

HEALTH ACTION CAMPAIGN

because prevention is better than cure



ANNUAL REVIEW 2019-2020

Our vision

A country where people live longer, healthier lives – instead of our health often being a postcode lottery.

Our mission

To encourage everyone who can (including government, businesses, employers and the NHS) to make healthy choices the easy choices for people – and to encourage ordinary people to make healthy choices a personal and political priority.

Why this matters

Living in a less affluent area shouldn't mean you're likely to die younger and spend more years in poor health.

Whatever your background, you should have a reasonable chance of living a long and healthy life. Recognising that prevention is better than cure is key to achieving this.

This will also help free up potential – with more people able to contribute positively, more actively and for longer.

Who we are

We're a health charity, recognised by HMRC, launched in 2015, with expert volunteers from a range of backgrounds, in particular health and medical research.

Our guiding principle is that prevention is better than cure.

Partnership working

We are currently working in partnership with:

- King's College London, Ulster University and Greenwich University on research into student mental health.
- SMARTEN, the national student mental health research network.
- The Obesity Health Alliance, to encourage the government to give higher priority to tackling obesity.
- Our sister charity, Age Watch, to make evidence-based information available to people to increase their chances of living long and healthy lives.
- The Richmond Group of Charities, to move public health up the government's agenda.

Our Long Term Priorities

Make healthy choices the easy choices for people – by making healthier food and drink more widely available and affordable, by increasing opportunities for mental and physical exercise, by encouraging active communities, and by continued initiatives to make it easier to stop smoking and to keep alcohol consumption to reasonably safe levels.

More focus on child health – because what happens to us in the early years of life from conception onwards can influence our health and our weight for years to come.

Greater support for those at risk – to avoid health inequalities being carried forward from one generation to another.

A true National HEALTH Service, which gives higher priority to preventing people from falling ill, not simply treating them once they fall ill.

Current Projects

Health at Work

Initiatives here can be good for both employers and employees, potentially reducing sickness absence, boosting morale and productivity and improving staff retention.

Our Employers Guide to Health at Work was updated in 2020. It includes:

- The business case for health at work initiatives
- A questionnaire to help employers identify where they are starting from
- Managing the main physical and mental health risks as an employer
- Quality of work and its effect on health
- Case studies from different types of employer
- FAQs
- Useful resources

“*I thought the guide was really useful, and I’m definitely going to use this to benchmark what my organization has to offer.*”

HR Adviser



Student Mental Health

Half of young people in the UK now go to university. However, a significant increase in student mental health problems has been widely reported – suggesting a growing public health issue.

Our Student Mental Health team have therefore been researching what can be done to reduce the problem. We started by asking three key questions:

- WHEN in young people's lives do mental health problems start?
- WHO is typically most affected?
- WHY – what has changed that might explain the increased risk?

Fresh Perspectives

For the vast majority of students who'll experience mental health problems there's growing evidence that symptoms first start BEFORE university.

Four factors may have combined to make today's students less prepared for the transition to university and more predisposed to mental health problems once there:

- A safeguarding, 'spoon-feeding' culture in schools.
- Over protective or over indulgent parenting.
- The lure of social media.
- The medicalization of normal feelings and emotions.

Planned Research

In partnership with researchers at King's College London, Ulster University and Greenwich University we are now planning follow up research, to test this hypothesis, with a randomised sample of first year students at each of the three universities.

As COVID-19 means the transition from school to university this year will not be typical we aim to start with a pilot study in autumn 2020 and then the main study in autumn 2021.



Student mental health team (November 2019)



Social media team (July 2019)

Student Mental Health

Publishing some initial findings

We have also published some of our initial findings as blogs, including the following on the SMARTEN or RSPH websites:

- What has changed that might increase student mental health problems?
- Student Mental Distress – A Fresh Perspective
- Social Media
- Are there lessons we can learn from the Netherlands?
- Fear of Failure

Our thanks to Natasha Airey, William Bate, Annie Borland, Sophie Izzard, Ellen Ji, Nicola Revington, Nikita Sinclair, Elizabeth Walters and Daniela Wilks for their contributions to the research.

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Guest blog: Student mental health problems – how to tackle a growing public health issue

Blog, Mental health, Younger people | 22 July 2019

Michael Baber, Director of Health Action Campaign, a public health charity whose guiding principle is that prevention is better than cure, discusses the growing issue of student mental health.

