

WHO Say Five More Years For Belfast Health

Belfast receives top World Health Organization recognition and is commended for contribution to the Healthy Cities programme across Europe.



Cllr Steven Corr, Chair of the Health and Environmental Services Committee and Dr Eddie Rooney, Chief Executive of the Public Health Agency accept Belfast's designation to Phase VI (2014-2018) of the WHO European Healthy Cities Network.

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Belfast has joined cities from across Europe in being designated as a World Health Organization Healthy City for the sixth phase of the programme.

The WHO Healthy Cities Network is a global movement engaging a range of stakeholders at the local level to improve intersectoral action with the aim of reducing inequalities and delivering better health and wellbeing for all, particularly vulnerable groups.

The designation was confirmed by Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe, who congratulated Belfast on the standard of its application: "Your city shows evidence of commitment and principles of Health for all and sustainable development and commitment to fulfil the specific requirements of Phase VI." Dr Jakab went on to highlight the important contribution Belfast makes on a European level: "Working as close partners with us, your experience and active engagement will provide valuable know-how in developing knowledge, tools and expertise that can benefit all European Member States."

Accepting designation on behalf of the city, Cllr Steven Corr, Chair of the Health and Environmental Services Committee and Dr Eddie Rooney, Chief Executive of the Public Health Agency both welcomed Belfast's continuing involvement in the WHO European Healthy Cities Network.

Cllr Corr said, "Membership of the WHO Healthy Cities network is especially valuable to Belfast City Council as it allows us share experience with our European partners and to adopt policy approaches from across Europe which can be used at a local level. The reform of local government is an important opportunity to continue the mainstreaming of public health. Using a partnership approach as part of an established network ensures that the key players in the city are brought together in working towards the shared goal of better health and wellbeing for all."

Dr Rooney added, "I am delighted that Belfast has been designated for a sixth phase by the World Health Organization and, in fact, recognised as an exceptional city in delivering the aims and objectives of the European Healthy Cities Network over the past twenty five years. In that time much has been done to improve health and wellbeing but significant inequalities still exist and must be addressed. People in Northern Ireland have benefited from the learning we have gained from Europe and our participation for the next five years will continue to deliver positive outcomes."

Chief Executive of Belfast Healthy Cities, Joan Devlin added:

"Belfast Healthy Cities is looking forward to supporting partners to deliver on the WHO Core Themes during Phase VI (2014-2018). The exchange of information and ideas is a two way process and Belfast plays a very active role in the WHO network. We look forward to continuing this in the next 5 years."

Phase VI of the programme, which will run until December 2018, is based on the WHO European strategy for health and wellbeing 'Health 2020' and aligns with the Making Life Better, the new public health framework for Northern Ireland. Having celebrated 25 years as a WHO European Healthy City in 2014, Belfast will now become one of a small number of select cities that has enjoyed designation over every phase of the WHO European Healthy Cities programme.

Belfast Healthy Cities now also fulfils the role of WHO Secretariat, which included the management of this year's international conference in Athens. Participation in the Healthy Cities Network has allowed Belfast to benefit from groundbreaking innovations including the Healthy Urban Environments model, where the design of the built environment is used to support health and wellbeing, and the emerging concept of Health Literacy, which supports communities and individuals to make full use of services to maintain and improve their health.