



# Women's Health Inequalities

A Review by the Healthier Communities Select Committee



# Executive Summary

After a successful review of Men's Health in the borough ending with a report in June 2007, the Healthier Communities Select Committee decided to review the services for women and investigate where it could improve provision in the borough. This review was also timely as at the time there was concern about the gap in the life expectancy of women in Lewisham compared with women in England and the council and Lewisham Primary Care Trust (PCT) were looking at how to address this.

The common themes of the review showed that, even though there was a lot of good work going on in the borough in respect of women's health, there are areas which could be improved. A lot of the recommendations relate to supporting the current work that is going on in the borough to ensure that the targets are able to be met. For example the review calls for the Healthier Communities Select Committee to monitor Lewisham PCT's work in improving the coverage of screening for breast, cervical and bowel cancer and to expand the Book Prescription Scheme, developed by Lewisham Library services in partnership with Lewisham PCT, to improve the excellent service it is currently delivering to residents.

The review also showed that there were some gaps in services to some residents in the borough. Improvements could be made to provide a better service for residents. For example, the review calls for: a Sickle Cell Register to be set up in the borough as soon as practicable, Lewisham PCT to develop ways to improve follow-up procedures for women who have received Health Checks for early identification of those at risk of cardiovascular disease in North Lewisham; and the Council to actively encourage all secondary schools in the borough to participate in the Westminster Domestic Violence Project.

The review was able to look at women's health over a broad range of policy areas, and come up with practicable and constructive recommendations to the bodies in the borough with health, well being and care responsibilities. This should help to improve the services for women – as well as more general services – and help to achieve the strategic aims, objectives and priorities for Lewisham in order to improve health and well-being.

# Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the Women's Health Inequalities Review Group were agreed as follows:

- a) Set out how existing provision of health services for women help to meet strategic aims, objectives and priorities for Lewisham in order to improve health and well-being.
- b) Identify what services are specifically targeted at improving women's health in the borough concerning health promotion, and including cancer screening, alcohol services, sexual health, cardiovascular and hypertension and consider the distribution and access to services.
- c) Understand the nature of women's health issues, including maternal health, alcohol and domestic violence and in particular investigate any inequalities that exist between different groups of women (for example according to age, sexuality, ethnicity-sickle cell, religion or disability) and what actions could be taken to address this.
  - Access (barriers including language, culture)
  - Health outcomes (prevalence/incidence eg Cardiovascular Disease (CVD), cancer, mental health)
  - Wider determinants – housing, employment, poverty and sexual violence.
- d) Examine the communication and targeted health awareness raising campaigns in the borough.
- e) Identify specific action that the local authority and/or its health partners might take to promote and improve women's health service provision and women's health awareness in general.

The Review Group held a number of meetings that consisted of taking evidence from leading officers from Lewisham Council, Lewisham PCT, Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust, Lewisham Police, Geography and Health Research Group, University of London, The

## Terms of Reference

Royal College of Midwives, and voluntary sector organisations groups such as the Building Healthier Communities, Sickle Cell Society, Lupus UK, Age Concern, Seniors and the Pensioners Forum. There was also input from the local Patient Welfare Forum at University Hospital Lewisham (UHL). The full list of meetings are listed in Appendix B.

The Review Group tried to engage with local community groups and interested bodies to gather as much information as possible for it to draw up its recommendations at the conclusion of its review.

The full analysis and comprehensive recommendations are provided in each section of the report.

# Members of the Review Group

Councillor Romaine Phoenix (Chair)

Councillor Chris Flood

Councillor Alan Hall

Councillor Andrew Milton

Councillor Sylvia Scott

# Conclusions & Recommendations

The main conclusions and recommendations of the Review Group are as follows:

## **Social and Economic Determinants of Health Amongst Women in Lewisham**

1. The Children and Young People Select Committee monitor how the 'Healthy Eating' initiatives and Sex Education in schools are being delivered to help improve young women's health for the future.
2. The Healthier Communities Select Committee monitor progress of the social marketing work taking place in Evelyn Ward by Lewisham PCT in respect of smoking cessation and investigate the use of social marketing for alcohol cessation.

## **Cardiovascular Disease**

3. The Healthier Communities Select Committee monitor the North Lewisham Plan to ensure that it delivers on its key targets, particularly in the areas of premature mortality in respect of cardiovascular disease which is a particular issue for women in the borough.
4. Lewisham PCT develop ways to improve follow-up procedures for women who have received Health Checks for early identification of those at risk of cardiovascular disease in North Lewisham.
5. Lewisham PCT provide more information to women patients on financial assistance in funding prescription costs. This has been seen as a particular concern for patients who have to take a lot of medication to keep their blood pressure low.
6. Lewisham PCT should recruit cardiac instructors to ensure delivery of the Active Heart Programme.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

### Maternity Services

7. The Healthier Communities Select Committee monitor the implementation of UHL's Maternity Services Strategy and Action Plan.
8. UHL and Lewisham PCT to periodically report to the Healthier Communities Select Committee on progress against the Maternity Services Strategy and Action Plan.
9. The Healthier Communities Select Committee take an active role in considering proposals for the reconfiguration of Maternity Services in South-East London

### Mental Health

10. The Council and Lewisham PCT should look to expand the Book Prescription Scheme, developed by Lewisham Library Services in partnership with Lewisham PCT, to improve the excellent service it is currently providing to residents.
11. Lewisham PCT should report to the Healthier Communities Select Committee improvements in access to cognitive behavioural therapy or equivalent psychological therapy treatment while it develops community care, to ensure there is appropriate early intervention for acute episodes where admission is required.
12. Lewisham PCT ensures that access to psychological therapies is a priority.

### Domestic Violence

13. The Council should support the establishment of a Special Domestic Violence Court in Greenwich which will also represent cases originated in Lewisham.
14. The Council actively encourage all schools in the borough to participate in the Westminster Domestic Violence Project.

### Sickle Cell Disease

15. Lewisham PCT explore with health partners the setting up of a Sickle Cell Register in the borough.

## Conclusions & Recommendations

16. The Healthier Communities Select Committee monitor the implementation of the Sickle Cell Society's '2008 Report: Standards for Clinical Care of Adults with Sickle Cell Disease in the UK' by Lewisham PCT.

### Cancer

17. The Council take a pro-active approach in promoting the use of sunscreen in all schools and also to promote the reduction in the use of sun-beds generally and the removal of unmanned sun-beds in council property.
18. The Healthier Communities Select Committee monitor Lewisham PCT's progress in increasing cancer screening coverage for breast, cervical and bowel cancer.
19. The Council should also promote uptake in cancer screening coverage for breast, cervical and bowel cancer through its communications and events, such as in Lewisham Life and at local assemblies.
20. The Healthier Communities Select Committee should monitor the Council and health partners' tobacco control 'smokefree' agenda to ensure that it is effective in stopping men and women of all ages from starting to smoke, as well as an effective 'stop smoking' service.

### Growing Older in Lewisham

21. The Cabinet Member for Older People ask Job Centre Plus to provide expert employment advice to older people in the One-Stop Shop.
22. The Cabinet Member for Older People should review the Lay Visitors Scheme after 12 months, with a view to including the use of unscheduled visits by Lay Workers.
23. Lewisham PCT must ensure that all GP surgeries publicise National Screening Programmes.

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