



# Public Health Medicine Committee (PHMC)

## Report to ARM 2024

### **Representing the whole Public Health profession and supporting its vital work**

Since the last ARM in 2023, the Public Health workforce that the PHMC represents, has continued to work hard for the populations we serve, with our colleagues in local authorities, OHID, UKHSA and NHSE striving to improve health and its underlying determinants at local, regional and national level; addressing health inequalities, responding to infectious disease outbreaks, informing commissioning and much more - despite cuts to budgets and posts, on top of the withdrawal of pandemic funding. The PHMC's constituents have undergone further restructuring in Wales and in OHID in England. The years of austerity, cost-of-living crisis and the health, social and economic devastation caused by Covid, continue to impact the health of populations across the UK, with stalling or falling life expectancy. We have supported our members and worked with others in the BMA, to campaign for pay restoration, take part in industrial action where possible - depending on employer and host organisation - and above all, to ensure that the needs of doctors working in organisations outside of the NHS are properly represented in pay negotiations, that there will be funding for any pay awards and to eliminate pay disparities across the Public Health system in the UK.

The PHMC along with the wider BMA, have consistently called for a reversal of the sustained cuts to general and public health funding, which have decimated vital prevention and health improvement services. We continue to work with BMA colleagues and with our partners in the Public Health Medicine Consultative Committee (PHMCC), including the Faculty of Public Health (FPH), Association of Directors of Public Health and other unions, to address population health and workforce issues. This has included requesting information from ICS CEOs and advocating for Public Health specialists to be appointed to ICBs, as well as calling for a sustained increase in Public Health training posts and measures to address low morale and boost wellbeing and retention. The Public Health Registrars' subcommittee has launched a local organising campaign on well-being and facilities and has collaborated with the FPH's Specialty Registrars' Committee on differential attainment and global health advocacy and the PHMC welcomed the new Public Health and GP dual specialist training programme.

Large numbers of local authority PH Consultant posts remain vacant or modified for recruitment of less qualified people and OHID has reduced the numbers of Public Health specialists employed; a worrying development on which we and the FPH have commented publicly. We have worked with our partners to gather data on pay disparities within and across the public health systems of the four nations, are lobbying ministers on this issue and also taking forward pan-BMA policy to work more closely with partners from unions with collective negotiating rights in local authorities, for the benefit of our members.

## **Action on population health**

This has been a particularly busy and successful session for the PHMC's collaborative work on key issues affecting the health of UK populations, particularly those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. The range of issues covered include smoking, vaping, alcohol, obesity, gambling and continuing work on equal protection from violence for children in England and Northern Ireland. In these areas, we have worked closely with the BMA Policy team and other elected members, particularly those from the Board of Science, as well as leading campaign groups external to the BMA; through stakeholder forums, coalitions and action groups, meeting APPGs, lobbying ministers, press releases, media interviews, briefings and blogs. It has been a particular privilege to contribute to the CMO's Smokefree Generation initiative, including action to curb the epidemic of vaping among children and young people, which led to the UK Government's bill. We will continue to support this work, to ensure the bill's passage through the next Parliament. We have actively supported the current president, Sir Ian Gilmore in bringing together a broad coalition of groups to establish consensus on alcohol, drugs and driving and are committed to developing and expanding this work into other areas of prevention in relation to alcohol harms. We have participated in the consultation on new gambling regulation, following lobbying on the gambling white paper informed by resolutions at successive public health conferences. We have continued to play a very active role in briefing and providing evidence for the BMA's witness statements and giving of evidence to the COVID-19 Public Inquiry.

## **Public Health Medicine Conferences**

The 2023 Sir Sandy Macara Memorial Lecture: *Public Health and Inequality: Insights from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* was delivered by Professor Virginia Berridge, Professor of Health History and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and was held in October. This linked very well to the theme of the 2024 Public Health Medicine Conference in February this year - *Public Health: Past, Present and Future*. This conference saw record attendance online and in person and featured keynote speeches from Professor Anthony Costello and Sophie Howe, the former Future Generations Commissioner for Wales and a range of breakout groups and workshops, with successful motions establishing new policy on pay and contracts, training and key public health issues. Sir Liam Donaldson has been invited to give the Sir Sandy Macara Memorial Lecture in November 2024 and the next Public Health Medicine conference will be held in March 2025.

The PHMC has met three times this session, with one further meeting scheduled for July. The committee has been ably served by the BMA Secretariat team, led by David Cloke, along with Chris Fosten, Sophie Upton, Winifred Annan and Laura Clark and the hard-working PHMC Executive, especially the elected Officer team; Deputy Chairs, Deiniol Jones, Heather Gimbaldston and Tamasin Knight and the conference co-chairs; Sushma Acquilla and Ishani Kar-Purkayastha. Special mention and thanks also go to Ellis Friedman, who stepped down recently, for his long-serving contribution to the PHMC and the wider BMA.

### **Penelope Toff**

Chair, BMA Public Health Medicine Committee  
June 2024