



Public Health  
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health



Duncan Selbie  
Chief Executive

## Friday message

Friday 12 June 2015

**Dear everyone**

Since the Government announced last week the £200m in year reduction to the public health grant I have been in contact with Local Authority Chief Executives, Cabinet Members and Directors of Public Health across England. It is very unwelcome news. It is, therefore, incredibly heartening that there is no let-up in the commitment across public health and local government to the prevention agenda. This remains central to the national ambition to reduce NHS expenditure by £22bn over the next five years. A significant contribution to this will come from shifting our focus from sickness to health. To do this, the reduction in funding needs to be accompanied by more devolution and by greater local control and freedom to innovate. The details of the £200m savings and how they will be allocated across local authorities will be subject to consultation by the Department of Health. The need to move quickly is fully understood and the consultation will be published shortly.

There has been an ongoing, lively debate among academe about the value of the NHS Health Check so it was encouraging this week to see that the number of people taking advantage of these [checks](#) has gone up by 7.4 per cent to 1.4 million over the past year, with an extra 100,000 people receiving a risk assessment. NHS Health Checks not only give people the opportunity to take control of their own health, most importantly they enable them to take early action to avoid or reduce the impact of an imminent health threat such as high blood pressure and diabetes. Just over 50 per cent of those offered health checks take them up, although in recent months this has been edging closer to 60 per cent. There is still much to do to increase take up and to ensure effective follow up, but every local authority is fully engaged with the programme and we look forward to seeing even more people come forward this year.

This week the National Cancer Intelligence Network held its annual meeting in Belfast. The conference was a huge success, bringing together over 500 clinicians, patients and researchers united by a common interest in using data to improve outcomes for cancer. We heard from Sir Richard Peto that smoking was still the most important preventable risk for cancer and from Michel Coleman that cancer survival still varies greatly around the world. One of the most innovative sessions was on primary care and how GPs could use cancer data to improve referral decisions and ensure cancer is diagnosed as early as possible. The patient voice was manifest throughout the meeting. PHE staff presented many talks and posters and we are delighted to support NCIN along with the other partners.

In addition to running the three Ebola laboratories in Sierra Leone, we were asked by the Sierra Leonean Health Minister to look at what we could do to support his Government in reconstructing their fragile public health system in the long term. We seconded one of our most senior public health experts, Professor Paul Johnstone, Regional Director for the North of England, to the WHO office in Sierra Leone to help with this. He also provided practical assistance, leading a group planning a revamped emergency operation centre in readiness for when Sierra Leone is declared Ebola-free. Our Global Health team is now developing a proposal for a five year programme. Anyone who wants to get involved in supporting academic links, in particular with the public health team at the University of Makeni who want to establish a School for Public Health, should contact Paul at [paul.johnstone@phe.gov.uk](mailto:paul.johnstone@phe.gov.uk).

And finally, Her Majesty The Queen has established a new medal, the [Ebola Medal for Service in West Africa](#), to recognise those who have supported the UK's efforts in tackling Ebola in West Africa. Around 150 of our people meet the criteria and I offer my heartfelt thanks to all who travelled to West Africa and to those who provided all the support back home.

**With best wishes**