

A Picture of Health and Well-being in St Helens

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) for Health and Social Care

Summary

Introduction

We are passionate about improving the health and well-being of our communities and we are working in partnership to make sure that we can meet the needs of local people, deliver better, more responsive services and support people to improve their own health. NHS Halton and St.Helens and St.Helens Council have been working closely together to draw up this picture of the Health and Well-being of St.Helens.

Headlines for St.Helens

An Ageing Population

The most recent estimate of the Borough's population is 177,400. Overall, there is predicted to be a slight growth in population (2.2% by 2015), with higher numbers of older people and diminishing numbers of younger people. By 2015 almost 1 in 5 people living locally will be over 65, long term illness that affects people's day to day life increases as people get older, this will put increased demand on our health and social care services.

Life Expectancy

The average life expectancy in St.Helens is 75 years for men and 80 years for women. Life expectancy for both men and women is continuing to rise steadily, but there is still a gap between St Helens and the England average. This improvement is partly explained by the reduction in premature deaths from our major killers – heart disease and cancer - over the last 10 years. Furthermore, there are significant health inequalities across the Borough, in the most deprived communities men live on average 9.5 years less than those in the least deprived areas, for women the difference between the most and least deprived communities is 5.9 years. Narrowing this gap is a key challenge shared by the local partnership.

Health and Wealth

St Helens is the 47th most deprived local authority in England, with approximately 63,000 people living in areas that are within the most deprived 20% of areas in England. In terms of Health and Disability over 100,000 people live in areas that fall within the top 20% most deprived nationally.

The Local Context

Housing conditions

There is a strong relationship between housing and health. The quality of housing within the borough has improved significantly over recent years, the proportion of housing stock deemed 'unfit' is now just 3.0% compared to 7.5% in 2002 and is better than the national rate of 4.2%.

The highest levels of unfitness are found in the private rented sector where 9% of the stock is classified as unfit. Work is ongoing across the partnership to work with Private Sector landlords to improve their properties. Similarly, the highest levels of fuel poverty are associated with households living within the private rented sector and tackling fuel poverty remains a priority, particularly in light of the economic downturn.

Employment

Worklessness remains a key challenge in St Helens, particularly within the most deprived areas of the borough including the Town Centre and Parr. Being out of work can put people at increased risk of ill health and premature mortality. Over 29,800 (almost 28%) working age adults in St Helens are 'economically inactive' with over a quarter of this group wanting a job. There are also 5770 people claiming job seekers allowance in St. Helens, this accounts for 5.3% of the working age population. Approximately 11,660 people of working age are currently claiming Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance, this is a reduction since last year. 4,800 of these claimants are suffering with a mental or behavioural disorder.

Educational attainment

Education is an important indicator of socio-economic status and influences health inequalities in several ways. People with poor attainment, or few qualifications are more likely to become NEET (not in employment, education or training). Young women with poor qualifications are also more likely to become teenage parents. The quality of our schools is crucial in tackling both health and socio-economic inequalities.

Educational attainment has significantly improved across St Helens and the proportion of young people achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSEs have now surpassed national rates. However, further improvements are required to ensure that the number of pupils achieving 5 or more A*-C GCSEs including English and Maths rises to the national average. Significant work has been undertaken to improve the proportion of the adult population who have at least entry-level skills. However, challenges remain, as 20,600 (19%) of working age adults still have no qualifications.

Isolation and social networks

Isolation has a significant effect on general well-being and increases the risk of a range of health issues such as depression. Strong social networks are particularly important for vulnerable people. In St Helens, over 10,000 adults aged over 65 live alone. As the older population grows it is projected that almost 14,000 pensioners will be living alone by 2025.

Social isolation and community cohesion is being addressed by a wide variety of organizations to ensure that there are adequate activities and support networks available in local communities. The Voluntary and Community sector plays an increasingly important role in sustaining social networks and St. Helens has been rated the best area in the country in terms of a thriving third sector.

Specific Populations

Pregnant Women & Newborns

Women's health during pregnancy impacts on the health of their child and can determine future prospects and well-being in families. The prevalence of low birth weight in St Helens has remained fairly constant from 1998-2007, but remains slightly above than the national rate. Locally, 1 in 4 women were still smoking at the birth of their child, and just 4 in 10 are breastfeeding on delivery (half the national average). Therefore programmes around stopping smoking (particularly before and during pregnancy), increasing levels of physical activity, developing healthier eating habits, and significantly increasing numbers breastfeeding remain a priority.

There has been an improvement in teenage pregnancy rates for St Helens, with a reduction of 11.4 % between 1998 and 2007. However, St Helens still has a higher rate than the national average.

