

Agenda Item	4
Report No	HCW/06/24

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Health, Social Care and Wellbeing

**Date:** 16 May 2024

**Report Title:** NHS Highland Director of Public Health Annual Report 2023:  
Medication and Public Health – Do the Right Thing

**Report By:** Dr Tim Allison, Director of Public Health and Health Policy

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 The Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for 2023 is presented.
- 1.2 The report for 2023 is presented to the committee along with this paper. The theme for the report is medication and public health. The report presents information about the health of the population of NHS Highland then gives examples of how medication affects public health. The areas selected for this report are not intended to provide a comprehensive picture of the relationship between medication and public health but rather serve as examples of wider themes. The report contains six chapters with key points; it also sets out recommendations. This report outlines the scope of the whole report but the presentation to the committee will have a focus on the elements relating to health inequalities.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the 2023 Director of Public Health Annual Report.

### 3. Background

- 3.1 Directors of Public Health are required to produce an annual report concerning the state of health of their local population. There is no set format for the report and in recent years the reports have tended to focus on individual themes rather than acting as a repository for population health intelligence.

### 4. Key Messages

- 4.1 Demography and health inequalities
  - Information on NHS Highland's population is essential for planning health and care services across the life course.

- An ageing population is increasing the demand on health and care services as more people are living with one or more long-term health conditions and with increasingly complex needs.
- Population data from Scotland's Census 2022 will provide a detailed picture of the characteristics of our people and communities, including information on: ethnic group, armed forces veterans, sexual orientation and trans status or history; health, disability and unpaid care.
- Improving the health of our population requires a fundamental shift towards prevention and mitigating the underlying issues that can impact on health, such as poverty and deprivation.

#### 4.2 The Environment: How medication can make our environment sicker

- There is growing evidence of the negative effects of medicines on our environment. When medicines are excreted from our body or flushed down toilets or sinks, they can end up in our water environment and soils. They can have negative effects on aquatic organisms and end up in the crops we eat.
- NHS Highland is at the forefront of research and action to reduce the impact of the medicines we use on the environment and is a co-founder of the One Health Breakthrough Partnership [One Health Breakthrough Partnership \(ohbp.org\)](https://www.ohbp.org)
- There is something that everyone can do to help reduce pollution of our environment with medicines.

#### 4.3 Hepatitis C: How medication is transforming treatment and prevention

- Hepatitis C (HCV) is a blood borne virus (BBV) which can lead to cirrhosis of the liver and hepatocellular carcinoma.
- The management of HCV has been revolutionised in recent years by the introduction of new therapies. This development has played a significant role in the increase in treatment initiatives and the potential across Scotland to achieve HCV elimination.
- The availability of effective treatment that can be taken over a short period of time with few side effects should encourage more people to come forward for testing for Hepatitis C and provide a major step towards elimination of the virus.

#### 4.4 Social Prescribing: How an alternative to medication can work

- It is estimated that 20% of people visit their GP with non-medical needs and up to one fifth of GPs' time is spent on issues related to social needs.
- Social prescribing provides an evidence-based potential to complement management of a wide range of health conditions through providing a holistic person-centred model of care to improve health and wellbeing and reduce reliance on medication and health services.
- The social determinants of health play an important role in the development of risk factors for a range of diseases and the health outcomes that people experience throughout life. Supporting people with wider social and environmental issues is important for improving health and wellbeing and reducing demand on health and care services.
- There is promising evidence that social prescribing provides a positive return on investment from between £2.30 and £7.08 for every £1 invested.

#### 4.5 Analgesics and Opioids: How medication can have long lasting effects on public health

- There is little doubt that analgesics and opioid use can bring great benefits to individual but there are serious disadvantages as well.

- There are negative impacts of opioid prescribing, particularly the management of chronic pain. Alternatives are available such as social prescribing programmes, psychologically based interventions and physical therapies.
- Leadership and support for the continued implementation of the Medicines Assisted Treatment Standards, and in particular the use of Opioid Substitution Therapy, is vital in assisting individuals with problematic drug use to turn their lives around.

## 5. Detail

- 5.1 The full report can be found at: [The Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2023 - Medication and Public Health - Do the Right Thing - Dr Tim Allison \(scot.nhs.uk\)](#)

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