Homepage > About RSPH > Latest Public Health News
> Guest blog: Student mental health problems – how to tackle a growing public health issue

Michael Baber, Director of **Health Action Campaign**, a public health charity whose guiding principle is that prevention is better than cure, discusses the growing issue of student mental health.

Why are more and more students reporting mental health problems – and what can be done to reduce the risk? This is a question universities are grappling with, as record numbers of students seek help. Here's our assessment.

Many aspects of student life haven't changed

Many factors suggested by researchers have been true for generations of students, so are unlikely to explain the increase – including the transition from home/school to university, deadlines, exam pressure, relationship breakdowns and the availability of alcohol and drugs.

Blog

Guest blog submission

RSPH welcomes guest blog posts from individuals working with or in public health

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Guest blog: Student mental health problems – the role of social media

Blog, Mental health, Younger people | 15 August 2019

Natasha Airey, a volunteer on the Health Action Campaign mental health research team, discusses the role of social media in student mental health problems.

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> Guest blog: Student mental health problems – the role of social media


Natasha Airey, a volunteer on the **Health Action Campaign** mental health research team, discusses the role of social media in student mental health problems.

Having previously worked with adults with mental health problems in a recovery service, as well as working for a children's and young adults' mental health charity, I'm interested in the impact of social media on the development of children in the future.

There is still so much about the effects of social media that we don't know. While I was a student, social media was still relatively new so I was curious whether there were any suggestions that social media is already having an impact on young people.

#StatusofMind


In May 2017, RSPH and the Young Health Movement published a report examining the positive and negative

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Guest blog: Reducing childhood obesity internationally

Blog, Obesity, Younger people 15 November 2019

Nicole Musuwo, a Registered Associate Nutritionist and Health Advisor at Health Action Campaign, gives an international perspective to childhood obesity policy.




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 Guest blog: Reducing childhood obesity internationally


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*In the second piece of our three-part series on obesity, Nicole Musuwo, a Registered Associate Nutritionist and Health Advisor at **Health Action Campaign**, gives an international perspective to childhood obesity policy.*

With childhood obesity on the rise globally, national governments are starting to move action to tackle obesity up their agendas. How successful have their policies and initiatives been so far and what can we learn from this?




National childhood obesity plans




Health on the Shelf

Tackling Childhood Obesity



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Guest blog: Using sports clubs to help support men's health


Blog, Physical activity, Obesity 24 January 2020

Sakura Yamamoto, public health researcher at Health Action Campaign, explores innovative approaches to encourage physical activity in the UK's male population.

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Obesity


We have a number of policies regarding obesity, with recommendations aimed at improving the public's health

At **Health Action Campaign** our guiding principle is that prevention is better than cure. With obesity a risk factor for so much ill health, that's why we're focusing on what can be done to prevent obesity – with a focus here on male obesity.

Male obesity is a growing problem in the UK, with **67% of men** in the UK overweight or obese, compared with 62% of women. However, commercial weight management programmes are mainly targeted at and taken up by women. It is also suggested that men are less likely to recognise their weight is an issue, more likely to view dieting as feminine, and less aware of the link between diet and ill-health.



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Guest blog: Health Promotion – a Case Study


Blog, General 14 March 2020

Sally Leach, Health and Wellbeing Advisor at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Health Promotion Adviser for Health Action Campaign, explains how holistic approaches to health and wellbeing can empower people to make positive lifestyle changes

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Health on the High Street

Our campaign and policy reports, exploring the healthiness of Britain's high streets, and how businesses and local authorities can improve the health of their communities

For the past two years I have been working as a Health and Wellbeing Advisor for Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council – as part of the nationwide **One You** health campaign. It's one of many health initiatives in the UK focusing on prevention by talking to adults directly about the small steps they can take to improve their health. Here's what I and my colleagues feel has been effective.

What is the One You health campaign?

One You was launched in the UK by Public Health England (PHE) in 2016 to help adults across the country avoid future disease, extend their lifespan, and live a better quality of life.

The Next Steps

We look forward to reporting further progress in our next Annual Review, in particular on our three current projects:

- Tackling Childhood Obesity
- Reducing the Risk of Student Mental Ill Health
- Health at Work

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