

Scotland is more motivated to turn knowledge into action

Over the past 12 years, Scotland has seen clear improvements in health knowledge, motivation and behaviour, with many more people actively striving for better long-term health.

A report, which analysed data collated by the Health Education Population Survey (HEPS) from 1996 to 2007, has been produced by NHS Health Scotland, Scotland's national agency for improving health.

The report – *Know, Feel, Do? Health behaviour change in Scotland, 1996 to 2007* – assessed the direction and extent of change in adult health behaviour, knowledge and motivation across three health topics: smoking, physical activity and healthy eating.

In addition, the findings for each topic were combined to assess overall progress in health improvement in the period 1996 to 2007.

The report reveals a reported increase in the proportion of adults meeting the 5-a-day recommendation for fruit and vegetable consumption. This increase was in line with improved awareness of the recommendation, enhanced motivation to eat more healthily among those with low fruit and vegetable intake, and an associated decrease in those not taking any action to eat more healthily.

There was also a modest increase over time in the reported proportion of adults meeting the physical activity recommendations. This was supported by enhanced motivation to become more active among inactive adults, with fewer reporting no interest at all in increasing their activity levels.

However, despite the reported increase in meeting the recommendations, it is clear that more effort is needed to clarify the levels of activity required in order to obtain minimum health benefits.

Encouragingly the proportion of adult smokers declined between 1996 and 2007. Although the proportion of smokers with no intention to cut down or stop was unchanged over the period, the results suggest that, for those who did attempt such a change, there was an increasing likelihood over time that they would be successful.

Dr Gerry McCartney, Head of the Public Health Observatory at NHS Health Scotland, said:

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“The results of this analysis show that more and more people in Scotland recognise that smoking, poor diet and a sedentary lifestyle are bad for their health. We also found that over the last 12 years, increasing numbers of people are saying they either intend to or actually have adopted the healthier behaviours reported here.

Although these results have to be interpreted with some caution because they are self-reported, there is some cause for optimism that the trends reported here will contribute to better health”.

Behaviour change is a slow process and so it is encouraging to see a definite improvement over time. However, it is important that there is continuing long-term investment in consistent sources of data on health status, knowledge, motivation and behaviour, and the wider determinants of health. Such investment is essential to better understand the health of the Scottish population.

Notes to editors:

1. The report *Know, Feel, Do? Health behaviour change in Scotland, 1996 to 2007* documents analysed data collected over a specific time period and highlights three main health topics. These findings should not be compared or contrasted with the Scottish Health Survey 2009 results published in September 2010.
2. The HEPS ran annually from 1996 to 2007, interviewing a representative sample of the Scottish population aged 16-74. This provides a 12-year span of consistent, comparable data with which to assess the level of improvement in health behaviour, knowledge and motivation.
3. The achieved sample size of the Health Education Population Survey was approximately 1800 each year. Its methodology was consistent over time and its response rates were high (at least 70% in all years except 2006 when it dropped to 68%). Other national surveys were used to validate the behaviour time trends.
4. From 2008, the Health Education Population Survey was replaced by the Knowledge, Attitudes and Motivations (KAM) module in the Scottish Government's Scottish Health Survey.
5. The full report can be found at:
http://www.scotpho.org.uk/home/Publications/scotphoreports/pub_HEPS.asp

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