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Investing in a Healthier Wales: prioritising prevention

July 2025



Investing in a Healthier Wales: prioritising prevention

Report updates evidence since 2016 from Public Health Wales outlining how investment in prevention lays the foundation for good health throughout life.



Benjamin Franklin : “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure”.

Put this statement to the test:

Communicable diseases – flu, covid, measles

Non-communicable diseases – cancers, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases

Wider determinants – employment, education, environment



Prioritising prevention

A strong sustained commitment to prevention can reduce the burden and costs of ill health to the health and care system, with public health interventions offering a return of £14 for every £1 invested (Masters et al, 2017)



Defining prevention

Primary prevention

Promote good health and prevent ill health occurring in the first place

Secondary prevention

Focus on early detection and management to prevent health conditions from getting worse

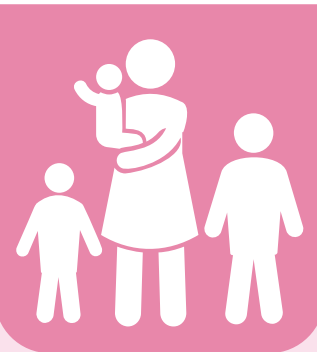
Tertiary prevention

Careful management of health conditions to reduce long term harm



Inequalities in Wales

Good health is a fundamental right, but in Wales, health outcomes vary unfairly across communities.



Early years and children

The child death rate in Wales is 70% higher for children living in our most deprived communities compared with their most affluent neighbours



Healthy Adults

People living in the most deprived areas have a much higher chance of death from avoidable causes (3.7 times for males and 3.8 times for females)



Healthy Ageing

There is a 17-year gap in healthy life expectancy for women living in the most and least deprived areas of Wales. This gap is 13 years for men

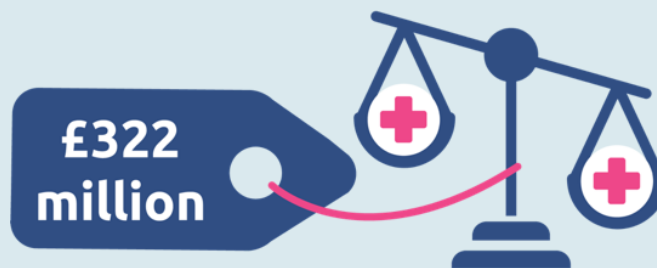
Why invest in prevention?

Offers value for money, addresses the root causes of health inequalities and help the people of Wales, to live longer, healthier and happier lives now and in the future.

There is a 17-year gap in healthy life expectancy for women living in the most and least areas of Wales. This gap is 13 years for men



The cost of health inequalities to acute NHS services in Wales is £322 million per year



Poverty is a leading cause of health inequalities



The long-term benefits of prioritising prevention:

- **Quality of life** – keeping people healthier for longer
- **Better Health outcomes** – fewer people requiring complex and costly treatments
- **Reduced health care costs** – reduce the need for expensive treatments
- **Improved productivity** – healthy populations tend to be more productive
- **Long-term sustainability** – the earlier we prevent, less pressure there is on healthcare systems

How to make a sustainable impact?

Focus on both long-term programmes and targeted interventions that aim to improve health outcomes, reduce inequalities and lessen the financial impact of poor health on the NHS and wider society in Wales.

