (A healthier Wales, a more equal Wales, a resilient Wales, a prosperous Wales, a Wales of cohesive communities, a Wales of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language, and a globally responsible Wales)



4. **Collaboration** – Working with other parts of Public Health Wales and other public bodies, including NHS Wales, our partner agencies and local government.



5. **Involvement** – Involving different groups and communities throughout Wales in our work, ensuring a diversity of people are involved and that those affected by health inequalities are included.



An example of the action areas being implemented can be seen in the work on screening equity by our screening division<sup>4</sup>:

- Screening uptake is highly socially patterned with groups experiencing socio-economic disadvantage having the worst uptake. In the case of cancer screening, these groups will have higher disease incidence and so would benefit the most from screening.
- There is dedicated commitment and strategy for health equity that specifies a number of actions and related timelines.
- Each programme has an equity champion who regularly come together and 'equality and health impact assessment tools' are being embedded in practice.
- Various forms of potential screening inequity are routinely monitored and used to evaluate the service, including both quantitative and qualitative data.
- There is clear engagement with specific service users and groups, including a screening engagement network that meets regularly.
- There is a specific focus on accessible communications and overcoming barriers.
- There is positive collaboration with partners, including local public health teams, primary care clusters and the voluntary and community sector. This includes a screening and inequalities group who regularly meet to share learning.

<sup>3</sup> <https://futuregenerations.wales/discover/about-future-generations-commissioner/future-generations-act-2015/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://phw.nhs.wales/services-and-teams/screening/screening-division-inequity-report-2023/>

## Our Approach to Health Inequalities



Thriving, equal communities need all the right building blocks in place: from safe surroundings and clean air, to decent homes and good jobs. Public services have a key role to play in constructing healthy places, by ensuring these building blocks are in place and ensuring there is equitable access to them.

Recognising this, Shaping Places for Well-being in Wales is a three-year programme funded by the Health Foundation to help Public Services Boards use systems thinking to take action on the building blocks of health.

Systems thinking can help us tackle health inequalities as it:

- Is a way of understanding and addressing complex situations by viewing them as interconnected wholes rather than isolated parts. This can help us consider the impacts of our work on the building blocks of health
- Emphasises inter-relationships, diverse perspectives and boundary judgements to explore how different elements interact within a system, helping to make more informed and sustainable decisions. This can help us to think about who's voices have power and influence in our work, and who's are marginalised.
- Is a holistic approach, which can help us understand what are the root causes of the patterns we see. This can help us to consider the long-term implications of our actions and ensure we are embedding prevention and long-term thinking into our strategies and plans



Inequalities have long been an area of focus in Public Health Wales' work across the breadth of health protection services, our work on vaccine equity and inclusion health protection are world-renowned. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us that we must do more to address inequalities consequent of threats to our health from infectious diseases and other hazards. What more can we do to mitigate harm from health threats for our most vulnerable people?

The Health Protection Inequalities Best Practice Guide forms part of a programme of work on health protection inequalities, focussing on what we can do in Public Health Wales. It is designed to provide our people in Public Health Wales with practical insights, proven strategies, and recommendations that can be applied to address inequities arising from threats to health. It also provides a springboard to collaborate with our partners in the health protection system across Wales to reduce the unequal impacts of health threats in our communities. The Health Protection Inequalities Programme (HPIP) team have compiled this comprehensive resource, drawing from a strong evidence base, to provide practical tools and strategies to improve our ability to provide excellent health protection services.

**Framework authors:**

**Daniel Jones, Specialist Registrar in Public Health,  
Jo Peden, Consultant in Public Health**

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