Children & Young People

A number of health issues are relevant to children and young people in St Helens and have been identified through the JSNA as well as the Children and Young People's Plan and Commissioning Strategic Plan. We have seen recent improvement in rates of breastfeeding and reduced smoking in pregnancy. The uptake of childhood immunization is good, exceeding national rates and there has been a significant reduction in the number of deaths of children from road traffic accidents. However, challenges remain including high levels of child obesity, poor nutrition and dental health. Risk taking behaviour in teenagers is also a problem, rates of sexual transmitted infections are rising and there are higher levels of alcohol and substance misuse than the national average.

People with learning disabilities

Adults with learning disabilities often have poorer general health and find it more difficult to access effective health services than the wider population. St Helens performs better than both regional and national rates for helping people with learning disabilities to live in the community.

The numbers of people (known to Social Services) in St Helens with a learning disability has remained fairly constant over recent years, but now many more (94.3%) of this client group are now receiving services in their own home. Mild and moderate levels of learning disability affect around 2.4% of the working age population; this equates to over 2,500 people in St Helens, of which approximately only 22% will be known to services.

People with disabilities or a limiting long term illness (LLTI)

Almost 1 in 4 people in the borough are suffering from a limiting long term illness. There is no evidence to suggest dramatic increases in the number of adults aged 16-64 with physical/sensory impairments in recent years. However, later onset conditions such as Parkinson's disease, sensory impairment, and arthritis will rise as the over-45 population grows. Disabilities linked to diabetes and obesity are also set to increase as the prevalence of these conditions rises.

Older people

There are 29,500 people over the age of 65 living in St Helens (16.3% of the population). Projections suggest a significant and substantial increase in the numbers of older people between 2006 and 2015 in St Helens, reflecting national and regional trends. The number of over-65s is projected to rise by over 17%. One of the largest growths (up by 19%) will be seen in potentially the most frail and dependent group of over-85s, bringing key implications for planning future services. Currently, a significant proportion of pensioners in St Helens live without central heating (16%), and nearly 10,000 are without access to their own transport.

Carers

Carers provide a significant proportion of community care, going unpaid and ultimately saving the local healthcare system millions. There are approximately 21,000 carers in St Helens (12% of the population), and one in four provide care for over 50 hours per week. Research by the Equal Opportunities Commission suggests that caring can have a detrimental impact on health and employment, and 15% of carers in St Helens consider themselves 'not in good health'. There is projected to be a steady increase in the numbers of older carers in the near and distant future, including those carers aged over 85. Furthermore, the numbers of older carers with poor health is forecast to rise. This reinforces our priority to identify hidden carers and provide high quality support services.

Lifestyle and Risk Factors

Smoking

Smoking is the single avoidable cause of early death in the UK and is a major contributor of ill health including coronary heart disease and cancer. It accounts for a quarter of UK cancer deaths, including 90% of cases of lung cancer. Second-hand smoke is also a risk to the health of non-smokers.

Estimates suggest that the prevalence of smoking within St. Helens is around 25%, this is similar to the rest of the North West and slightly higher than the national rate. The levels of smoking vary across the borough with significantly higher levels estimated in Parr (42.5%).

Alcohol

Drinking alcohol to excess is a major cause of disease and injury, increasing the risks of heart disease, liver disease and cancer. Heavy drinking produces a severe risk of cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, as well as addiction. Alcohol is also strongly related to crime and disorder, particularly domestic violence, nighttime economy violence, anti-social behaviour and drink driving.

The impact of alcohol misuse will affect health services in a variety of settings, ranging from primary care, A&E, hospitals, mental health and sexual health services.

It is estimated that 22.9% of adults in St. Helens binge drink (defined as drinking more than double the daily recommended alcohol units)

In terms of alcohol-specific hospital admissions, St Helens remains above the national average for males, females and those under 18 demonstrating that alcohol consumption is an issue of serious concern locally, particularly within the most deprived areas.

Eating Habits

A balanced, nutritious diet is vital for both physical and mental well-being, and protects against the onset of many diseases throughout life. It is estimated that locally only 21% of adults eat the recommended 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day which is below the regional and national average of 23.6% and 26.3% respectively. Decaying teeth is another sign of poor nutrition and the rate in St Helens for 5-year-olds is higher than the national average.

Physical activity

Promoting physical activity across the borough is key in reducing obesity and diabetes and not only does being active reduce the risk of health problems for all ages, it also improves well-being and offers an excellent opportunity for social interaction.

92.7% of children are physically active in St. Helens which is better than the national average of 90%. However, only 19% of adults are active, compared with the England average of 21%. Males are more active than females with 25% participating in at least 30 minutes of physical activity at least three times a week, this is above the England and England Males average.

Sexually Transmitted Infections

Sexually transmitted infections have been rising in the UK over the past decade due to personal behaviours relating to sexual risk taking, greater awareness of infections and better diagnosis. Overall since 1996- there has been a general rise in the numbers of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) recorded in St Helens, with the highest rises in uncomplicated gonorrhoea and chlamydia. The PCT has now set up a screening programme to opportunistically test 15 – 24 year olds for Chlamydia and as part of this screening programme young people can be tested for gonorrhoea as well.

