

Introducing Economies for Healthier Lives

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- Sharlene McGee

[Economies for Healthier Lives](#) is our new £2.1m grant programme to strengthen joint action between economic development and health.

Economic development: what's health got to do with it?

There is growing understanding that economic development strategies – at local and national level – are a key factor in building healthy communities. Rather than being peripheral or incidental to people's health, the right approach can ensure that local interventions boost the local economy and health, while also reducing inequalities.

In the UK, the government's full strategy to 'level up' the 'left-behind' regions is much anticipated. How closing health gaps, recognised as central to the agenda, will be incorporated into levelling up plans is so far unclear. To date, physical infrastructure spending has been the overriding focus.

Economic and health inequalities are interlocking and mutually reinforcing and there is a clear rationale for taking joint action. We know that economic insecurity can lead to poor health and that poor health also risks further embedding economic insecurity. [Our analysis](#) highlights that the employment rate for people with a work-limiting condition is 47%, compared with 81% for people without one.

Place matters

Local authorities and regional government are uniquely placed at the apex between public health and economic development. Our 3-year [Economies for Healthier Lives programme](#), led by local authority partners, will explore how joint action in this space can deliver improvements in health

and health inequalities.

Thinking around the role of 'place' in developing inclusive local economies has progressed significantly in the last 10 years. Public Health England (and now the National Institute for Health Protection) agree that action is needed across the social and economic determinants of health to deliver healthy communities, increased productivity and shared prosperity. In their [March 2021 report](#) they identified place-based approaches as essential to building inclusive and sustainable economic development.

How will Economies for Healthier Lives take this thinking forward?

As the government seeks to rebuild the economy post-pandemic and level up UK regions, Economies for Healthier Lives will fund four projects to explore how to effectively incorporate health and wellbeing into local economic strategies. We will demonstrate how inclusive economies can build healthier communities. How might anchor institutions create business opportunities and high-quality, local jobs in the community? Could those on the edges of the labour market – including young people and those with poor health – be brought into the workforce?

[Glasgow City Region](#) will develop a Capital Investment Health Inequalities Impact Assessment Tool. This will ensure their £2bn annual capital investment package (from Glasgow City Region local authorities) maximises the potential to improve health outcomes through large-scale capital spending projects, as well as mitigating harmful effects.

[Havant Borough Council](#) is focused on closing the gap between economic opportunities and health inequalities experienced by young people in Leigh Park, which is the largest council estate in Europe (with a population of 29,000). By designing a wraparound health and wellbeing support model, the project will aim to remove barriers to accessing new local jobs from recent significant infrastructure investment in the area.

[Leeds City Council](#) will drive culture change by tapping into the extensive reach of the Leeds Inclusive Anchors Network – currently including 13 institutions with 58,000 employees and with a combined annual expenditure of more than £2bn. Anchor institutions will be supported to generate social and economic impact in the most disadvantaged areas in Leeds. The private sector will also be invited to engage in the anchors network – for the benefit of their business as well as the local community.

[Liverpool City Region](#) will explore the redesign of employment services, placing public health at their core, joining up wider local services including health, welfare, housing and debt. Aiming to strengthen data infrastructure, the project will test new data mechanisms, expanding metrics to better understand the health of people who are participating in employment programmes in Liverpool (and using this knowledge to improve practice).

The local authority teams will test approaches to systems change to generate insights with wide applicability. The Health Foundation is working with the RSA to support all four projects and we have commissioned Renaisi to provide an independent evaluation of the programme and maintain an iterative approach to our learning.

Opportunities ahead?

At a national level, opportunities to improve health and reduce inequalities appear to be opening up. The health secretary has [vowed to 'level up health'](#), there is new political impetus with the rebranded Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, and Andy Haldane – previously Chief Economist at the Bank of England – has been appointed to lead the new [Levelling Up Taskforce](#).

As the government moves from rhetoric to action on levelling up, we'll be connecting what we learn from these four projects with the wider national conversation, to continually strengthen understanding of the links between economic investment and improving health.

Find out more

Would you like to know more about Economies for Healthier Lives? Email us at economiesforhealthierlives@health.org.uk for updates on the learning community and throughout the programme.

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<https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/blogs/introducing-economies-for-healthier-lives>