

APHR 21/22 One year on update – Hypertension: Tackling the Silent Killer

Last year's annual report focused on the major public health challenge of hypertension, which 1 in 4 adults in England live with. The report set out the current measures relating to prevention, early detection and effective treatment of high blood pressure, and included several recommendations for further action. These included:

- Preventing hypertension by supporting residents to make healthy lifestyle choices, such as quitting smoking, regular physical activity and healthy eating.
- Finding people who are undiagnosed with high blood pressure, as early intervention and treatment are critical to avoid major health conditions such as heart and circulatory disease.
- High quality treatment to be provided by health and care professionals once hypertension has been diagnosed.
- The health and care system to continue to prioritise reducing health inequalities and tackling the wider determinants of health, due to specific population groups being more commonly affected by hypertension.

Last year's report detailed how smoking increases the likelihood of hypertension and I am pleased to say that Medway has seen some excellent progress on adult smoking prevalence. The Integrated Household Survey reports annual data on smoking prevalence across the country with Medway's prevalence reported as 8.9%. This is the lowest on record and is significantly lower than the England average which is 12.7%. Smoking rates have halved over the last 7 years in Medway but there is still more work to do to fully eradicate this major cause of premature death and disability. Rates of smoking are still too high in routine and manual workers and people living with a mental health condition. We must continue to focus on supporting these groups.

The NHS Health Check programme aims to reduce the risk of heart attacks, stroke and dementia in people aged 40-74 years. It is an important tool in the early detection of undiagnosed high blood pressure. The most recent data shows that Medway ranks second out of 19 councils in the South East Region, for eligible adults who have received an NHS Health Check. This programme's success means more than 26,000 people have attended and received, a potentially lifesaving health check over a five year period. In addition to the NHS Health Check Programme, the public health department has been working with local communities, attending events and local high streets to encourage people to 'Know Their Numbers'. Over the last 12 months we have measured the blood pressure of more than 1,000 people. Offered tailored advice to help people improve their lifestyle and referred some people for specific treatment where necessary.

Last year's APHR highlighted the excellent collaborative Hypertension Heroes project. This project aims to reach communities with the poorest health outcomes. It is focussed on improving diagnosis and treatment rates of high blood pressure through the use of specially trained local community champions. This programme received national recognition for its impact. In November 2023 it was a finalist in the Health Service Journal awards within the 'Innovation and Improvement in Reducing Healthcare Inequalities' category.

Following last year's annual report, the Kent and Medway Integrated Care System has identified reducing hypertension as a core priority within the Inequalities Prevention and Population Health Programme. This committee receives regular updates on progress against a number of short and long

term actions that aim to prevent, detect and treat high blood pressure. The actions are spread across the health and care system including primary care improving their treatment to target rates and the community pharmacy pilots rolling out hypertension case finding services. Across Kent and Medway 36 Community Pharmacy leads have been recruited out of the 42 Primary Care Networks.