

Over the past many years, there have been impressive social economic and health improvements in Northern Ireland. People from every class and region are healthier and living longer than ever before. Unfortunately, not everyone is able to share the benefits of these improvements. It is essential that everyone is empowered and encouraged to do so.

Health inequalities are unacceptable. Tackling health inequalities is one of the top priority areas for the health protection service and is focused on:

- narrowing the health gap between disadvantaged groups, communities and the rest of the country;
- improving health protection services overall.

The PHA health protection service has established a multi-disciplinary health protection improvement and inequalities team. The main aim of this team is to strengthen its efforts, working with partners in many different sectors, as well as directly with communities, to ensure we make best use of our collective efforts and resources.

Current priority work

Migrant health

For the majority of migrants entering the country, there is no greater risk of infectious diseases than for the indigenous population. However, there are certain individuals who come from countries with high prevalence of diseases such as tuberculosis (TB), hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV.

Broadly, the health protection issues regarding migrants are in three main categories which include vaccinations, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and blood borne diseases.

The PHA is establishing a Northern Ireland Migrant Health Network health protection service which would be a major part of the network along with health improvement, primary care and local trusts.

The main aim is to ensure policies are in place for screening of individuals entering the country, have the resources available to be able to offer appropriate medical services for treatment of such individuals, and to prevent further transmission of disease.

The health protection agencies have done a lot of work on this issue for many years and developed a useful guidance which is available online. This [website](#) provides practical guidance and resources to assess and manage a wide range of migrant health issues.

Environmental inequalities

A clean and healthy environment is a vital component of public health. This is particularly so for children. While our environment is much healthier than in previous generations and continues to improve, environmental quality varies between different areas and communities and there is an emerging research base describing the scale and range of environmental inequality in the UK.

There is an unquestionable link between deprivation and ill health. The PHA has a major role of assessing the potential public health impacts of those processes applying for authorisation under the Integrated Pollution Prevention Control (IPPC) regime.

Understanding the distribution of social factors such as deprivation in communities local to these processes is an important factor in making these assessments especially with regards to identification of high risk population, eg children.

The health protection service's aim is to make sure policies are in place to address these issues and will work with other partners to address the issues of environmental health inequalities.

Reports/guidance documents

[Barriers to health: Migrant health and wellbeing in Belfast](#)

[Burden of disease: Environmental inequalities](#)

[HPA migrant health guide](#)

[Print](#)