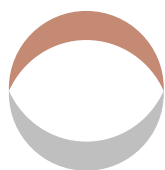


The Institute of Public Health in Ireland Strategic Plan: 2000 – 2003



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FOREWORD

It is a fact that people of this island, North and South, are less healthy and die younger than elsewhere in Western Europe. Though it is a sad reflection on our society, it is also true that those who are less well off have the worst health and die younger.

For these reasons, it is not surprising that the health strategies of our two departments share a great deal of common ground. The establishment of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland is an acknowledgement that health concerns do not recognise boundaries.

We are pleased to launch the Institute and its first Strategic Plan. It provides the foundation for a positive and valuable partnership for people who work in public health, North and South, to share information and experiences and to influence the development of policies to improve the health of the population. Significant gains can be had by different but complementary cultures and structures addressing common problems and issues.

It is the profound hope of all of us that this partnership can be further developed and deepened, to mutual benefit, in the context of the implementation of the North/South provisions of the Good Friday Agreement.

We wish the Institute well in its future endeavours and look forward to the valuable contributions it will make to health debates in the years to come.



Brian Cowen

Brian Cowen, TD
Minister for Health and Children



George Howarth

George Howarth, MP
Minister for Health and Social Services

CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

It gives me great pleasure to present the first strategy of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland. I believe there is a strong desire for practical co-operation across the island of Ireland and am delighted that the Institute has been set up in the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland.

Founded in 1654 to tackle the inadequacy of medical provision, the college is an all Ireland non governmental organisation. As physicians our purpose is not only to treat and care for those who are ill, but also to use our best efforts to prevent illness and promote health and wellbeing in the community. These tasks are shared with a wide range of professional groups both within and outside the health service.

As the Institute develops its unique role working across professions, sectors, organisations, boundaries and jurisdictions, it will aim to develop a broad coalition for public health across the island of Ireland.

Creating a new organisation and building the foundations for its future success is a challenging task. I welcome the appointment of Dr Jane Wilde as Director. She has demonstrated a strong commitment to the ideals of public health. Her vision and determination are attributes which will be invaluable in the work that lies ahead. I wish her and the staff of the Institute every success in their important task. As Chairman of the management committee, they can be assured of my full support.



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'B. Keogh', written over a thin horizontal line.

CHAIRMAN

Dr Brian Keogh MD FRCPI FRCP (Edinburgh) FACP (Hon.)

INTRODUCTION

This is the first Strategic Plan of the Institute of Public Health.

The idea to set up an all Ireland Institute of Public Health originated with an awareness of common public health needs, North and South. The Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland and the Department of Health and Children in the Republic of Ireland agreed to provide core funding to set up an Institute which would offer practical benefits through promoting co-operation in the area of public health.

In preparing this strategy the Institute has taken account of the report on the role of the Institute prepared by a working group set up by the two Chief Medical Officers (1996). This outlined ways in which co-operation could achieve benefits in the areas of information, research, training and policy advice. Valuable suggestions have also been received from many people within and outside the health sector.

The nature of the Institute means that it needs to play a strategic role if it is to be effective. Over the next three years the Institute aims to support and strengthen work for public health; and influence the direction and content of public policies in favour of public health.

To ensure that it makes maximum impact the Institute is committed to working with others, particularly those whose work concentrates on the important themes of addressing health inequalities and influencing policy for public health.

It will seek to build on existing collaboration between North and South in the area of public health.

INTRODUCTION

Managing the Institute

The Institute's work will be set in the context of the plans for improving health developed by the Department of Health and Children in the Republic of Ireland and the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland.

A memorandum of understanding agreed by the two departments and the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland outlines the management arrangements for the Institute. Membership of the management committee is set out on page 18 of this document.

In addition an Advisory Council will be established. It will meet at least annually and will advise and provide feedback on the Institute's work.

Each year the Institute will produce a workplan setting out its work in detail and reflecting its four main functions: surveillance; research; education and training; and providing a resource for the two departments.

Under the provisions of the Multi-party Agreement reached in Belfast on 10 April 1998 (the Good Friday Agreement), North/South co-operation will be placed on a new basis following devolution in Northern Ireland. Strand Two of the Agreement provided for the setting up of a North/South Ministerial Council. It outlined the new frameworks and context within which co-operation between North and South would be taken forward. The promotion of the health of the people in both jurisdictions is one of the areas identified for enhanced co-operation through existing bodies, North and South, and following devolution, the work of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland will be taken forward in that context under the direction of the North /South Ministerial Council.

A I M

“ The Aim of the Institute of Public Health is to improve health in Ireland, by working to combat health inequalities and influence public policies in favour of health. ”

This will be achieved through:

- Working to strengthen the information and skills people need to work for improvements in the health of society
- Developing and promoting an interdisciplinary and intersectoral way of working
- Promoting co-operation for public health between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland
- Developing a greater awareness of public health matters.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In society the main determinants of health are people's social and economic circumstances. Policies to improve public health must therefore be directly linked to social and economic policy.

The reduction of inequalities is essential to improving the health of society. It is also a matter of social justice.

Partnership between government and the statutory and community sector at national and local level is vital for public health.

Respecting the views and concerns of individuals and community groups is essential to the planning and implementation of public health policies and programmes.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The Institute will promote co-operation in research, training, information and policy advice in order to achieve the following Strategic Objectives:

- To work to contribute to policies which tackle inequalities in health
- To strengthen partnerships for improving the health of society
- To maximise the potential for international collaboration to contribute to public health in Ireland
- To produce information on health and inequalities and contribute to the surveillance of population health
- To contribute to the capacity (information, skills and resources) of those who work to improve the health of society.

