

## ***Developing HENS: The Economics of Prevention***

The programme for the first year of HENS included work on the economics of prevention. The aims were twofold:

- to begin addressing the need for more evidence on the economics of prevention and
- to test how HENS might work as a way of accessing, disseminating, discussing and encouraging use of evidence on the economics of prevention.

The economics of prevention was chosen as an area in which to test and develop HENS because it is an area where there is growing demand for health economics input. There is interest, for example on the part of Scottish Government, NHS boards and COSLA, in understanding which preventative public health policies and programmes represent the best use of resources. There is also interest in understanding whether and how prevention can free up resources by reducing demands on health and other public services. However, the economic analysis of preventative public health policies and programmes presents particular challenges. As a result, to date, the application of those methods to public health interventions has been limited and the economics evidence base remains underdeveloped.

Through HENS we therefore wanted to do four things in relation to the economics of prevention:

- identify robust evidence on the economics of preventive public health interventions
- share information on approaches to carrying out economic analysis of preventive public health interventions that address the challenges identified in the literature
- share experiences of ways of disseminating results of such analyses that have been effective in influencing policy and practice
- reach beyond the health sector and encourage use of health economics among non-health sector partners whose actions influence population health and health inequalities.

Progress in each of these areas of work is summarised below and challenges identified for the further development of HENS' work.

### **1. Identify robust evidence on the economics of preventive public health interventions**

NHSHS published a discussion paper on the economics of prevention in December 2014.<sup>i</sup> The paper discussed the aims of prevention, identified review level evidence on the economics of prevention and summarised expert opinion on the most effective forms of prevention for reducing health inequalities.

The paper has been put on the HENS website.<sup>ii</sup> It has been circulated to all MSPs, Jim Murphy ex-MP (in his previous role as Leader of the Scottish Labour Party), ministers' special advisers, the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), political party research units, key third sector organisations and a number of MPs and MSPs who have requested copies following meetings with NHSHS.

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<sup>i</sup> NHSHS. Best preventative investments in Scotland - what the evidence and experts say. December 2014.

Available at: <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/24575.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> <http://www.scotphn.scot.nhs.uk/networks/health-economics-network-for-scotland/current-activities/economics-of-prevention/>

It has been cited in Holyrood Magazine<sup>iii</sup> and other news media. An 'inequalities briefing' updating and summarising the document will be published by NHS Health Scotland and circulated to MSPs and parliamentary committees in advance of the Scottish Parliament elections next year. The paper was also referenced by What Works Scotland witnesses during a Scottish Parliament Finance Committee session on preventative spending.

NHSHS is also publishing a series of inequalities briefings on a range of topics and have requested that all should include sections on the economics of prevention, where evidence is available.

## **2. Share information on approaches to carrying out economic analysis of preventive public health interventions**

HENS has funded (using funds from the QuEST team at Scottish Government) and commissioned learning opportunities for HENS members from the Health Economics Research Unit at the University of Aberdeen and Health Economics Health Technology Assessment at the University of Glasgow. Further sessions are planned. The sessions were aimed at non-health economists working in a health organisation to learn more about economic principles and evaluation of health services and interventions. Students were required to apply learning of economic analysis to their current work areas – some have applied the learning to preventative interventions, some have used clinical or service development examples.

Both learning opportunities have evaluated well. The challenges are reach, sustainability and the wide range of learning needs that delegates have.

HENS has created a forum on the HENS webpage on the Scottish Public Health Network (ScotPHN) website for sharing knowledge and skills amongst HENS members,<sup>iv</sup> including a section on the Economics of Prevention, but the forum is not being actively used.

## **3. Share experiences of ways of disseminating results of such analyses that have been effective in influencing policy and practice**

HENS has organised three events to bring together producers and users of health economics evidence. The first of these was held in December 2014 and focused specifically on ways of translating evidence on the economics of prevention into practice, using case studies to illustrate the use of health economics techniques in this area, and successes and challenges in influencing policy and practice. Key themes from the event and presentations are available on the HENS webpage.<sup>v</sup> 50 delegates attended, primarily from the NHS, academia and Scottish Government. Around 60% of delegates were economists.

Evaluation feedback was limited by small numbers responding. Delegates were asked about their expectations of the event and whether these were met. The expectations most frequently mentioned were networking and information on recent developments in developing and applying health economics, in particular in relation to HENS' work. Most respondents said they were fully or partly met. Those who didn't feel it met their expectations wanted better illustrations of the relevance of health economics outputs to local level (NHS Board) decision-making, wider representation of public health-relevant bodies amongst the delegates and a clearer idea of how HENS would operate in practice to meet needs for health economics support.

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<sup>iii</sup> [Freeman T. Central Reservation: More centralised services and integration plans, but Scotland's NHS remains off-balance.](#) Holyrood Magazine. 340, 8 June 2015. (Health of the Nation edition), page 28.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.scotphn.net/forums>

<sup>v</sup> <http://www.scotphn.scot.nhs.uk/networks/health-economics-network-for-scotland/previous-activities/lost-in-translation-2nd-3rd-december-2014/>

Suggestions for improvement of future events included more examples of local application of health economics and its impact and more input from a wider range of service based professionals, creating opportunities for group discussions with health economists. Priorities for the next steps for HENS were clarification of HENS' role and supporting knowledge transfer to local health and social care decision makers.

#### **4. Reach beyond the health sector and encourage use of health economics among non-health sector partners**

The second and third events were organised jointly with What Works Scotland (WWS). The workshops were designed to address one of the concerns expressed about the first workshop viz. the narrow range of organisations represented. Delegates were invited from community planning partnerships (CPPs), HENS, Scottish Government, WWS and NHS Health Scotland.

The second seminar focused on:

- economic principles and how they were relevant to the economics of prevention in health and other services engaged in prevention activities
- summarised available evidence on the economics of prevention
- invited a CPP representative to comment on whether and how the economics principles and evidence were relevant to the realities of prevention from a CPP perspective.

Presentations are available on the WWS website.<sup>vi</sup>

49 delegates came predominantly from local government (18) and academia (13) with others drawn from the NHS (7) and Scottish Government (5) with small numbers from the third sector (3).

The third event picked up on a theme highlighted in the first, the need to better understand the realities of prevention from the perspective of practitioners rather than economists. The programme comprised presentations from practitioners in three sectors: police, health and housing. Presenters were asked to:

- describe an example of prevention from their practice in terms of what was put in place with what aims
- describe what impact it had on policy and/or practice
- comment on whether they were able to make savings - if so, how? If not, what were the challenges?

Group discussions amongst delegates developed these themes, with the aim of helping economists understand the contexts in which non-economists work and how these influence the types of evidence and information they need from economists and the wider decision-making process.

50 delegates were split fairly evenly across the NHS (11), local government and CPPs (9), the third sector (8) and academia (11) with good representation from Scottish Government as well (6).

Again, presentations are available on the WWS website.<sup>vii</sup> Evaluation feedback highlighted the high levels of interest in the economics of prevention and an appetite for further dialogue in workshops such as these involving practitioners from different sectors.

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<sup>vi</sup> <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/presentations/>

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Along with the dissemination of the evidence described in Section 1, this illustrates the extending reach of the work on the economics of prevention. Challenges include extending the reach further and better understanding whether and how the evidence and ideas shared through HENS are beginning to influence policy and practice.

## **Conclusion**

Experience to date shows the high levels of interest in the economics of prevention and the partial success of HENS in meeting its objectives. Future challenges relate to building on the foundations laid so far to realise the full potential of the network and to understand better whether and how HENS can have a greater influence on policy and practice.