Health Inequalities: Fair Society, Healthy Lives (The Marmot Review) 2010
It has long been believed that the conditions people are born into and their living standards have a major impact on their health. The Marmot Review proved that this is true and made recommendations of how to improve the health of the nation based on hard facts – a so called ‘evidence-based’ strategy.

The review showed that:
• The lower a person’s social class, the worse their health
• Health inequalities happen because some people are born, work and live in worse conditions than others – lower living standards means poorer health
• Improving the conditions into which a child is born can improve their health
• To reduce health inequalities, we must target everybody – not just the worst off
• Reducing health inequalities saves money

Where a person lives can in some cases can affect the availability and quality of services they receive – something known as the ‘postcode lottery’. Although improvements have been made in recent years, your postcode alone can sometimes determine which doctors, hospitals or other healthcare services you are allowed to access – and these may be very different to somebody who lives just down the road with a different postcode.

Measuring Health
There are several ways we can find out how the health of people in our towns and cities (or even country as a whole) compares with others. This type of information helps us to see where improvements can be made and help is required.

Healthy Life Years provides data on life expectancy for the UK as well as other European countries whilst the Public Health Outcomes Framework compares the life expectancies of people in different towns, cities and counties of the UK. Health Profiles provide detailed data on a range of different health issues – for example levels of smoking, obesity, teenage pregnancy and cancer.

Recently dementia became the biggest killer in the UK overtaking Coronary Heart Disease (CHD) which still however kills 1 in 6 men and 1 in 10 women. Although improvements in health have seen fewer CHD deaths, a major concern is the continued increase in obesity.

A person is classed as overweight if they have a Body Mass Index (BMI) between 25 and 29.9, whilst a BMI of 30 to 39.9 is classed as obesity. The prevalence of obesity is similar among men and women, but men are more likely to be overweight. Obesity in children has been linked to little or no physical activity.

The NHS and Health Policy
The Health and Social Care Act 2010 led to the creation of an organisation called Public Health England (PHE) to ‘protect and improve the nation’s health and to address inequalities’. The NHS Five Year Forward View was published in 2014 and outlined a future vision for the NHS based on seven new models of care, ranging from primary care to maternity and care home provision.

An initiative called Making Every Contact Count plans to use the millions of occasions NHS staff come into contact with patients every day. They are encourage to ask questions about patients’ health and lifestyles, agree actions and signpost them to other services. This has now also been adopted by some ‘blue light’ services too such as ambulance trusts.

NHS Health Trainers are now found throughout the country, helping clients to assess their lifestyles and wellbeing, set goals for improving their health, agree action-plans, and provide practical support and information that will help people to change their behaviour.
Health Campaigns and Resources

Health promotion can provide the information that will help people take control and make positive changes to their health behaviour. NHS statistics now show that exercise can reduce the risk of serious illness (diabetes, cancer, heart disease and stroke) by 50% and early death by up to 30%.

NHS One You is a campaign launched in 2016 to address the health risks of middle aged adults. By the time we reach our 40s and 50s our lifestyles can already be having an impact on our health and survival in later life. One You uses a self-assessment quiz, provides healthy lifestyle advice and recommendations and uses mobile phone apps too such as the ‘Couch to 5k’ and the ‘Alcohol Tracker’

Change4Life is a national campaign to reduce obesity and set out to target families with young children initially. Its colourful website, promotional materials and phone apps have activities, recipes and games to help motivate people to eat healthily and increase their activity levels.

A Government initiative called ‘5 Ways to Wellbeing’ aims to encourage people to take action to improve their mental health. Rather than sitting down and relaxing, people are encouraged to connect, be active, take notice, keep learning and give.

Local Strategies

When proposing the development of new health services in your area it is important to know what the local priorities are. Health Profiles indicate where inequalities may exist in a locality whilst the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) reports on the current and future health care needs within a local authority area. These can usually be accessed online or by contacting your local authority (council).

Behaviour Change (NICE Public Health Guideline PH6)

NICE have produced comprehensive guidance to behaviour change based on the available evidence of what works best. The recommendations it makes can be used by health practitioners to encourage people to adopt healthier lifestyles and follows four key stages:
1. Planning interventions and programmes
2. Education and Training
3. Delivery
4. Evaluation

Health Models

The Biological or ‘Medical Model’ first emerged in the 1800s and suggested that illnesses (particularly mental illnesses) were caused by ‘biochemical imbalances’. Whereas people may have been punished or even burnt as a witch for abnormal behaviour in the past, it had been observed that brain damage caused people to behave abnormally. This approach has helped us to understand and treat illnesses such as depression (which is caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain) and dementia (which has a biological cause – brain cells degenerate and die).