Adaptation to Climate Change for England’s Health and Care System
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INTRODUCTION

The Climate Change Act 2008⁴ requires public sector organisations to consider the risks posed by climate change and report on their preparation and planning for adaptation. For the first time, a comprehensive report for the whole of the health and care system in England has been prepared. A cross system approach was considered most appropriate because it provides greater insights into the state of climate change preparedness and capacity to adapt in this sector. It also means that synergies and barriers can be identified so that areas for further collaboration can be recognised.

METHODS

The following parts of the health and care system have been considered:
- National Bodies representing health sector in England;
- Providers of NHS services;
- Family doctors, dental practitioners;
- Voluntary Sector (e.g. Joseph Rowntree Foundation);
- Clinical Commissioning Groups;
- Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The report was prepared by a team from all the above sectors, led by the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU).

Three elements are considered for each part of the health and care system:
- Risk Assessment;
- Adaptation Planning;
- Impact/Evaluation of Adaptation Actions.

Where possible other areas are addressed including:
- Opportunities;
- Assumptions and uncertainties;
- Barriers to implementation of adaptation plans;
- Useful tools, support, guidance.

A considerable amount of information is routinely collected by the health care system and this adaptation report draws predominantly on these sources, also highlighting areas where key information is still needed.

RESULTS

- Risks to health sector include those to health of population²;³
- Risks to health infrastructure and the delivery of health services through changes in service patterns;
- Headline risks include:
  - impact of heat waves and overheating of buildings;
  - changing patterns of air pollution;
  - increasing likelihood of flooding events.

CONCLUSIONS

- This is the first health sector wide report of its kind and as such has been an invaluable exercise to determine the position across the sector, raise awareness and set a baseline for the future.
- The report highlights the considerable level of work carried out to date to prepare the health and care system for climate change.
- The report has confirmed that the health sector is moving towards better adaptation to climate change. There has been a useful collaborative start and the sector now ensure that progress is not only maintained but improved upon.
- Working together with local authorities (who provide and/or commission much of the social care provided) is essential to understanding the risks and the impacts to develop a platform to support local communities and enable services to be prepared and respond well to climate change induced events.
- A future report can build further on this approach by developing links to local authorities and social care providers.
- An action plan has been developed and will be monitored by the National Cross System Group and National Adaptation Programme Steering Group.

DISCUSSION

The health sector in England spends over £100 billion every year to provide services for a population of some 55 million people. It is the first health sector globally to issue a collective commitment to address climate change.

The National Cross System Group committed to supporting the implementation of the Sustainable Development Strategy for the NHS, Public Health and Social Care system, launched in January 2014. This includes reducing carbon emissions by 34% by 2020, embedding sustainability into decision making processes at all levels, supporting local leadership in attaining sustainable, resilient, healthy people and places and having regularly updated emergency weather plans in place to deal with events such as heatwaves, flooding and cold.

As the health sector in England has made a joint collective commitment to address sustainable development and climate change, recognising that by doing so it can develop more resilient services and improve population health, it has produced a report under the “Adaptation Reporting Powers” provision of the UK’s 2008 Climate Change Act. This first sector wide report, “Adaptation Report for the Healthcare System 2015”, covers the majority of the health system in England⁵.

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REFERENCES

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