



Welcome

Issue 3
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CONTENTS

- Welcome
- Contact Details
- Foreword from CMO
- What is Making Life Better?
- A Brief History
- MLB Seminar
- MLB Programmes of Work
- ADOG
- Share Your News

Welcome to the third issue of the Making Life Better Newsletter: **MLB News**.

In this issue, we relaunch the MLB network, reflect on the work it has accomplished over the last 10 years and what plans are for the future. Also we invite the network to attend a seminar led by projects under the MLB framework to explore how they have sustained over COVID-19 and how they have supported people through the values of the MLB framework.

We hope you enjoy this issue of the MLB News.

MLB Network Contact Details

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Foreword

I am delighted to write the foreword to this, the first MLB Newsletter since the COVID-19 pandemic.



As you may be aware, a mid-term review of MLB was underway in 2020 but work on this was paused due to the pandemic. However, work to implement MLB, building on its underpinning public health strategies and addressing inequalities on the ground, continued.

We are now in a position to recommence work under MLB. However, we are all clearly in a very different place now. Rather than continuing with the review of MLB, we will be focusing our efforts on a number of specific, collaborative projects across government and partner organisations. These projects will add real value to our local communities in this extremely challenging time and will help address the health inequalities which were exacerbated by the pandemic as we continue through the difficult process of recovering the health of the population. We will liaise with partners about the potential projects and other opportunities to further deepen and strengthen collaboration going forward.

With this in mind, I would also encourage participation in the forthcoming online workshop referenced in this Newsletter, which will focus on the projects, COVID-19 recovery, addressing health inequalities and good news stories.

I whole-heartedly support cross-departmental and cross-agency liaison and believe that MLB is an excellent vehicle through which to progress these plans. We all have so much to contribute towards the health of our population and we can do this better together. As we move forward, there will also be opportunities to look at North/South and East/West input and collaboration, and we will keep you updated on these through our series of MLB Newsletters.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition.

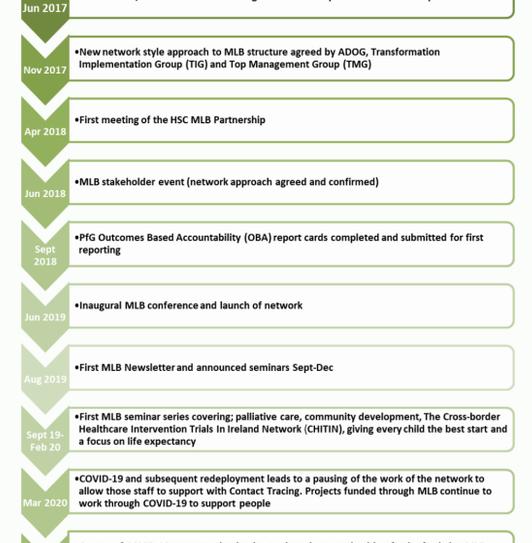
Professor Sir Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer

WHAT IS MLB?

Making Life Better 2013-2023 is the Executive's overarching strategic framework to improve health and address health inequalities. It is a whole system strategic framework for public health which specifically helps to address Outcome 4 (People live long, healthy, active lives) of the draft Programme for Government (PiG). While dated 2013-2023, it should be noted that the framework wasn't launched until 2014 and therefore its full 10 year time frame would come to an end in 2024.

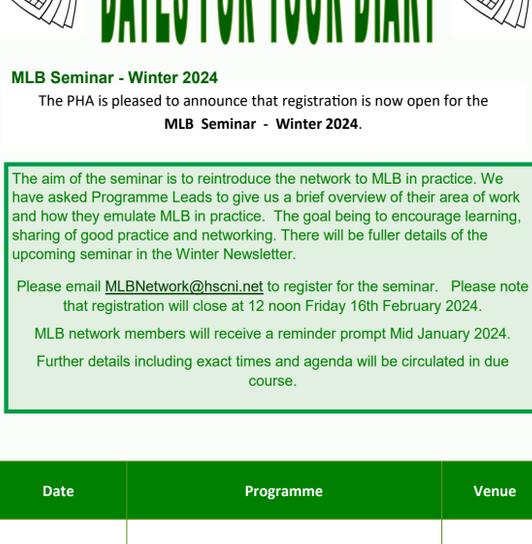
MLB was developed on the evidence that health and wellbeing, and health inequalities, are shaped by many factors, including age, family, community, workplace, beliefs and traditions, economics, and physical and social environments. Many of these factors are outside the control of the Department of Health. This evidence base remains largely unchanged since the framework was published in 2014.

