



# Healthier for longer? Bringing focus on health span not life span

The challenge

**We are living longer, but unhealthier lives. Good health not only makes us happier, but also boosts our ability to work, volunteer, care, and spend in the ways we choose. Many conditions are avoidable, but we're still spending more money and time curing rather than preventing ill-health.**

What we know

The UK Government has promised to increase healthy life expectancy, for all, by five years, by 2035. But across the past decade, the time we spend in good health has decreased - with wide inequalities in our healthy life spans:

- Latest figures show an 18-year difference in healthy life expectancy between the least and most deprived areas of the country.
- People in the most deprived fifth of the population develop multiple long-term conditions 10 years earlier than those in the least deprived fifth.
- In 2019, the Lancet reported over one-third of the premature deaths between 2013 and 2018 were attributable to socioeconomic inequality, equating to one death every 10 minutes.

Projections are gloomy. The prevalence of mental health conditions increased by 20% between 1993 and 2014, yet only one in three adults with a common mental health problem is receiving treatment. And poor mental health appears to be growing at a faster rate for children and young people. One in four adults has at least two health conditions and on current trajectories, the Government's target of five years of extra health life expectancy for all by 2035 will take 192 years to reach.

Poor health harms our economy: ill-health stops people working and costs the economy £100 billion annually. It also burdens our overwhelmed and under-resourced healthcare system: Cardiovascular disease alone costs the NHS £18 billion a year.

Yet 40% of ill health and premature mortality in England is linked to preventable factors, including smoking, nutrition, lack of physical activity and alcohol and drug use. Unhealthy nations are less able to capitalise on the opportunities of ageing. ILC analysis shows that spending just 0.1 percentage points more on preventative health can unlock an extra 9% of spending per year by older households and 10 extra hours of volunteering.

The pandemic illustrated the necessity of a shift from cure to prevention and that where there is political will, there is a way, however, this approach must be sustained long-term. Covid prevention initiatives resulted in a leap in "preventative care" spending from 4.4% in 2019 to 14.1% in 2021, yet work by the Health Foundation shows a real-term decrease of 26% in public health grant allocations leading to cuts in local authority preventative services like smoking cessation.

New evidence

Change in average healthy life expectancy between 2011 and 2020 (in years)			
North East Lincolnshire	-6.7	Warwickshire	-3.7
Bedford	-6.0	Barnet	-3.5
North Lincolnshire	-4.9	Lincolnshire	-3.3
Stoke-on-Trent	-4.4	Darlington	-3.1
Lambeth	-3.8	West Sussex	-3.1



**The UK economy loses £27bn a year in productivity among people age 50-64, due to largely preventable conditions. The second worst in all of Europe**

Office for National Statistics (ONS), Health state life expectancies, UK: 2018 to 2020 (NB refers to life expectancy at birth)

**We know we can do better than this.  
Do you have a sustainable solution for longer lives?**

Please email your solution to [info@ilcuk.org.uk](mailto:info@ilcuk.org.uk)

The ILC Longevity White Paper is supported by:

