

Public health reform

Scotland's Public Health Priorities – Local Partnerships and Whole System Approach



Public Health Priorities and the Whole System Approach

Our Vision

To improve Scotland's public health record we need to work together to shift our focus towards preventing ill health, reducing inequalities and working more effectively in partnership. This will require a different way of working that supports a shared vision for public health as part of a whole system approach.

The scale of the task should not be underestimated and the success of public health reform will be judged against the major public health challenges facing Scotland, these include:

- Scotland's relative poor health
- The significant and persistent health inequalities
- Unsustainable pressures on health and social care services

Public Health Priorities

As a starting point, the Scottish Government and COSLA agreed six national **Public Health Priorities** in June 2018, which are intended to support national and local partners across Scotland to work together to improve healthy life expectancy and reduce health inequalities in our communities.



Priority 1 A Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities

Priority 2 A Scotland where we flourish in our early years

Priority 3 A Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing

Priority 4 A Scotland where we reduce the use of and harm from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs

Priority 5 A Scotland where we have a sustainable, inclusive economy with equality of outcomes for all

Priority 6 A Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight and are physically active

Whole system approach (WSA)

To deliver the public health priorities we need to work more effectively together as part of a whole system approach. Whole system working can be defined as applying systems thinking and tools that enable:

“An ongoing, flexible approach by a broad-range of stakeholders to identify and understand current and emerging public health issues where, by working together, we can deliver sustainable change and better lives for the people of Scotland.”

Characteristics

To build on the definition above a set of **nine** core characteristics have been developed to reflect a true whole system approach. Drawing on established models, these have been developed and refined through extensive national engagement.

1: System thinking

- Recognition that public health outcomes are influenced by a complex and adaptive system of interacting components, which will require the action of many partners to redesign the system to one that protects and promotes health.

2: Learning culture

- An ongoing process of reflecting, learning and adapting is adopted.
- Robust monitoring and evaluation is embedded and provides the foundation for learning, adaption and ongoing improvement.

3: Collaborative leadership

- Leaders must build and sustain collaborative relationships across the system; be committed to drive change over a longer period; empower leadership at all levels; be flexible; champion, test and learn from new ways of working across organisational and professional boundaries.

4: Purposeful engagement

- Communities should be involved directly in decisions that affect them. Clear methods to enhance the ability of organisations and sectors to engage meaningfully with the communities who experience the system are needed.

5: Governance and resourcing

- To drive and sustain a WSA clear and robust governance structures are required which enables shared accountability and align outcomes across organisations.

6: Sustainable collaborative working

- WSA is a collaborative approach and is intended to reach beyond the partners we usually and comfortably work with. This will require flexibility and strong relationships, and a sustained commitment to collaborative working.

7: Shared commitment and outcomes

- Developing a shared vision and purpose which identifies, connects and aligns shared longer-term outcomes will help to engage partners beyond health and sustain collaboration.

8: Place is important

- Local context is important and will shape systems at a local level. All those responsible for providing services and looking after assets in a place need to work and plan together and with local communities to improve the lives of people, support inclusive growth and create more successful communities.

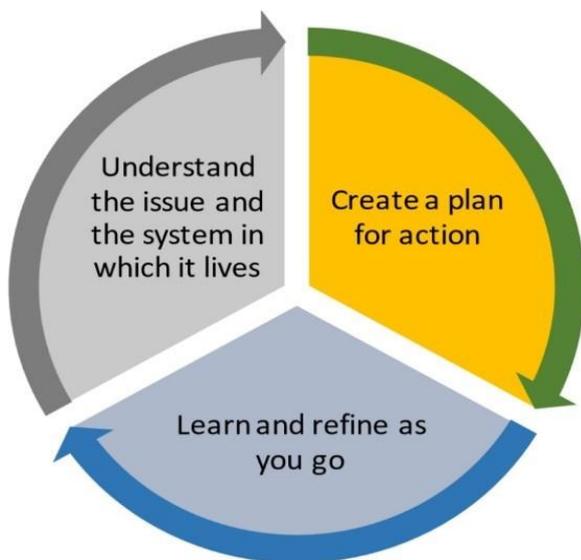
9: Creativity and innovation

- Understanding what works in a local context is important, this will require flexibility around ways of working and identifying creative and innovative actions that best fit local needs are important. Leaders should encourage a culture which champions learning from what does and doesn't work.

Practice

A whole system approach involves application of complex systems thinking, methods and practice to better understand public health challenges and identify collective actions. Adopting a whole system approach to Scotland's Public Health Priorities is a long-term endeavour. It will require new partnerships between a broad-range of stakeholders to deliver better lives for the people of Scotland.

There are many tools and methods that have been developed to support whole system approaches. Put simply, there are three phases that can help stakeholders adopt a whole system approach*:



- Collectively form an **understanding of the issue, context and wider system**.
- **Create a plan for action collaboratively** with a wide set of stakeholders. Actions should be aligned and jointly prioritised.
- **Learn and refine as you go by involving stakeholders and embedding monitoring and evaluation**. Considering the 'so what?' and 'now what?'

*Adapted from FSG [Systems Thinking Toolkit. Putting systems thinking into practice in your organization](#) and Australian Prevention Partnership Centre (2018) [Systems Change Framework](#).

A WSA has many similarities with effective partnership working. However what sets it apart and adds value is the adoption and application of complex systems thinking, methods and practice to both understanding the problem and to support identification and testing of actions to address it. It also embeds an ongoing and reflective cycle of learning. It recognises that system change is a long-term endeavour, often delivered through incremental steps and collaboratively with many partners.

Measuring impact

The [National Performance Framework](#) (NPF) sets out a vision for national wellbeing. Looking at the sort of Scotland we want to see. By adopting a values-based approach to improving the public's health we will be able to successfully demonstrate that we are truly working differently.

Early adopters

Work is underway to identify and work with early adopters of the WSA at both a local and national level to begin to put this approach into practice. This will involve testing new ways of working and sharing learning.

The objectives of the early adopters work will be:

- Test and refine the Public Health Reform WSA with partners.
- Understand what helps and hinders adoption of a WSA and identify and test activity to overcome barriers.
- Identify ways of improving links between national policy and local delivery which best support a WSA.
- Share the learning across the wider system.

Long-term ambition

Our long-term ambition is to see wide adoption of a WSA to support collaboration on Scotland's Public Health Priorities and action to improve healthy life expectancy and reducing inequalities. This will require new partnerships between a broad-range of stakeholders, with the ultimate aim of delivering better lives for the people of Scotland.

Public Health Reform – useful links

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