

“Public Health: what next?”

University of Hertfordshire, 12th June 2019

1. Background

On Wednesday 12th June 2019, the University of Hertfordshire and Hertfordshire County Council Public Health delivered a masterclass session entitled “Public Health: what next?”. The event brought together professionals across Hertfordshire from a range of organisations and members of the public to discuss the future of Public Health and its importance to our residents and this incorporated facilitated round table discussions. The session was an opportunity for delegates to meet professionals from different backgrounds across the county, to learn from experience and what health priorities may mean to others. This narrative looks at some of the challenges and topics raised during the roundtable discussions which centred around consideration of three questions outlined below:

2. Questions

2.1 What does Public Health mean to you and your organisation?

For this masterclass we were fortunate to see a great attendance over 75 delegates across the county and welcomed professionals including commissioners, service providers, members of the public, project managers, voluntary sector colleagues, pharmacists, researchers in academia, care providers and Hertfordshire Councillors.

It was fantastic to see so many attendees representing just some of the services and ongoing work in Hertfordshire – from teaching accessible chair yoga to leading community groups!

Discussions on what Public Health meant to our delegates covered the following areas:

- Health inequalities affecting service users,
- Invisibility of Public Health issues prior to costly levels of intervention
- Emphasising the key message of prevention.

The importance of public health was also raised as key to supporting Adult Social Care and Children’s services to meet statutory requirements, through better coordination of support and addressing wider determinants of health, that contribute to more complex and high need cases.

It was also highlighted during several roundtables that understanding individual difference is key for public health, and the factors that contribute to individual needs across the life course. This person-centred approach was emphasised as an important method to consider how we promote prevention and healthy behaviours.

2.2 What are the most pressing issues facing Public Health?

Many pressing issues were raised for public health in the future.

- Funding was a concern; how do we put into practice new research or social initiatives with uncertainty surrounding funding?

- Are we supporting the pockets of deprivation across Hertfordshire with the appropriate resources?
- Could partnership funding address prevention objectives through joint commitment to long term outcomes?
- How resilient is Public Health considering the importance of colleagues in the voluntary sector – and are they being supported?
- Is investment being maximised, for example in early year's/prevention work?

Population challenges encountered by our delegates included obesity, mental health and frailty/social isolation in our ageing population.

Several roundtables also talked about the importance of behavioural change – it is clearly positive to have agreed messages and understand common objectives

- How can we ensure these messages are heard?
- How do we reach those in more isolated settings?
- How do we make sure messages are taken on board and actioned by our residents and service users?
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- One delegate said:

“We should be supporting individuals to live a life at the highest capacity – not one size fits all. We want to create an environment that supports individuals to make their own (best) decisions.”

It was useful to see accessibility and inequalities at the forefront of many attendees perceptions of challenges. There was clear desire to ensure health initiatives remain inclusive and are well promoted across the county to those in need. Many discussions supported integrated approaches to delivering health messages, utilising individuals from all backgrounds and professions, including retail staff and local radio as central players in local communities.

It seemed many people also considered how we embed academic research in our practice. Concerns were raised about how studies can be incorrectly used by against demographics. Furthermore, if the funding *is* available to transform services/programmes following new research, we must ensure we map and replicate good practice.

2.3 How will you be involved in Public Health/Public Health connect?

As tables fed back their discussions, we heard some great ideas for future Herts PH Connect blog posts and masterclass sessions – which we will consider in the months to come. It was great to also see delegates considering how they can promote apprenticeships and study resources to those who may want to pursue a career in public health, deliver health messages through their own work and consider how to make services more accessible and personable to those who need to access them.

3. Conclusions/Final thoughts

It was fantastic to see such a high level of engagement throughout the session and so many

ideas being discussed during roundtable discussions. For us, this has provided a clear direction for what we can produce and continue to share on Herts PH Connect as we promote and address the public health landscape in Hertfordshire. Whatever the organisation or service, health impacts us all, and it was fantastic to share so much experience throughout the session.

Perhaps you're reading this with some thoughts on the topics and questions that emerged, why not contribute a blog post or contact us to discuss?