These factors are broken down as follows:



Health inequalities remain a particular challenge and we therefore need to tackle the wider social determinants of health and reduce inequalities in these determinants in order to improve health outcomes across the whole population

Below shows a mapping of some of these determinants:



Through strengthened co-ordination and partnership working in a whole system approach, MLB seeks to create the conditions for individuals and communities to take control of their own lives and move towards a vision for Northern Ireland where all people are enabled and supported in achieving their full health and wellbeing potential. The aims of MLB are to achieve better health and wellbeing for everyone and reduce inequalities in health.

MLB is structured around the following themes –

1. Giving Every Child the Best Start
2. Equipped Throughout Life
3. Empowering Healthy Living
4. Creating the Conditions
5. Empowering Communities
6. Developing Collaboration

A Brief History

- Oct 2014 • First Regional Project Board Meeting
- Dec 2014 • First All Departments Officials Group (ADOG) Meeting
- May 2015 • Individual Meetings with Trusts re MLB Implementation
• Second ADOG meeting
• Making Life Better in Partnership Workshop facilitated by Health & Social Care (HSC) Leadership Centre
- Summer 2015 • Individual meetings with councils re MLB and community planning
- Jan 2016 • Third ADOG meeting
- Feb 2016 • First Ministerial Committee Meeting
- Summer 2016 • Obtained funding for Identified Public Health Agency (PHA) projects aligned with MLB
• Met with local councils around MLB, outcomes and community planning
- Sept 2016 • HSC MLBAutumn Forum (agreement of 4 key areas)
- Dec 2016 • Programme for Government (PiG) Healthier Places Workshop
• PiG Healthier Workplaces Workshop
• ADOG membership refreshed
- Feb 2017 • Fourth ADOG meeting (proposal of new structure for regional arrangements)
- Jun 2017 • Start of MLB/PiG coordination meetings for internal implementation with Dept of Health
- Nov 2017 • New network style approach to MLB structure agreed by ADOG, Transformation Implementation Group (TIG) and Top Management Group (TMG)
- Apr 2018 • First meeting of the HSC MLB Partnership
- Jun 2018 • MLB stakeholder event (network approach agreed and confirmed)
- Sept 2018 • PiG Outcomes Based Accountability (OBA) report cards completed and submitted for first reporting
- Jun 2019 • Inaugural MLB conference and launch of network
- Aug 2019 • First MLB Newsletter and announced seminars Sept-Dec
- Sept 19 - Feb 20 2019 • First MLB seminar series covering: palliative care, community development, The Cross-border Healthcare Intervention Trials in Ireland Network (CHITIN), giving every child the best start and a focus on life expectancy
- Mar 2020 • COVID-19 and subsequent redeployment leads to a pausing of the work of the network to allow those staff to support with Contact Tracing. Projects funded through MLB continue to work through COVID-19 to support people
- Jan 2023 - Apr 2023 • As part of COVID-19 recovery plan begun to relaunch network with refresh of existing MLB network mailing list. This includes renewed drive to increase membership
- July 2023 • ADOG meets again for the first time since the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic
- Nov 2023 • MLB Newsletter published for the first time since COVID-19 pandemic
• ADOG meeting due to be held mid November

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

MLB Seminar - Winter 2024
The PHA is pleased to announce that registration is now open for the **MLB Seminar - Winter 2024**.

The aim of the seminar is to reintroduce the network to MLB in practice. We have asked Programme Leads to give us a brief overview of their area of work and how they emulate MLB in practice. The goal being to encourage learning, sharing of good practice and networking. There will be fuller details of the upcoming seminar in the Winter Newsletter.

Please email MLBNetwork@hscni.net to register for the seminar. Please note that registration will close at 12 noon Friday 16th February 2024.

MLB network members will receive a reminder prompt Mid January 2024. Further details including exact times and agenda will be circulated in due course.

Date	Programme	Venue
Tuesday 21st February 2024 10.30am - 12 noon	Starting Well Early Intervention and Support Service Living Well Whole Systems Approach to Obesity Ageing Well Ageing Well Strategic Planning Team	MS TEAMS

ADOG Meeting

ADOG is a key part of the structure for coordinating the implementation of MLB.

