

## **OXFORD HEALTH ALLIANCE**

### ***Evidence to the LGA Health Commission***

#### **Healthy People in Healthy Places**

*The way we live is making people sick. It is also making our planet sick. It is not sustainable.*

The world is now facing the most serious challenges to human health. The magnitude and complexity of these challenges requires the broadest alliance and partnership of stakeholder groups to confront this growing and urgent problem. Four preventable chronic diseases – cardio-vascular disease, diabetes, chronic lung disease and cancer – account for over 50% of the world's deaths. Their predominant underlying causes are tobacco use, physical inactivity and poor diet. The Oxford Health Alliance (OxHA) is a global charity registered in England and Wales that works to reduce the global epidemic of chronic disease through tackling those three major risk factors

These preventable chronic diseases are at epidemic proportions. They are increasingly affecting younger people and cause physical disability, unemployment, mental ill-health and early death. There are immense costs to society in lost productivity and increased use of health services. They account for 80% of GP visits; it is estimated that diabetes alone accounts for up to 20% of the cost of the NHS. The problem is similar to that of climate change in that it affects the whole world, is the result of our lifestyle and, crucially, can be reversed.

There are significant inequalities between socioeconomic groups in the UK both in terms of the disease prevalence and the behaviours that lead to the diseases. Promoting health and preventing chronic disease, therefore, requires tackling any inequalities that discourage healthy decision-making.

Urgent action is needed. There is a clear way forward. The four major chronic diseases can largely be prevented, but there is no simple or quick solution. To achieve real change, it is necessary to bring together dedicated stakeholders from all parts of society. We need houses, workplaces and cities to be designed for health promotion, we need less junk food and more opportunities for exercise, we need legislation to ensure that healthy lifestyles are affordable for all, we need health services focused on prevention as well as cures, and we need our world free of tobacco. We must fundamentally reshape our social and physical environments so that they are aligned with eradicating this epidemic of chronic disease.

OxHA calls on local government to work with the NHS, businesses, professionals, consumers, non-government organisations and trade unions, civil society and individuals to collaborate in taking urgent action to halt the devastating impact of chronic diseases. We know that change is possible for individuals, families and communities and that the change will promote economic and environmental sustainability. We need:

- **Healthy places – designing towns and cities where it is smoke free, easy to walk, cycle and play, with open spaces and safe local areas that foster social interaction.**
- **Healthy food – making healthy food affordable, and available to all.**
- **Healthy business – engaging business in the agendas promoting healthy people, healthy places, healthy planet and making good health good business.**
- **Healthy public policy – formulating comprehensive, innovative and 'joined-up' legislation and social and economic policies that promote health.** *Oxford Health Alliance, February 2008*