

Cross-Party Group on Improving Scotland's Health

Wednesday 21 September, 12:30-13:45, online AGM

Summary

Present

MSPs

Foyso Choudhury MSP (Chair)
Monica Lennon MSP
Brian Whittle MSP

Invited guests

Maree Todd, Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport
Alison Douglas, Alcohol Focus Scotland
Sheila Duffy, ASH Scotland
Lorraine Tulloch, Obesity Action Scotland

Non-MSP Group Members (54)

Amanda Amos, University of Edinburgh
Karen Barton, Abertay University
Annie Brown, Patchwork Recovery Community
Gareth Brown, Asthma + Lung UK Scotland
Christina Buckton, Public Health Scotland
Simon Capewell, University of Liverpool
Jeff Collin, University of Edinburgh
Lee Craig, Public Health Scotland
Nathan Critchlow, Institute for Social Marketing and Health
Alan Dalziel, ASH Scotland
Lucia D'Ambruoso, University of Aberdeen
Beth Davidson, Children's Health Scotland
Carol Emslie, Glasgow Caledonian University
Peter Faassen de Heer, Scottish Government
Niamh Fitzgerald, University of Stirling
Jennifer Forsyth, Obesity Action Scotland
Karl Ferguson, Public Health Scotland
Holly Gabriel, Action on Sugar
Alison Giles, Institute of Alcohol Studies
Shona Hilton, University of Glasgow
Karen Keeley, Royal Environmental Health Institute of Scotland
Murdo Macdonald, Church of Scotland

Andy MacGregor, ScotCen
Karen MacNee, Scottish Government
Laura Mahon, Alcohol Focus Scotland
Ian McCall, Paths for All
Lynne McNiven, NHS Ayrshire & Arran
Susan Philp, Glasgow Council on Alcohol
Gillian Purdon, Food Standards Scotland
Bruce Ritson, Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems (SHAAP)
Kay Samson, NHS Fife
Jonathan Sher, Queen's Nursing Institute Scotland
Rebecca Sibbett, Alcohol Focus Scotland
Elisabeth Smart, NHS Highland
Marissa Smith, University of Glasgow
Kimberley Somerside, Voluntary Health Scotland
Alexandra Taylor, Alcohol Focus Scotland
Annafleur van Mourik Broekman, NHS Lothian
Laura Wilson, Food Standards Scotland

Apologies

Hilda Campbell, COPE
Ruth Campbell, BDS Scotland
Emma Crawshaw, Crew 2000
Linda Duthie, NHS Grampian
Dr Colwyn Jones, University of Glasgow
Gareth Reid, Public Health Scotland

Agenda item 1: Welcome from co-convenor Foyso Choudhury MSP:

Foyso Choudhury MSP (FC) welcomed attendees and outlined the agenda.

Agenda item 2: AGM

The group agreed on renewing the term of the current co-conveners Foyso Choudhury MSP, Emma Harper MSP, and Brian Whittle MSP, and the current secretariat, Alcohol Focus Scotland (AFS) and Action on Smoking and Health Scotland (ASHS).

Agenda item 3: Approval of Wednesday 15/12/21 meeting minutes and any matters arising

Apologies were noted in the meeting minutes, as above. The group unanimously approved the previous meeting minutes with no amendments.

Agenda item 4: Ministerial address from Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport, Maree Todd MSP on NCD prevention plans and progress

FC introduced the **Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport, Maree Todd MSP (PHM)**.

PHM thanked the group for inviting her to the meeting, welcoming the opportunity to discuss how we can continue to improve public health in Scotland and reduce the significant burden and impact that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) have on our society.

The Minister reaffirmed both her and the Scottish Government's commitment on tackling obesity, noting that they have committed to introducing a bill to restrict the promotions of less healthy food within this Parliamentary term. There is cross-party support to make this Parliament the public health parliament.

PHM welcomed the work of the NCD Alliance Scotland in prioritising actions to reduce the comorbidities and mortality associated with NCDs, noting that the recommendations align with the Scottish Government's and the World Health Organization's approaches in reducing the demand for unhealthy products.