A crucial function of ADOG is to bring together senior officials from all NI Government Departments, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) and PHA and to inform and support the Executive's Ministerial Committee for Public Health (Permanent Secretaries Group in the absence of the NI Executive) in carrying out their role of providing strategic leadership and cross-government coherence effectively. ADOG is chaired by the CMO.

ADOG met on the 6th July 2023 to discuss a focused action plan for MLB going forward. The following programmes have been identified as providing potential for further development over the next period of implementation of MLB. Some of them will build on and extend existing programmes. All are clearly linked to the core MLB themes and outcomes and will involve collaboration, both across the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and with external partners. These programmes will be tested further with key partners across Government and sectors:

- Inclusion Health;
- Smoke-Free Places and Spaces;
- MLB through Community Planning;
- The Early Intervention Support Service (EISS);
- Whole Systems Approach (WSA) to Obesity;
- Active Travel;
- Northern Ireland Youth Prevention Approach to preventing the harms associated with substance use;
- Food in the Fines (FIS);
- Suicide Prevention;
- Mental Health Early Intervention and Prevention;
- Addressing the employment gap for certain groups and
- Embedding inclusive growth conditions for Department for Economy (DfE) partner organisations.

Further updates on the work of ADOG going forward will be provided in future Newsletters.

Next meeting of ADOG is scheduled for 16th November 2023.

Making Life Better in practice.

The MLB Newsletter has taken some time to catch up with some of the projects working through a MLB approach.

Work Well Live Well

The PHA currently commission 'Work Well Live Well' to support businesses to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of employees within the workplace. The two contracted service providers are Northern Ireland Chest Heart and Stroke (NICHSS) and Developing Healthy Communities (DHC). They currently work with 250 businesses each year throughout Northern Ireland, particularly businesses with risk of poor physical health and emotional wellbeing - sedentary, low paid, migrant or other vulnerable population groups. "Effective workplace health programmes can make a real difference to the health and wellbeing of employees, businesses and the communities in which people live and work." Support for mental wellbeing is of particular importance and businesses who are part of the initiative must commit to signing up to the Equality Commission Mental Health Charter and to Mental Health First Aid Training.

Breastfeeding Welcome Here (BWH) Scheme

Between 2010–2020 the rates of breastfeeding at discharge rose from 45% to 50%. The BWH scheme aims to provide supportive environments, indicating businesses who have taken proactive steps to welcome breastfeeding. Over 800 businesses have signed up to the scheme ([Breastfed Babies](#)), including Queen's University Belfast (pictured), Translink and Ulster Museums NI. BWH has implemented a breastfeeding strategy including support programmes for those least likely to breastfeed, we have seen an increase in breastfeeding rates and greater promotion and support of breastfeeding overall.

Northern Ireland Youth Prevention Approach to preventing the harms associated with substance use

MLB recognises that youth, "while it is generally a time of peak health, is often associated with risk taking behaviour – such as harmful alcohol and drug use." Evidence for substance use education and persuasion approaches is poor in terms of achieving and sustaining change in drug and alcohol use. Stronger evidence exists for a social life skills approach in supporting young people to make healthy choices.

The PHA funds targeted drug and alcohol programmes for young people at risk that are provided within community settings, as general life skills programmes within schools may miss this cohort. The PHA also funds a number of other services that provide support around life skills, e.g. Youth Engagement Services.

The Young Persons Behaviour and Attitude Survey reports the percentage of young people who have ever used drugs in NI as being 4%, a drop from 24% in 2003.

Nutritional Standards for HSC staff and visitors across catering facilities including retail outlets and vending.

PHA, FSA, Saferfood and partners are implementing Nutritional Standards for staff and visitors in HSC settings. The Standards are food based modelled on the Eatwell Guide and encourage healthier eating amongst staff and visitors. They apply to all facilities that serve food or beverages to staff or visitors operating within HSC settings i.e. catering facilities, privately owned retail units and vending machines. HSC employs 72,500 people, many consuming the food on offer at their place of work for meals and snacks, and NI has a population of 1.9 million, many of whom access health services. To date we have seen 100% compliance with vending standards.

Nutritional Standards in action

Improving Your Health and Wellbeing

Share Your News

The aim of this Newsletter is to help you, help all of us, as we work to make life better using useful information, updates and announcements. If there is anything you wish to see included, anything you want to submit to be included or anything you want to ask network members, please just let us know by [email](mailto:).

If you have received this but aren't yet part of the network and you want to keep up to date with MLB, please click [here](#).

If you wish to unsubscribe please click [here](#).