Conditions

Mental health and well-being

National research has shown that 1 in 4 adults experience mental health problems at some point in their life and 1 in 6 adults are experiencing mental health problems at any one time. Depression, anxiety and phobias are the most common.

Supporting people with mental health problems into employment remains a priority for the LSP. At just 2%, St Helens has a much lower rate of people with mental health problems in employment when compared against regional (14%) and national (20%) rates. Furthermore, over 4800 residents are in receipt of incapacity benefit who are experiencing mental health or behavioural problems, this is significantly higher than the regional and national average.

Emotional well-being is a concern for all age groups and we are focussed upon promoting it. Improving young people's relationships, self-image, self-esteem and emotional resilience, which all impact on emotional well-being, will give young people the ability to cope better. Supporting adults to remain in or return to employment will pay dividends in terms of mental health and this remains a local priority.

Dementia

Dementia is most common in older people, especially those aged over 65 years and it is one of the main causes of disability in later life.

As the numbers of older people rise, so will the numbers of people with dementia. There will be a steady increase in numbers of sufferers over the next 2 years followed by a dramatic rise over the following 15 years. In St Helens there are an estimated 2,000 people with dementia living in the community now, and this is likely to rise to nearly 3,000 by 2025. Dementia is more prevalent in older women than older men locally. The projected figures point to a demand for more services for older people, especially those aged 85+ who suffer dementia.

Early diagnosis of, and intervention for, dementia are the keys to delaying admission to long-term care and to help people remain independent for longer. Promoting healthy ageing, for example by keeping people active and tackling social isolation, is crucial in delaying the onset of dementia.

Accommodation choices – including residential and nursing care - for older people with dementia must also be kept in mind.

Obesity

Obesity is one of the most significant threats to the long-term health of our population as it leads to a wide range of health problems. Locally, over 13% of children in Reception year at school and almost 22% of children in Year 6 are already obese, and this is predicted to rise. Amongst all adults it is estimated that 1 in 4 are obese, with a higher rates in the most deprived wards of the Borough. Parental obesity significantly increases the risk of children becoming obese. Obesity is therefore a key priority

Cancer

Nationally one in four people will die of cancer and more than one in three will develop cancer at some point in their lives. Cancer is not a single disease, there are many types of cancers and, hence, treatments. Cancer accounts for 30% deaths for men and 25% of deaths for women. However, over half of cancers can be prevented through lifestyle, and the single biggest preventable lifestyle risk relating to cancer is smoking.

Heart disease and stroke

Coronary Heart Disease is a significant cause of death in St.Helens. There are many primary and secondary interventions that can help to reduce the risk of heart disease and prevent serious ill health due to existing heart disease. Locally a higher proportion of people have heart disease than nationally, and men are more likely to have it than women. Heart disease causes significant suffering because of the conditions that go alongside it and its impact on daily living. It is clearly linked to getting older and being poor, but adopting healthy personal behaviours can prevent it worsening. These include not smoking, being physically active and eating a healthy diet.

Stroke is a significant cause of UK morbidity and mortality – the most important cause of adult disability, and a major cause of death. Over the past 15 years the rate of mortality from stroke has been reducing nationally, regionally and locally.

Approximately 17,000 people in St Helens are at risk of hypertension (or high blood pressure) which can lead to stroke and heart disease and it is predicted that by 2015 that number could increase to over 46,000. Healthy behaviours can help to reduce high blood pressure and reduce the risk of stroke.

However, of those with heart disease or stroke, around 1 in 6 still smoke and they are more likely to be physically inactive or obese.

Diabetes

The prevalence of diabetes is increasing and currently stands at nearly 5% of all adults locally. As the older population increases and certain other factors, especially obesity, continue to grow, more and more people will be affected. It is projected that by 2020, approximately 12,000 people in St Helens will be diabetic.

It is a very disabling and potentially fatal condition if not well managed.

Diabetes increases the risk of other conditions such as heart disease and stroke, and magnifies the ill effects of things such as smoking, high cholesterol levels and obesity. Men are twice as likely to have diabetes, and South Asian people 6 times more likely to have diabetes than white people.

The severity of impact of the disease is linked to how soon it is identified and

how well managed it is. Type 2 Diabetes is the most common form, strongly linked to obesity – indeed, a weight increase of just 1kg can increase the risk by 4.5%.

Planning for the Future

Information about the health needs of the borough is a major influence in establishing priorities, directing what we need to work on and where to target funding. We are already using this information to direct our planning and policies.

Local residents can also use the JSNA to think about how they can improve their health and well-being, and find out what services and support is available for them and their families.