

Behaviour Change

June 2017



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Version: 1

Last Updated: June 2017

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Changing people's health-related behaviour can have a major impact on some of the largest causes of mortality and morbidity, including cardiovascular diseases and cancer. The Wanless report (2004) outlined a position in the future in which levels of public engagement with health are high and the use of preventive and primary care services are optimised, helping people to stay healthy. This fully engaged scenario requires changes in behaviours, with their social, economic and environmental context to be at the heart of all disease prevention strategies (NICE 2007).

What Do We Know?

As of 2008, people with no qualifications were five times as likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours as those who have undertaken higher education (Buck 2012). Public health interventions to support prevention of health conditions related to alcohol and substance misuse, obesity, physical inactivity and smoking are generally cost-effective (NICE 2013).

Make Every Contact Count (MECC)'s focus is on behaviour change, and building on the NICE guidance, Behaviour Change: General Approaches, and NHS Yorkshire and the Humber's Prevention and Lifestyle Behaviour Change Competence Framework. The Kent, Surrey and Sussex branch of MECC aims to support the provision of brief advice and/or signposting to reduce smoking, unhealthy diet, excess alcohol consumption and inactive lifestyles. There are four parallel strands weaving through their MECC implementation plan: supporting organisational and staff preparation or readiness; developing regional training; delivery, and evaluation. The housing services team and housing providers in Maidstone is a spearhead site for good practice, test training and delivery (KSS MECC 2016).

The Government Communication Service (2014) guide to communications and behavioural change provides a common framework for all government communicators wishing to apply behavioural approaches to their work.

The Realising the Value Programme has published a guide (Nesta 2016a) that outlines how the science of behaviour can help people to self-manage their health and wellbeing. It is written for people who support those living with long-term conditions, or those who help people avoid these conditions using person and community-centred approaches. NHS England set up the Realising the Value Programme to strengthen the case for change; identify evidence-based approaches that engage people in their own health and care; and to develop practical tools to support implementation across the NHS and local communities. These approaches include self-management education courses for people with specific conditions, peer-to-peer support and community based activities. The Realising the Value Programme was led by Nesta (an innovation foundation) and the Health Foundation, in

partnership with Voluntary Voices and The Behavioural Insights Team. They worked together with NHS England, the Coalition for Collaborative Care and other stakeholders.

The Kent Expert Patients Programme (Kent Community Health NHS Foundation Trust 2016) aims to help people take more control of their health by learning to manage their condition. The course covers managing pain and tiredness, coping with emotions, relaxation techniques and exercise, healthy eating, communicating with family, friends and healthcare professionals, and planning for the future.

Evidence of What Works

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has provided advice on planning and running behavioural change programmes (NICE 2007).

More recently, NICE (2014) has provided guidance on individual approaches to behavioural change. It has also summarised guidance for local authorities and partner organisations on the general principles that should be used when considering the commissioning, planning, content and evaluation of initiatives to support behaviour change at individual, community and population levels.

NICE guidance (2015) relates to delaying or preventing dementia and encourages inter-relating programmes. For example, physical activity programmes can also be opportunities to socialise or be mentally active.

The Local Government Association (2013) published a briefing for councillors and officers explaining how behavioural change interventions can help local authorities fulfil their public health responsibilities. The briefing refers to a spectrum of interventions drawn up by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics in its 'ladder of intervention', and a House of Lords Science and Technology Select Committee (2011) which reported on government approaches to behaviour change, looking at the concept of 'nudging' as an intervention, influenced by the book, *Nudge* (Thaler R and Sunstein C 2008). This approach suggested a range of non-regulatory interventions attempting to influence behaviour by altering the context or environment in which people choose, in ways which people often do not notice.

The Centre for Understanding Behavioural Change (CUBeC) (2013) delivers evidence and insight into the drivers of behaviour change to inform and improve policy making. Concepts other than nudges are being developed, to show a wide range of approaches, including techniques like direct incentives, such as vouchers in return for healthy behaviour. These are being labelled 'hugs', while the tougher measures that restrict choice, like restricting takeaways from schools, are 'shoves'. Bans, such as the restriction on smoking in public places, are simply known as 'smacks'.

Focusing on the behaviours that cause illness is part of a broader change in the government's approach, set out in the public health white paper, *Healthy Lives, Healthy People* (Department of Health 2010). Consequently, a public health social marketing strategy was developed for changing health related lifestyle behaviours and improving

health outcomes (Department of Health 2011). It argues that people value their health and most want to lead healthy lives.

What does this tell us?

While there has been a decline in unhealthy behaviours in higher income, well-educated populations, there has been an increase in multiple unhealthy behaviours in people who have not participated in higher education (Buck 2012). These populations should be targeted for effective interventions. There is a need for research into effective interventions for poor people with lower levels of education.

The research community should aim for robust, well-designed studies, with longer-term follow-up, to determine the effect of interventions on maintenance of healthy behaviours and on prevention or delay of cognitive decline and dementia (NICE 2015). More studies on cost-effectiveness and disadvantaged and minority groups are needed.

What should we do next?

- implement person- and community-centered ways of working across systems, using the best available tools and evidence
- continue to pilot new ways of working, alongside supporting research activities
- improve use of existing levers such as legislation, regulation and accountability
- trial new outcomes-based payment mechanisms to support person and community-centered activities, and implement these as part of wider national payment reform (Nesta 2016b)
- consideration should be given to the best ways to engage older adults in changing health behaviour, as behaviours can be more entrenched (NICE 2015)
- social marketing techniques should be considered to help change risky behaviours.

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