

7.9 Chapter summary and key priorities for action

The development of long-term conditions and subsequent mortality follow a clear social gradient. Good evidence exists to support active prevention, early detection and treatment of the major causes of mortality. A re-energised local effort to put these actions in place systematically and robustly is needed to fully realise the potential for reducing the burden of disease in Walsall and the mortality rates from common conditions. Potentially 45% of the 670 cancers diagnosed in Walsall each year could be avoided by modifying simple lifestyle risk factors. In addition, heart disease, COPD admissions to hospital and days lost from work could be reduced dramatically from these same actions. The Marmot Review urges us to:

- *Prioritise prevention and early detection of those conditions most strongly related to health inequalities*
- *Increase availability of long-term and sustainable funding in ill-health prevention across the social gradient*

Priorities for action:

- *A sustained focus by individuals, communities and organisations on the BIG FOUR lifestyle changes which improve health, wellbeing and quality of life: stopping smoking, healthy eating, an active lifestyle and keeping alcohol intake to safe levels are essential to tackle the higher rates of illness and early death experienced by the people of Walsall (See Chapter 6)*
- *Making Every Contact Count (MECC), ensuring health and other staff use every opportunity to support and advise people to take up healthier lifestyles. Walsall offers a massive opportunity to develop this approach across all agencies: a few minutes each year of each member of staff's time can deliver enormous benefits. Organisations are urged to adopt this approach*
- *A renewed focus on the early identification of the risk factors of disease, including the aggressive identification and management of heart disease, e.g. through the National Health Service health checks programme – a primary prevention initiative which identifies those at highest risk of developing heart disease and puts actions in place to reduce those risks*
- *Promoting and developing all opportunities to improve self-care, through patient education programmes and telehealth for people with long-term conditions, giving patients and their families a larger stake and responsibility in the ongoing management of their condition. It also provides potential for better control of these conditions*
- *A clear focus on social support and rehabilitation and re-ablement will deliver benefits in terms of people returning to work following illness (e.g. stroke) as well as improved mental health. Investment in social worker input to clinical pathways often allows for early supported discharge and promotion of independence*
- *A clear and robust service for younger stroke sufferers needs to be commissioned and delivered within Walsall. This will increase the proportion of stroke sufferers returning to work within 6 (and 12) months*

- *All partners need to design and implement appropriate bed-based rehabilitation services within Walsall. This will maximise the regaining of function for stroke patients*