



Healthy Ageing – Living Well to Age Well

Director of Public Health
Annual Report 2023-2024

**Sunderland
City Council**

**“It is not the years in
your life but the life
in your years that
counts”**

Adlai E. Stevenson



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Foreword

Welcome to my annual report as Executive Director of Public Health and Wellbeing in Sunderland.

This report provides me with the opportunity to share an independent view on the health of the people of Sunderland. This year I have chosen to focus on healthy ageing and how we can support people to age well.

Healthy ageing has always been important for Sunderland. Our city is a place where people can thrive and enjoy their later years. Some of our strengths include:

- A commitment to being an age friendly city.
- Having places and spaces that support people to live healthy, fulfilling, connected and independent lives, including digital health hubs.
- A thriving Ageing Well Ambassadors programme recognised nationally as an example of good practice by the Centre for Ageing Better - [Ageing Well Ambassadors in Sunderland](#).
- A collaboration between the University of Sunderland, Ageing Well Ambassadors and Sunderland City Council to carry out research about ageing in Sunderland - [Are you ageing well in Sunderland? - North East Connected](#).
- A strong voluntary sector alliance and communities which support social interaction.
- [Links for Life](#), which aims to support people to live the best life they can, by creating healthy, happy communities and supporting people to link to local services.
- Some amazing activities and services to help people to stay healthy including an evidence-based strength and balance programme.
- An over 50s news team, 'We'ar Shining the Light' reporting on ageing well in Sunderland - [Wear Shining the light news team](#).

However, healthy life expectancy in Sunderland is lower than the England average. This means that people in Sunderland are living shorter lives, with fewer years in good health and more of their later years in poor health. The reasons for this are complex and varied and to improve how long residents live in good health we need a system wide approach to address inequalities.

How we age is strongly related to life chances and experiences in our younger years and we must support residents and provide an environment where everyone can thrive and be healthy from a young age. Sunderland is building on its strengths with community collaborations which support improvements in health outcomes and reduce health inequalities. This is detailed in our Sunderland Healthy City Plan 2020-2030¹ which we are currently updating.

As we age the risk of developing illnesses and becoming frail increases, which can lead to greater need for health and social care. But does an ageing population mean an inevitable rise in health and care need and loss of independence? This report highlights the challenges of an ageing population, but importantly the actions we can all take to support people to improve health, promote independence and age well. It also focuses on how we can work together on prevention and early intervention. Examples of our excellent local services and initiatives supporting health in older age will be highlighted. The COVID-19 pandemic showed the vulnerability of older people to disruption in health services and social isolation. We must learn from these findings and use them to support our ageing population.

I am grateful to those who have shared their valuable experiences of what it is like to age in Sunderland, which allows us to celebrate the great work around the city and highlight issues and actions needed. Thank you to colleagues and partners who have contributed to this report with a special thanks to Jackie Nixon, Kaye Chapman, Sheila Rundle and Louise Darby.



Gerry Taylor, Executive Director of Public Health and Wellbeing



Introduction

How we live our life has a huge impact on how we age. Living well is important to be able to age well, but it is never too late to make positive changes that can impact our health in later years. Healthy ageing is about more than what we do after age 50. In this report 50 is used as reference point because it is a time when people can start to develop long-term health conditions and is generally seen as middle age.

In Sunderland, some people are dying younger than they should and are spending many of their older years in poor health. The reasons are varied and complex and issues such as poverty, housing and low-paid or unstable jobs contribute to this inequality and impact physical and mental health. To support our residents to live longer and in good health we need a comprehensive approach to reduce poverty, improve living conditions and create an environment that supports people to live healthily.

It is also important to help people understand the impact that having a healthy life has on later life and ensure that people have the information they need to support their own health.

People aged 50 and over provide invaluable contributions in countless ways to Sunderland's rich and vibrant communities – through their skills, knowledge, caring roles and the skills and experience they bring to their workplaces. Sunderland will be increasingly reliant on these contributions as our ageing population grows.



