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# BMA

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## PfG: Draft outcomes framework

### Dear Sir: Madam

The British Medical Association (BMA) is an apolitical independent trade union and professional association representing doctors and medical students from all branches of medicine across the UK. Our mission is we look after doctors so they can look after you. BMA Northern Ireland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the PfG: draft outcomes framework.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the UK has been enormous, but not everyone has borne the brunt equally. The impact of the virus as well as the restrictions designed to reduce its spread have affected and will continue to affect different groups to varying degrees of severity. However, it is not too late for the NI Executive to take comprehensive action to reduce the negative impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in Northern Ireland on those most clinically vulnerable and socially disadvantaged. For example, over 65s had an infection rate three times higher than those 65 and under; and people in the most deprived areas had a 40% higher infection rate than the NI average.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/news/health-inequalities-annual-report-2020>

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British Medical Association  
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Beyond the moral imperative for taking such action, mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on health inequalities will be vital for an inclusive long-term socio-economic recovery.

BMA NI responded to the PfG in July 2016 and welcomed the change in approach, but we were also critical of the sole focus on the work of Mark Friedman, *'Trying Hard is Not Good Enough,'* 2005. This was also backed up at the time by a number of key academics who also outlined their concerns. As such we would reiterate our call for a more robust evidence base to be established and critiqued to ensure that it is fit for purpose and achieves the aims of this outcomes framework, *"An inclusive society in which people of all ages and backgrounds are respected and cared for and in which we all prosper. A society which has no barriers to prevent people from living fulfilling lives."*

We know that the real determinants of health relate to how and where we live, learn, work and play. BMA Northern Ireland believes that there is a moral obligation on government to tackle the drivers of poor health by making health improvement an objective in all policy areas, in recognition that it is fundamental to a prosperous and sustainable society. Although BMA Northern Ireland is primarily concerned with health-related outcomes, it is important to note that issues that may seem non-health related impact greatly on the health of the population of Northern Ireland. One way to achieve this would be to put health impact assessments on a statutory footing. This 'health in all policies' approach, recognises that every policy decision will have an impact on population health.<sup>2</sup>

In light of this we are calling on the governments on the island of Ireland to consider developing joint strategies and initiatives across a number of areas to mitigate against health inequalities on the grounds of economies of scale and proximity.

BMA NI understands that the closure of the HSCB will result in the shift from a commissioning model to a planning model, through the creation of integrated care systems which will include linking in with the community planning framework and this is welcomed. We would reinforce the need not to miss this opportunity to put population health planning at the centre of these proposed changes.<sup>3</sup>

BMA's current president, Sir Harry Burns, has developed a different approach to tackling health inequalities. At a recent meeting with BMA members in which he detailed his methodology, members left feeling that the traditional approach to health inequalities were no longer fit for purpose.

Sir Harry<sup>4</sup>, outlined that *"Health inequalities are caused by not enough wellbeing, not too much illness!"*

He outlined the key elements that are needed for wellness:

- An optimistic outlook

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<sup>2</sup> BMA (2016) *Health in all policies: health, austerity and welfare reform.*

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.bma.org.uk/what-we-do/population-health/health-inequalities/health-at-a-price-reducing-the-impact-of-poverty>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/politics-vs-evidence-a-president-s-passion>

- A sense of control and internal locus of control
- A sense of purpose and meaning in life
- Confidence and an ability to deal with problems
- A supportive network of people
- A nurturing family.

For the creation of health, the social and physical environment must be comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. The absence of these would mean that the individual would experience chronic stress in their lives.

He concluded that if we continue to focus the manifestations of health inequalities such as alcohol, obesity and smoking and not look to the causes, we will fail current and future generations -

*“The circumstances in which children are born and raised determine the choices they make and the outcomes they experience.”<sup>5</sup>*

We do hope you find these comments and observations useful and we are happy to meet to discuss further. If you need any further clarification on any of the issues raised, please do not hesitate to contact, Judith Cross, head of policy and committee services, [jcross@bma.org.uk](mailto:jcross@bma.org.uk)

Yours sincerely



Dr Tom Black  
**Chair**  
**BMA NI Council**

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<sup>5</sup> Sir Harry Burns presentation to BMA NI, 24 February 2021