

Contributing to public health guidance – a guide for the public

Factsheet 1: How NICE develops public health guidance

This factsheet is one of a series that describes how individuals and organisations can help NICE develop public health guidance.

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The series aims to:

- help community members and organisations representing public interests take part in developing NICE public health guidance
- explain why NICE wants them to be involved
- explain what community members and organisations can expect if they do get involved
- explain how NICE supports individuals and organisations throughout the development of guidance.

What is NICE?

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is an independent organisation that helps those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider community deliver high-quality health and social care. We provide the following types of guidance or advice:

- Clinical guidelines – recommendations for the NHS about the treatment and care of people with specific conditions
- Health technology guidance – recommendations for the NHS on new and existing medicines, diagnostic techniques, treatments and procedures
- Public health guidance – recommendations for local authorities, the NHS and others on promoting and maintaining good health and preventing disease
- Social care guidance – recommendations for local authorities and service providers about care for people using social care services

Different types of guidance apply to different parts of the UK. NICE also has other related responsibilities, such as developing quality standards for the NHS, local authorities and other providers of health and social care services in England. In all our work, we aim to ensure that our methods and guidance promote equality. For more information about our work see www.nice.org.uk

What do we mean by ‘community members’?

We use the term ‘community members’ in this series to cover all groups of people who contribute to NICE public health guidance from a public or community perspective. This includes people with direct experience of public health activities (such as people who have used a service to help them quit smoking) and their carers, as well as individuals involved in health-related voluntary and community action (paid or unpaid).

How NICE develops public health guidance

Equality

In all its work, NICE takes account of its equality scheme, which aims to make sure that we do not discriminate against people on the grounds of age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race or ethnicity, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status, and that our methods and guidance promote equality among different groups in the population.

For more information about all our work, including the equality scheme, please look at our website, www.nice.org.uk

What is public health guidance?

Public health guidance provides advice on promoting and maintaining good health and reducing the risk of developing a disease or condition. It aims to reduce differences in health (called health inequalities) between different groups. The guidance is developed following a set method, and using the best available evidence. It is designed to be put into practice (implemented) by those working in the NHS, local authorities and the wider public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

You can look on the NICE website to see the lists of published guidance and the sets of guidance that are being developed:

www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/PHG/Published and

www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/PHG/InDevelopment

For more information on how NICE public health guidance is developed see 'The NICE public health guidance process and methods guides 2012', available from www.nice.org.uk/phmethods

Why does NICE want the public to take part?

NICE thinks that it is very important to involve the public in making decisions about their health and wellbeing, healthcare and social care support.

Community members can help the other people developing public health guidance to understand what helps and hinders people's ability to live healthy lives and what different public health activities mean for them. For instance, community members can add insights into:

- the practical, physical and emotional challenges associated with living with, or supporting someone with, a particular health issue – for example, trying to give up smoking, becoming more physically active, or improving mental health or social and emotional wellbeing
- what people may want from a health promotion service or activity – for example, some people may want continued support from a stop smoking service after quitting smoking
- how acceptable particular public health activities are to people – for example, public views on specific traffic calming measures to reduce speed and help prevent accidents; women's views on advice about maintaining a healthy weight during pregnancy or following childbirth
- what factors affect people's preferences – for example, factors that affect choice of contraceptive services, young people's views on what affects their preferences on where to go for sexual health advice
- what factors affect people's willingness and ability to take part in a specific public health activity – for example, parents and carers' views on what has prevented them having their children fully vaccinated against specific diseases
- whether different groups of people have different views or needs – for instance, with regard to disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or where people live. See the 'Equality' section on page 2 for more information.

Who develops the guidance?

Public Health Advisory Committees

Public Health Advisory Committees (PHACs) are the standing committees responsible for the development of NICE public health guidance. They consider the evidence on a specific topic and develop recommendations on

interventions that aim to improve health for specific groups of people. There are multiple PHACs in operation at any one time.

Each PHAC includes a Chair and around 12 members with both general and specialist expertise in public health. This includes a core of about 3-6 members, plus topic expert members who join a committee for the duration of work on a specific topic. Core members may include a health economist, a public health practitioner (such as a director of public health), and 1 community member. Core members usually serve a 3-year term on one committee.

In addition to the core membership, topic expert members join a PHAC for each new guidance topic. This includes 1 community member with relevant topic expertise. Other topic expert members may include professionals, practitioners and technical experts drawn from the NHS, education, social care, environmental health, local government or the voluntary sector.

Community members of the PHAC either have direct experience of public health interventions or are members of a relevant organisation or support group. All PHAC members are selected for their individual expertise and do not represent their organisations.

