Written evidence submitted by the Terrence Higgins Trust [FSR 028]

Terrence Higgins Trust is the UK’s largest HIV and sexual health charity, with service centres across England, Scotland and Wales. We are a campaigning organisation which advocates on behalf of people living with or affected by HIV or poor sexual health.

Recommendations

1. Public health, including sexual health services need to be fully funded to meet local need, to tackle the soaring rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and to ensure we end new HIV infections.
2. Based on the Health Foundations analysis, the Government’s Spending Review should include an uplift in future public health funding to fully fund local prevention services.
3. Public health must be at the heart of the upcoming Department of Health prevention green paper with commitments on future funding for these vital services.

Key messages

4. Public health includes sexual health services and are the responsibility of local authorities since the Health and Social Care Act 2012.
5. Local authority public health grant funding is being cut by £700 million in real terms between 2014/15 and 2019/20 and delivering the public health function is now unsustainable with current funding. This equates to a reduction of almost a quarter in public health spending per person.
7. There is no future funding settlement for the local authority public health grant past 2019/20 and no solution from the government to the very urgent demand being seen in sexual health services now.
8. The Health Foundation has called for an extra £3.2bn of funding a year to reverse the effects of cuts to public health as well as allow additional investment to areas that are seeing the highest levels of demand and need.
9. Incredible progress has been made on tackling new HIV infections in the UK. However this progress risks being undone. Sexual health services are essential if we are to end new HIV transmissions in the UK but clinics are reporting that they are having to turn people away because of cuts to services.
10. Gonorrhoea and syphilis rates in England continue to soar – with a 20% rise in cases in just one year and drug-resistant gonorrhoea remaining a significant challenge across the country.
11. Demand for sexual health services are rising - Public Health England data has indicated a 13% increase in attendance of sexual health services between 2013 and 2017.

12. Over the same time, the Health Foundation has indicated that sexual health budgets have been cut by 25%.

13. The result is that sexual health services are at crisis point and no longer able to meet current levels of demand.

**What are public health services?**

14. Public health is about preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting good health in everyone in our communities. Public health is therefore the first step towards promoting a healthier population and thus reducing downstream costs to the NHS.

15. Public health includes sexual health services, ranging from providing information and advice on how to maintain good sexual health, to providing contraception and methods to prevent sexually transmitted infections; to testing for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections and the treatment of infections when they do occur through sexual contact.

**Who is responsible for funding public health services?**

16. The Health and Social Care Act 2012 transferred responsibility for local public health services from the NHS to local authorities. The Local Authorities (Public Health Functions and Entry to premises by Local Healthwatch Representatives) Regulations 2013 sets out in more detail the public health functions of local authorities. These changes came into being from April 2013.

17. Sexual health services are one of a number of services that are specifically mentioned in the local authority regulations. The regulations state that “each local authority shall provide, or shall make arrangements to secure the provision of, open access sexual health services in its area.”

**Local authority public health funding cuts**

18. Local authorities receive an annual ring-fenced public health grant from the Department of Health and Social Care. The core condition of this grant is that it should be used only for the purposes of the public health functions of local authorities.

19. **Local authority public health grant funding is being cut by £700 million in real terms between 2014/15 and 2019/20.** This equates to a reduction of almost a
quarter in spending per person. The cuts to funding has led to sexual health service budgets being cut by 25% between 2014/15 and 2019/20. In December 2018 it was announced by DHSC that the total funding for local authority public health grant for 2019/20 is £3.134 billion. This is a cut of £85 million from the total public health grant in 2018/19.

20. The Health Foundation believes that an extra £3.2bn of funding per year is needed if the impact of cuts to public health funding is to be reversed, and investment is available to those areas who face highest levels of demand and need. Even this additional funding will not go far enough with the Health Foundation stating that “this increase will bring a more equitable distribution of funding for public health but is far short of the update called for in the NHS Five Year Forward View”.

21. These cuts are directly having an impact on frontline public health services, including sexual health, with organisations including the Local Government Association (LGA), Terrence Higgins Trust, The British Association of Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH), the British HIV Association (BHIVA), the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) and National AIDS Trust stating that “sexual health services are at crisis point”.

22. Data collected by South East London sexual health clinics, indicated that in a one-month period (November 2017), 1,094 people were turned away from sexual health clinics in that area as clinics did not have enough capacity to see everyone who needed their services. Over half (54%) of those turned away reported that they had symptoms of a sexually transmitted infection. New data from BASHH indicates that a worryingly high proportion of sexual health doctors are having to turn away patients because they don’t have capacity to see them.

23. Public Health England data has indicated that demand for sexual health services is rising – a 13% increase in attendance between 2013 and 2017 – but with no rise in resources to deal with this demand. Rates of many sexually transmitted infections, including gonorrhoea and syphilis, are skyrocketing with both seeing at least a 20% rise in number of infections between 2016 and 2017.

NHS 10 year plan and long-term funding settlement

25. On 18th June 2018, the Prime Minister and Jeremy Hunt announced new five year funding for the NHS and an ambition for a new 10 Year Plan. The NHS will receive increased funding of £20.5 billion per year by the end of five years. Yet the funding DOES NOT include local authority public health funding. A future public health

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1 [https://www.health.org.uk/taking-our-health-for-granted](https://www.health.org.uk/taking-our-health-for-granted)
2 [https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-12-20/HCWS1221/](https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-12-20/HCWS1221/)
3 [https://www.health.org.uk/taking-our-health-for-granted](https://www.health.org.uk/taking-our-health-for-granted)
5 ‘British Association for Sexual Health HIV. Member Survey. September 2018. Data available on file.'
settlement will have to wait for the next spending review when it will be up against other government departments – who are also calling for an increase in resources.

26. On public health, the Prime Minister said in her speech: “We also know we need to... support prevention and public health, both for the benefits they bring in themselves and to relieve pressure on NHS care.”

27. The NHS 10 year plan was released on 7th Jan 2019. It has a much welcome focus on prevention BUT ignores the public health role of local authorities and is not achievable with the continued cuts to public health budgets.

28. The Secretary of State for Health Matt Hancock has announced that prevention is one of his key priorities. He released his vision “Prevention is better than cure” in November 2018 and announced the launch of a Government Green Paper on Prevention “by summer 2019”. The vision fell short on the role of public health. The green paper must now provide solutions to the chronic funding shortage that local authority public health services are experiencing.

29. The rhetoric from Government is that public health must be considered alongside NHS England functions. But in reality the Government is not putting this into practice. Public health services including sexual health services are in crisis and there is no commitment to increase (or even sustain) public health funding, and no plan to address those services that are in crisis.

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