

Belfast Healthy Cities

A Manifesto to Support Health and Wellbeing for All in Belfast

Belfast is a member of the World Health Organization (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network. The Healthy Cities approach is about involving people in developing and testing new approaches to improving health and wellbeing. It is about taking action to make Belfast a city for all where citizens have access to all parts of the city and are made to feel valued and welcomed.

As a WHO Healthy City, Belfast works to achieve two overarching goals:

- Improving health for all and reducing health inequality
- Improving leadership and governance for health



Improving health for all and reducing health inequality

Northern Ireland is a region where everyone's health is improving but it is still divided by health inequalities. In Belfast, three of four constituencies, East, West and North are at the bottom of life expectancy in Northern Ireland. Within the city, life expectancy also varies significantly between 72.5 years for a male in West and 76.9 in South. Similarly, the rates of suicide and self-harm are greater in parts of Belfast than elsewhere in Northern Ireland with East Belfast recording the highest rate of death by suicide. Inequalities among our citizens are unjust, damaging and serve as a block on the sustainable economic and social development of our city.

Health and health inequalities are socially determined. Shortfalls in health result from society's social, economic, environmental and cultural situation, especially the decisions that influence the distribution of power, money and resources. In order to tackle these underlying socio-economic factors, we need political representatives who will champion the city and work to secure necessary resources and support structures for its citizens.

We are asking those seeking election to make a commitment to support policies, and set ambitious targets to create conditions that will help redress inequalities, through their work locally and at all levels of Government.

Improving leadership and governance for health

The underlying causes of inequalities are multiple and can be complex. Addressing them successfully is dependent on the policies deployed not only by the Department of Health, but also across all central and local government departments and agencies. There is a responsibility on policy makers and political representatives to provide leadership for new ways of working that can improve health and wellbeing for all.

equality in all policies and actions. It ensures that stakeholders understand and act on their responsibility for health and reinforces the importance of collaboration across departments and between agencies to ensure resources are used to their full potential.

These principles apply in all legislative chambers from local Government and the Stormont Assembly to the UK Parliament.

The WHO 'Health Equity in All Policies' model is a 'whole system' approach to policy development that advocates all initiatives pay full regard to their implications for the health of the population, promoting health

We are asking candidates to recognise the potential benefits of a 'Health Equity in All Policies' approach in effectively addressing inequalities and to promote its implementation across all sectors.

WHO European Healthy Cities work across four priority areas for population health and wellbeing.

Empowering people for better understanding of health

Targeted interventions to tackle health inequalities and their social determinants can be introduced at key life stages and include maternal and child health; children and adolescents; healthy adults; and older people. Cities can be champions for developing effective approaches in strategies, policies and plans. This is especially true when applying new approaches to promote health and prevent disease from early child development to healthy and active ageing, as well as to people who live in vulnerable circumstances.

We are calling on candidates to support actions and policies, which will improve understanding of health, health services and health systems amongst citizens and professionals.

Increasing Active Travel to tackle the major health challenges

Social and physical environments, supported by good public transport systems, can be designed to increase opportunities for physical activity, such as walking and cycling, in people's everyday lives. Encouraging active travel is one way of addressing rising levels of obesity. It also contributes to reducing air pollution that creates a substantial burden of disease in our city, worsening conditions such as asthma and heart disease.

We are calling on candidates to support the development of an integrated active travel system for the whole city that incorporates infrastructural change and benefits all of Belfast's citizens.

Developing capacity for health and health inequalities

In order to deliver better health outcomes cities will need to strengthen substantially public health functions. Transforming health services to address emerging social and demographic changes, such as an ageing population, will require a new working culture with cooperation across sectors. This process will need to be supported by reform of staff training and the development of better understanding of the impact of other sectors policies on public health and health inequalities.

We ask candidates to acknowledge the value of increasing all sectors' understanding of their impact on and contribution to health.

Creating healthy urban environments to support health

Resilient communities respond proactively to adverse situations, prepare for economic, social and environmental change and cope better with crisis. A well-designed physical environment can also be an asset for improving health. How land is used is important, access to green space is good for physical and mental health. Effective street design creates places that are safe, accessible, and connected; improving people's confidence, and encouraging full use of neighbourhoods.

We ask candidates to recognise the enabling role of a vibrant, well-designed physical environment that supports the health of citizens and makes Belfast a high quality place for all.

Key points

Health inequalities among our citizens are unjust, damaging and serve as a block on the sustainable economic and social development of our city. Cities are about people and we would encourage elected representatives to continue to pursue an inclusive approach to policy development, which ensures that all members of society can live, work and enjoy their leisure time in our city.

We are asking those seeking election to:

- make a commitment to support policies, and set ambitious targets to create conditions that will help redress inequalities, through their work locally and at all levels of Government.
- recognise the potential benefits of a ‘Health Equity in All Policies’ approach in effectively addressing inequalities and to promote its implementation across all sectors.
- support actions and policies, which will improve understanding of health, health services and health systems amongst citizens and professionals.
- support the development of an integrated active travel system for the whole city that incorporates infrastructural change and benefits all of Belfast’s citizens
- acknowledge the value of increasing all sectors’ understanding of their impact on and contribution to health.
- recognise the enabling role of a vibrant, well-designed physical environment that supports the health of citizens and makes Belfast a high quality place for all.

Belfast - leading by example

Over the last 5 years, Belfast has served as Secretariat to the World Health Organization in Europe. Our small team plans and manages all WHO European Healthy Cities major events, where policy is debated, agreed and formally adopted.

Over the same period, we have welcomed senior WHO representatives to Belfast, including Dr. Agis Tsouros, Director of the Division of Policy and Governance for Health and Well-being and Manfred Huber, WHO Head of Healthy Aging who briefed the Northern Ireland Assembly Health Committee on WHO strategies to address health inequalities.

Internationally, we work to put the best of Belfast on display with the active support of successive Lord Mayors and other political representatives on local, national and European platforms. We hope we can continue to rely on your support in this important role.



For further information on Belfast Healthy Cities visit: www.belfasthealthycities.com

Belfast Healthy Cities
22-24 Lombard Street
Belfast BT1 1RD



028 9032 8811



info@belfasthealthycities.com



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