

About health inequality

Information about health inequalities, what we mean by health inequalities, who is at risk of experiencing them, how they are created, what we can do to reduce them and how the PHA is working to reduce health inequalities.

Who this page is for

- **Public**

General awareness of health inequalities

- **Community & Voluntary Organisations**

What health inequalities are and how they can take action

- **Public Sector Organisations**

What health inequalities are and how they can take action

- **Others**

For example, professionals, elected representatives, private sector, etc. What health inequalities are and how they can take action

Everyone in Northern Ireland should have the opportunity to lead a healthy life. However, too many people experience poor health and shorter life expectancy.

To improve health and reduce inequalities, we must strengthen the building blocks for good health.

In many communities, these building blocks are not equally available. As a result, health inequalities impact across the life course.

People affected by health inequalities experience poorer mental wellbeing, increased exposure to health risks, and greater barriers to accessing services and opportunities.

What we mean by Health Inequalities

Health inequalities are the avoidable and unfair differences in health between different groups of people.

Health inequalities can include differences between groups of people in:

- health status (for example life expectancy)
- access to care (for example availability of services)
- quality and experience of services (for example user experience)
- behavioural risks (for example smoking)
- wider determinants of health (for example housing)

Who experiences Health Inequalities

People can experience health inequalities due to factors including:

- Equality characteristics included within Section 75 legislation – (age, religion, race, disability)
- Groups at greater risk of poor health outcomes – people experiencing homelessness, people from the Traveller community, people involved with the criminal justice system)
- Social and economic conditions – employment, education, poverty, housing
- The places people live and the communities they are part of – access to services, urban, rural and coastal areas, social support networks

However, these inequalities are not inevitable. By strengthening the key building blocks for good health and embedding equity into policy and practice, we can create the conditions for everyone in Northern Ireland to have a fair and equal opportunity to live longer, healthier lives.

Actions we can take to embed health inequalities in our work include:

- Deliver targeted, evidence-based **prevention** by scaling interventions for communities experiencing health inequalities, prioritising early years, improving screening uptake, and ensuring accessible, culturally appropriate services to reduce health inequalities.
- Strengthen action on **wider determinants** by using policy, economic, education, and place-based interventions to address structural drivers of health inequalities at population level.
- Embed equity in **commissioning** by allocating resources to need, designing accessible services, targeting high-risk groups, and prioritising investment in high-impact interventions.
- Strengthen equity by embedding impact assessments, using disaggregated data, and applying **equity tools** to identify gaps and improve access and outcomes for disadvantaged groups.
- Strengthen engagement by **co-producing** services with communities, leveraging community assets and partnerships, and delivering culturally competent approaches through trusted local channels to improve access, trust, and outcomes.

Examples of current PHA action

- [Farm families health checks programme | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Screening | HSC Public Health Agency](#)
- [Vaccination and immunisation | HSC Public Health Agency](#)

Last reviewed
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Data health inequalities

- [Health inequalities annual report 2026 - Department of Health](#)
- [Health Inequalities Dashboard - Department of Health](#)

Useful resources

- [Making Life Better - Thematic Action Plan to Refresh and Reshape Collaborative Action to Improve Health and Reduce Health Inequalities - July 2026 | Department of Health](#)
- [NICHI Health Alliance - Northern Ireland](#)

- [Work Well Live Well](#)

Related content

- [Making Life Better](#)