**Investing in prevention
cannot be done in isolation**



**Focus on high impact
programmes with
significant, scalable**



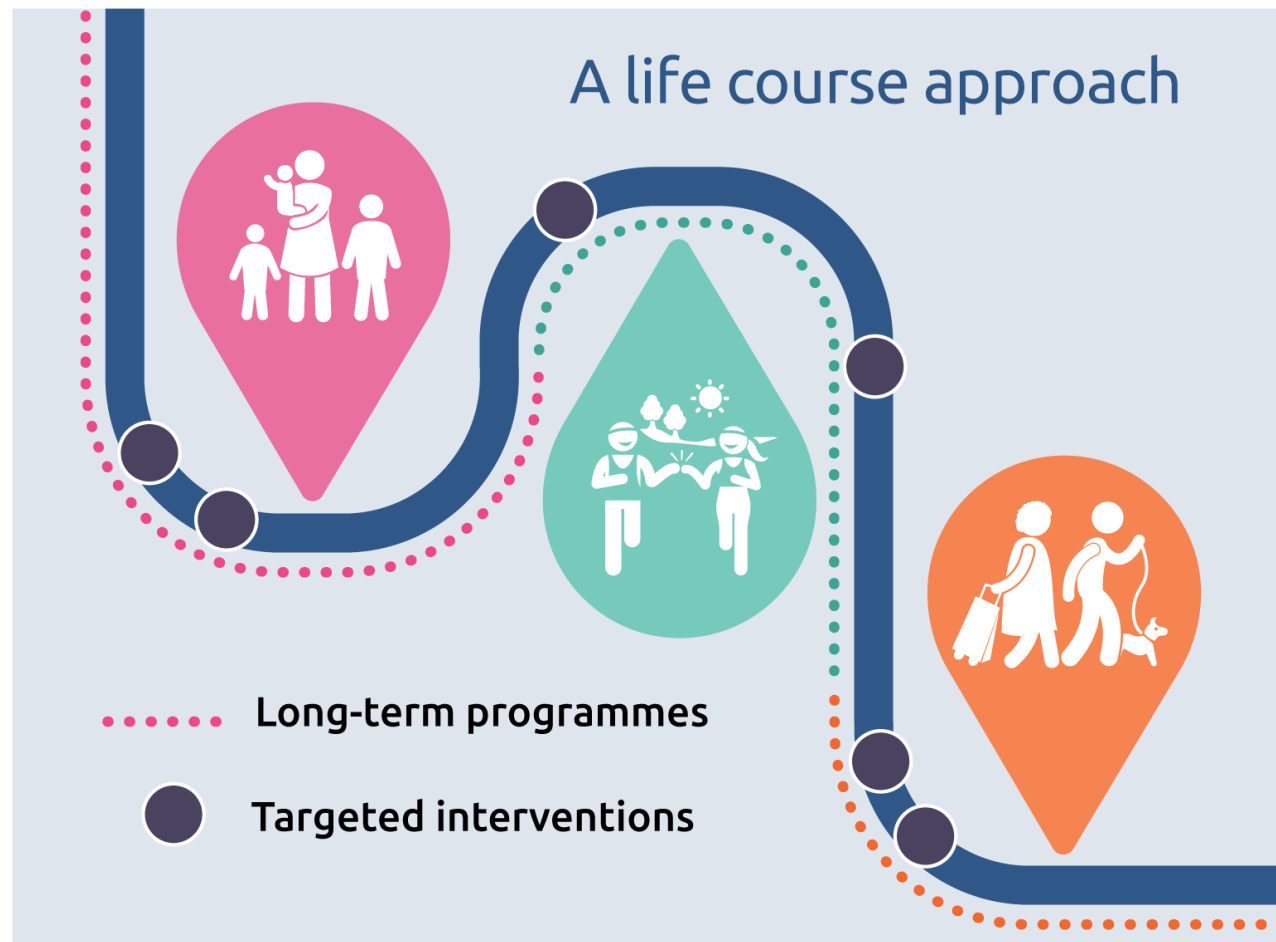
**Long-term commitment to
fully realise the impact**

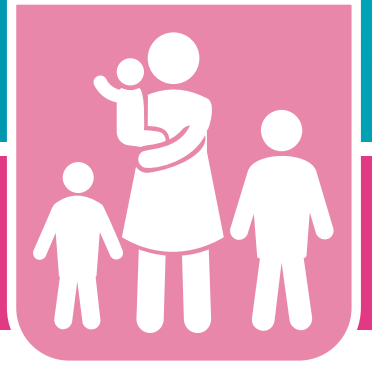


A route map for impactful change

This report outlines how investing in prevention sets the foundation for good health throughout people's lives, showcasing areas that could have the greatest impact.

The report adopts a life course approach, emphasising interventions that reduces the cumulative impact of health risks throughout life and across generations.





Early Years and Children

Programmes to support parents and the early years are effective and set the foundation for good health and well-being in the longer term, bringing substantial return on investment. Addressing inequalities enable all children and young people to maximise their capabilities and achieve their potential into healthy adulthood.

