

Labour Public Health Policy and Cambridge University inactivity research

Summary

Today has seen some significant developments in public health that we believe are relevant for all of our Vanguard members.

- Labour launched their Public Health Policy proposals today through the publication of a report and at an event attended by ukactive.
- This document is extremely important for Labour's election campaign as one of their key campaign themes is centred on Public Health and the NHS.
- Physical activity is featured heavily in the document, which could be massively significant for the future of Public Health policy in the UK if Labour is elected.
- The second development comes in the form of a study by Cambridge University that claims physical inactivity is 'more deadly' than obesity.
- The 12-year long study of over 300,000 Europeans has found that activity levels are responsible for more deaths than weight. This is of course a hugely important finding for the sector, and could lead to wide-ranging implications for health policy throughout Europe.

Labour Public Health Policy

Labour's Public Health Policy plan was launched by speeches from Andy Burnham, Shadow Secretary of State for Health, and the Shadow Minister for Public Health, Luciana Berger.

Labour's two new general guiding principles for public health policy will be to;

1. Take decisive action to give each child a healthier start in life,
2. Place a new emphasis on empowerment for adults to make healthier choices.

Physical activity will be at the 'very core' of Labours Health Policy if they are elected. Physical activity is listed as the first item in the 'Our programme for action' section of the report, and it is listed as their 'pre-eminent health goal'.

In his speech, Andy Burnham stated that an active nation would be 'emblematic of Labour's vision for Britain', not just another government target.

Burnham listed several reasons as to why physical activity is the 'golden thread' that links together Labour's entire health policy. These reasons include; the fact that physical activity is a positive call to action, moving from being inactive to being active is "the easiest yet most effective health choice to make", and physical activity is a catalytic change which can impact on other health choices. **He also maintained that exercise on referral 'should be in every GP surgery'.**

In their programme to 'Empower all' Labour has stated it will;

- Make a pledge to get 50% of people active by 2025
- Give local authorities an expanded remit to support physical activity in communities. We will look at how we can better support local communities so that they have the opportunity to use sporting facilities in schools outside school hours, including at weekends, and outside term time.
- Work with local authorities, learning from the measures introduced by Labour in Wales, to steadily improve the walking and cycling environment in all communities.
- Be committed to restoring national standards to cut deaths and serious injuries on our roads and taking steps to make HGVs safer.
- Ensure every child has the opportunity to learn to ride a bike. We want to see cycling education and training continue in the next parliament.
- A national programme will be put in place to support social prescribing of physical activity, by health and social care professionals, for people who would benefit.

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Further aims of the party, with regards to children's activity, are to ensure all children are doing a **minimum of 2 compulsory hours of PE a week at school**, as well as providing the opportunity for 3 extra hours per day of physical activity for primary school children through childcare provision. Furthermore, whilst the idea of a 'sugar tax' policy was rejected, **the suggestion of working with businesses to reduce advertising of sugary-products aimed towards children was introduced.**

Supporting Burnham's comments, Luciana Berger stated that Labour's pre-eminent public health vision was to get more people, more active, reminiscent of the aim of ukactive and its members!

The full Labour report can be found [here](#).

Cambridge University Study

Cambridge University has today published research in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition that has ground-breaking findings for the activity sector; that inactivity is responsible for twice as many deaths as obesity. The study, entitled "*Physical activity and all-cause mortality across levels of overall and abdominal adiposity in European men and women: the European Prospective Investigation into Cancer and Nutrition Study*", compared the health effects of being overweight to being inactive. The study took place over a 12-year period and included 334,161 people across Europe. The participants had an average age of 50.

The study shows that people are at risk of premature death if they are inactive regardless of weight. The researchers claim that "The greatest risk [of an early death] was in those classed inactive, and that was consistent in normal weight, overweight and obese people." Whilst the diseases caused by inactivity and obesity were largely the same diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, inactivity was attributable to 676,000 deaths each year whereas carrying too much weight accounted for 337,000. Therefore, **eliminating inactivity in Europe would cut mortality rates by nearly 7.5%**, whereas eliminating obesity would cut rates by 3.6%.

One of the researchers, Prof Ekelund, commented that: "I don't think it's a case of one or the other. We should also strive to reduce obesity, but I do think physical activity needs to be recognised as a very important public health strategy."

The study claims that **just 20-minutes of brisk walking per day** could reduce such risks, however the researchers acknowledged that whilst this level of activity would produce substantial benefits we should be looking to do more than this where possible.

The new report follows David Stalker's calls for stronger data to support the physical activity sector's quest to become a 'central pillar of the nation's public health strategy.'

The report also ties well into Labour's Public Health Policy report, and has come at a good time, as Andy Burnham today promised to make physical activity a priority.

A link to the full report can be found [here](#).