Each PHAC is supported by staff with specialist skills such as searching scientific journals for research studies (literature searching), deciding whether the evidence from the research studies is reliable (systematic reviewing and critical appraisal) and looking at whether interventions are value for money (health economics). The committees meet regularly to assess the evidence on the topic of the guidance and to develop recommendations.

How the topics are chosen

Ideas for topics come from a variety of sources. NICE's Centre for Public Health (CPH) liaises with a range of key groups to identify topics, these are then discussed at an internal topic selection meeting to decide whether they fit within NICE's remit and address priority issues that will help to improve the health of the population. Once a topic has been agreed, NICE convenes a

Topic Advisory Workshop with experts in the field, including people working in the community and voluntary sector. Workshop participants discuss NICE's briefing paper on the topic and help to refine the potential areas for new NICE guidance.

The Department of Health makes the final decision on which suggested topics to give to NICE to develop public health guidance.

For more information on how topics are chosen see chapter 2 of 'The NICE public health development process' available from
www.nice.org.uk/phmethods

How the guidance is developed

The scope

When the Department of Health gives a topic to NICE, it produces a brief description of the topic. NICE produces a draft 'scope' based on this description. The scope sets out what the guidance will and will not cover. It addresses the most important parts of the topic, and defines an area for which it is possible to produce useful guidance within the available time and resources.

NICE invites organisations representing public interests and other stakeholders to comment on the draft scope during a 4-week consultation period (see Factsheet 2).

Following the consultation, NICE considers and responds to all comments from stakeholders, and makes any necessary revisions to produce a final version of the scope. This is published on the NICE website with a table of the comments received and NICE's response to them.

Collecting and assessing evidence

NICE develops a set of research questions based on the scope, and arranges for researchers to find the relevant research papers. The researchers then assess the quality and relevance of these research papers (using a technique

known as critical appraisal) and present summaries of their findings to the committee.

Reviewing the evidence

The committee reviews the research evidence on the guidance topic. If the committee does not have enough evidence on the views and experiences of the target population, they may invite stakeholder organisations to submit information on any research they know about (see Factsheet 2) or gather extra information by other means (see Factsheet 3).

Draft guidance

Draft guidance contains draft recommendations for the NHS and local authorities (and other relevant sectors). It also describes the evidence behind the recommendations and explains how the developers have interpreted the research evidence to make those recommendations. The recommendations take into account effectiveness (how well an intervention or activity works) and cost effectiveness (whether it represents value for money).

Public consultation on the draft guidance

The draft guidance is published on the NICE website. The draft guidance includes the draft recommendations, details of how they were developed and information about the evidence on which they were based.

Organisations with an interest in the topic (called stakeholders) are invited to comment on it (see Factsheet 2). This is known as a public consultation, and lasts for 6 weeks.

Fieldwork

In exceptional circumstances, fieldwork is undertaken at the same time as the public consultation. Fieldwork involves researchers talking to people working in the topic area about how easy it will be to put the recommendations into practice, according to their local knowledge and practical experience (see Factsheet 2). Depending on time, resources and the nature of the topic, NICE may also contract researchers to consult with members of the target

population, to check that the draft recommendations are relevant and acceptable to them.

Final guidance

After the consultation and any fieldwork, the committee (supported by NICE staff) discusses the comments received, and makes any changes to the guidance that it thinks are needed.

The final changes are agreed with NICE and the guidance is published, along with a number of other documents designed to help make sure the recommendations are put into practice (see Factsheet 5). NICE also publishes stakeholders' comments and the developers' responses on its website.

From its first meeting to publication of the final guidance, the committee normally takes about 14 months (short topics) or 18 months (standard topics) to produce the guidance, with support from NICE. Additional work may be required either before or after this period.

What happens when guidance is published?

For each topic of public health guidance, NICE publishes the final guidance in the following formats on its website

(www.nice.org.uk/Guidance/PHG/Published):

- The full guidance, which contains the recommendations, details of how they were developed, and a summary of the evidence behind them.
The full version is divided into a summary and separate chapters.
- The recommendations are presented as part of NICE Pathways, which is an online tool that brings together all related NICE guidance and associated products in a set of interactive topic-based diagrams. For more information, see <http://pathways.nice.org.uk/>

Updating the guidance

NICE usually checks for new developments in evidence, policy and practice 3 years after publication, and then at 3-yearly intervals, to decide whether all or

part of the guidance should be updated. NICE may also update part of a piece of guidance sooner, if there is new evidence on a particular area.

Further information

For more information on how NICE public health guidance is developed, see 'The NICE public health guidance process and methods guides 2012', available from www.nice.org.uk/phmethods. Many terms in this factsheet are described in the NICE website glossary – www.nice.org.uk/website/glossary.

Summary of the process for developing public health guidance