Example of evidence identified with a positive impact and positive return on investment include:

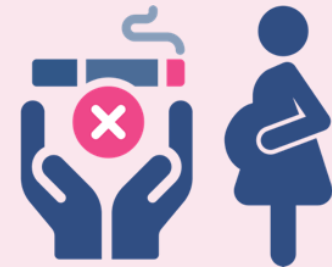
**Integrated services for
maternal and parental
mental health**

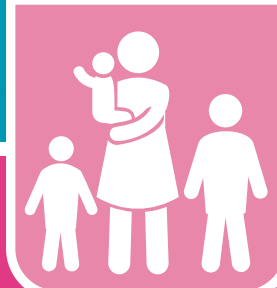


**Early years education
programmes especially for
low-income families**



**Programmes supporting
women to quit smoking
during pregnancy**





Further examples

Parenting programmes
offered a return of
**£15.80 for every
£1 invested**



Programmes promoting breastfeeding can save the NHS around **£50 million annually** by improving mental health and reducing hospital admissions

Breastfeeding support to improve the uptake of breastfeeding



Oral health programmes



After 5 years, targeted supervised tooth brushing yielded **£3.06 for every £1 invested**

Vaccination and screening programmes



Universal early years education, especially for low-income families can yield **£1.31 for every £1 spent**

School and community programmes to support healthy childhood development



Reducing exposure to food advertising





Healthy Adults

The findings emphasise the need to support healthy behaviours, mental well-being and addressing the wider determinants of health. The programmes reflect a cross-sector approach providing effective services and supportive, enabling environments.

Example of evidence identified with a positive impact and positive return on investment include:

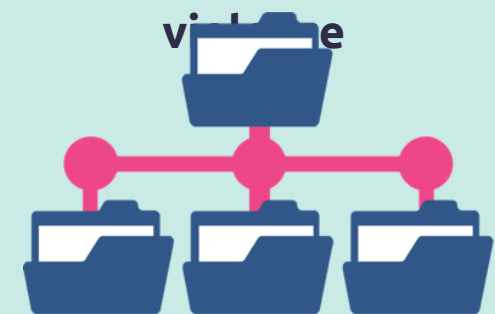
Integrated services for Multi-component approaches to reducing self-harm and suicide



Physical activity programmes to mitigate against obesity and associated diseases such as diabetes.



Data sharing between organisations reducing the costs associated with





Further examples

Increasing access and uptake of smoking cessation services



Preventative programmes can return up to **£9** for every **£1** invested

Workplace programmes to improve mental health



Reducing the accessibility of alcohol



Social prescribing programmes generate a positive ROI, potentially saving the NHS **£4.6m** in healthcare use over five years

Primary care programmes including social prescribing



Access to green and blue spaces



Can contribute to improved mental health and offer SROIs of between **£0.79 to £28** for every **£1** invested



Healthy Ageing

A holistic approach is required to ensure healthy ageing with a recognition of the value of older people and their contribution to society. Social return on investment (SROI) provides evidence for the wider social value of healthy ageing.

Example of evidence identified with a positive impact and positive return on investment include:

Programmes and interventions to promote independent living of older people



Programmes to address loneliness and isolation



Prediabetes management programmes





Further examples

Falls prevention programmes



Falls prevention programmes can return financial results back within a three year time frame, which is much shorter than many interventions

Improving housing through heating and insulation upgrades



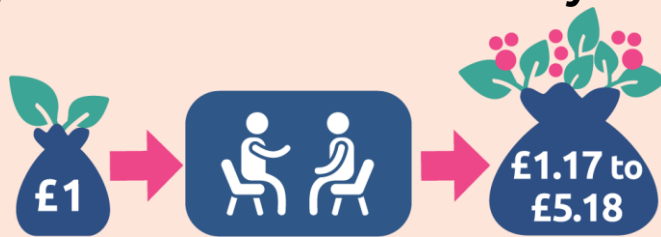
Housing insulation programmes can provide an ROI of **£1.87 for every £1 invested**

Providing support to carers



Peer support

for people with dementia and carers has been shown to give a positive ROI with groups creating social value, ranging from **£1.17 to £5.18 for every £1 invested**



The Arts and culture

Craft cafes and 'men in sheds' programmes have been shown to generate substantial SROIs of **£8 to £10 for every £1 invested**



Conclusion

The scale of the challenge we face necessitates prioritising prevention, working across sectors and boundaries, involving our population and integrated solutions to complex problems, ensuring that our actions embody the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 to achieve sustainable change.