Tackling health inequalities

Socio-economic inequalities are a serious barrier to improving health in Ireland.

Not only is there a wide gap in the health of rich and poor, but a gradient in health runs across the social spectrum. Increasingly research suggests that people's social and psychosocial circumstances impact on health in the long term.

There is growing interest in the scale and nature of inequalities in health in Ireland, North and South. But the debate has, so far, been hampered by limited information.

Research in Ireland has shown that health inequalities are linked to measures of deprivation. Further research is urgently needed to establish the extent of this relationship, to unravel its complexities and to identify action which will tackle inequalities.

The Institute's work will aim to develop and strengthen understanding about health inequalities, North and South. The aim will be to influence policy through disseminating information, promoting research, and strengthening alliances in order to create greater impetus for change.

This will involve collecting and providing information on the social determinants of health and developing collaboration with individuals and organisations working in this area in Ireland, North and South, and elsewhere.

Strengthening partnerships for health

One of the main strategies for Health 21, the Health for All policy framework for the 21st century produced by the World Health Organisation (European Region), is the development of multisectoral work to tackle the physical, economic, social and cultural determinants of health. A second major strategy within Health 21 is a participatory approach to improving health locally, involving relevant partners for health at all levels and including joint decision-making, implementation and accountability.

Canada led the way in multisectoral approaches with publications such as 'A new perspective on the health of Canadians' in 1974 and 'A framework for health promotion' (The Ottawa Charter) in 1986. The strategies for health from both the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland and the Department of Health and Children in Ireland promote this approach and a range of partnerships have been established with a focus on health and wellbeing. In addition, District Partnerships have been set up throughout Northern Ireland and Area Partnerships throughout Ireland with the explicit aim of tackling social exclusion. Comprehensive evaluations of these partnerships have been published and provide valuable learning on partnership governance.

The aims of multisectoral collaboration are more difficult to achieve than many people anticipate and considerable time and energy is required for the establishment of such partnerships. While such approaches are being widely promoted, some of the determinants of health are deteriorating, such as income inequalities. Multisectoral action should provide a more effective, efficient and sustainable way to achieve improved health. There is a need to understand how to ensure that this is the case and to communicate this learning to those who are involved in establishing such partnerships.

The Institute will promote more effective, efficient and sustainable approaches to multisectoral collaboration to improve health. The work will include collaborating with people with experience of working in partnerships to bring about improvements in health, to identify training needs and assist with evaluation.

ACHIEVING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

International Networking and European Policy

The Institute will aim to make links with centres of excellence internationally from which it can bring relevant experience and learning to benefit public health in Ireland. This will identify and encourage good practice and enable cooperation.

Recent developments in public health policy in the European Union make it vital that people with responsibilities for public health in Ireland have a good understanding of how European institutions operate and how European public health policy is influenced. This is particularly important in view of the opportunities for strengthening public health which exist under the Amsterdam Treaty.

The Institute will explore, with the help of other interested organisations, ways in which funding, including the structural funds, can be used to maximum effect in improving health at community and national level, particularly in terms of cross-border and all island projects.

Contributing to public health information and surveillance

Public health information and surveillance are vital instruments in underpinning public health action. It is therefore important that the Institute develops work with others who are engaged in this area. An emerging theme is the need to promote the effective use of information which is already available and which can bring benefits to public health.

The Institute will support work to examine current public health databases North and South; identify areas of common concern; develop proposals for work on selected public health issues; and examine the feasibility of all Ireland reports on these issues. For example the feasibility of an all Ireland report on the social gradient in heart disease will be examined.

The Institute will explore the potential for joint work with the Research and Development Office in the North and the Health Research Board in the South to identify public health research needs, and specific cross border or all island research projects.

Work with the Northern Ireland and Irish Cancer Registries will also be undertaken. This will include the development of proposals for research funding to investigate cancer incidence and survival rates related to inequalities.

Strengthening public health capacity

The Institute aims to strengthen the capacity of people working for public health.

An important part of this is public health leadership and training. In line with 'Health 21' there is growing recognition of the need for people from different sectors to take on leadership roles in addressing public health issues. A number of initiatives are being developed internationally including programmes in Sweden, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. The Institute will explore whether there is potential for applying aspects of these ideas in Ireland.

Several professional groups are exploring ways in which to develop and strengthen their contribution to improving the health of society. As the Institute develops its work discussion will take place with organisations involved in public health leadership and training to identify areas for future collaboration.

The Institute will seek to develop informed debate about the links between the environment and public health, including inequalities in health.

The physical environment is recognised as one of the key determinants of health. The health effects of a poor physical environment such as those caused by air pollution, traffic, poor housing and noise, tend to impact most on the most vulnerable in our society, particularly the least well off, children and the elderly. Sustainable development requires that account be taken of the needs of local communities, who should have a clear role in the development and implementation of solutions to local environmental problems. Many environmental issues transcend national boundaries.

ACHIEVING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The Institute will work with organisations and individuals with expertise to highlight the links between environmental problems and inequalities in both income and health with a view to contributing to environmental health strategies.

The development of National Environmental Health Action Plans was strongly supported at the European Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in London, June 1999. The Department of Health and Children has published a consultation document on its National Environmental Health Action Plan (NEHAP); and the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland is considering what work is required locally to complement the UK NEHAP. The Institute will aim to identify areas of common concern, North and South.