PHM said the Scottish Government want to see smoking levels at 5% or less by 2034. Bold action will be required, and **PHM** was particularly grateful for the support of public health stakeholders in the development of the Tobacco Action Plan refresh. People who want to stop smoking must be supported, especially in Scotland's most deprived communities where smoking is more prevalent and the financial impact more significant.

PHM shared her concern at hearing stories of children as young as 11 vaping. Vape products require a delicate balance, as they might be a way to help people who currently smoke stop smoking, but more evidence is needed to confirm this. However, children and young people need to be protected from unnecessary harms, and vaping is certainly not harm-free, although it may be less harmful than smoking tobacco. By targeting children and young people, tobacco companies are targeting their next generation of smokers.

Restricting alcohol advertising is particularly important to **PHM**. There is an undeniable link between exposure to alcohol marketing and children and young people starting to drink or drinking more if they already drink. Marketing works. It is not about switching brands. It encourages people to drink. **PHM** is determined to cut down the volume of alcohol marketing that young people are exposed to, noting that reducing the appeal of alcohol is part of shifting that relationship with alcohol, citing the World Health Organization's "best buys" to reduce alcohol consumption and subsequent harms.

PHM spoke briefly about minimum unit pricing (MUP), which is possibly the most studied policy ever produced in the Scottish Parliament.

The importance of addressing alcohol treatment was also noted, and **PHM** highlighted that the system needs to make sure that when people present at services they are treated with respect, dignity, and no stigma. The aim is for a “no wrong door” policy, which is a challenge as people are often bounced around inside the system, as happens with drugs treatment.

PHM highlighted the importance of continuing to improve patient pathways for cancer and heart disease, from prevention, to diagnosis, and treatment and care. She said we need to be better at raising awareness of the links between cancer and alcohol, and we need to support innovation, such as the work done around the early detection of liver disease. **PHM** commended the work of the British Liver Trust’s Love Your Liver Roadshow during which MSPs were invited to get their liver checked. Identifying liver disease early is key as it is often not discovered until it is too late. Similar work is ongoing with heart disease.

Although 24 people a week lose their lives due to alcohol, **PHM** noted that this number constitutes only the direct deaths relating to alcohol, which is the tip of the iceberg as this does not include cancers and heart disease.

PHM shared that the Scottish Government is helping Health Boards design weight management services to reduce the burden of Type 2 diabetes on people’s lives. Diets need to be complemented with support, helping people reverse the diabetes and achieve remission. The necessary target of halving child obesity by 2030 has also been set. New regulations and nutritional requirements in school should make food and drink even healthier. Pupils are a priority, with primary classes 1 to 5 in publicly funded schools benefitting from universal free school lunches during term time, saving parents about £400 a year. The aim is to expand the free school meal programme.

One of the main causes of a poor diet and excess weight is inequality. **PHM** recognised that the underlying causes of ill health must also be tackled through ending poverty and supporting fair wages. **PHM** urged the group to consider how we rebuild our environments, as we have created an obesogenic environment.

PHM touched on food poverty, explaining that the Scottish Government is investing in a programme of work to make healthy foods more affordable and available. An effective public health policy is to make harmful products more expensive, but the cost of healthy options must also be reduced.

A Q&A followed, with questions asked on topics ranging from physical activity, action by industry to slow and obstruct public legislation, preconception health, disposable vapes, and Westminster public health policy.

Agenda item 5: Update on NCD Alliance Scotland report and asks from Alison Douglas (AFS), Lorraine Tulloch (OAS), and Sheila Duffy (ASHS)

Due to time constraints, this agenda item was pushed back to the next meeting.

Agenda item 6: Any Other Business:

There was no other business.

FC ended the meeting by thanking the Minister for addressing the group and for making the meeting especially informative, as well as the other MSPs who attended. **FC** thanked the group members for making the whole group a success.

CPG members will be notified of the date of the next meeting by email.

END