This report builds on our State of Ageing report³ and uses data and insights from our Ageing Well Ambassadors to highlight healthy ageing experiences. We focus on action needed to improve how people age in the city:

✓ **Healthy Places:**

Creating environments that support healthy, connected and independent lives.

✓ **Healthy Communities:**

Building on our community assets, addressing the social circumstances needed to support people to have active and fulfilling later lives, including community and social connections, and prevention at a population level.

✓ **Healthy People:**

Highlighting factors that support healthy living, such as physical activity, stopping smoking and reducing alcohol consumption.

Today, living longer is not just a hope but an expectation. Many people are living into their 70s, 80s, 90s and beyond, with record numbers of centenarians⁴. This is a great success story, however, many people are ageing with multiple long-term health conditions, with health inequalities disproportionately affecting the poorest in our city. Our ageing population is also becoming more diverse and we need to support healthy ageing in an inclusive and equitable way that meets the needs of all of our communities.

Our age-friendly plan for Sunderland is based on three themes incorporating the World Health Organisation's eight domains needed to create age-friendly communities⁵:



Developing age-friendly neighbourhoods supporting Sunderland residents to live healthier lives for longer.



Creating age-friendly services to enable residents to live in their homes for as long as they want.



Promoting age equality and supporting older residents to have their say on the things that matter to them.

The places we live, work, and socialise in, and our communities and services in Sunderland play a key role in enabling people to live healthy, fulfilling, and independent lives. Healthy ageing is everyone's business, we can all benefit and play our part - from individuals to communities and organisations. There is lots we can do to support healthy ageing and increase the number of years that people in Sunderland spend in good health. We have a collective responsibility to ensure that our residents have the opportunity to live independent, healthy, purposeful, and connected lives in older age.

We asked people in Sunderland what healthy ageing means to them...

"Being able to continue doing the things I have always done."

"Being healthy and having appropriate services to maintain independence for longer"

"Not feeling left out and respected despite getting old."

"Good health, positive activities, able to interact with people, coping skills in daily living."

"For all people to be able to live socially active, healthy, meaningful lives into older adulthood."

"Remaining as fit, active and engaged in the wider community for as long as possible."



We're Shining the Light: What's good about ageing in Sunderland?



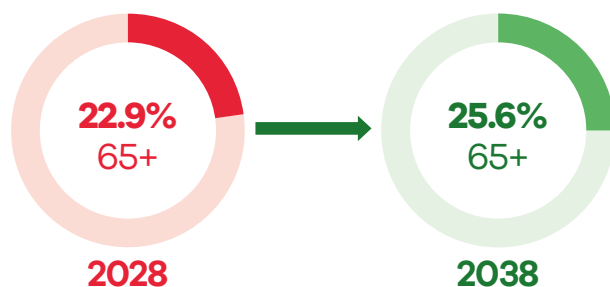
How do we support healthy ageing?

There are so many things that can be done to support residents to increase the amount of time they live in good health in Sunderland including:

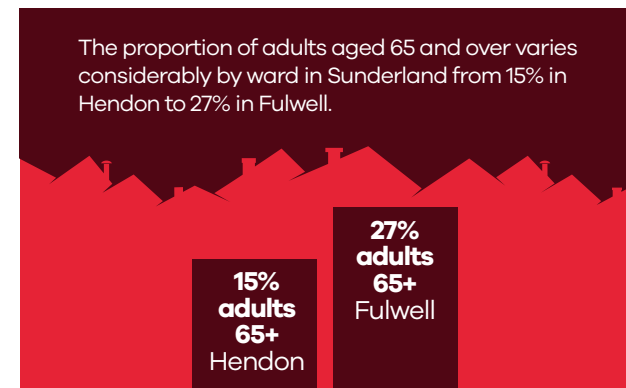
- ✓ creating places, communities and opportunities that enable people to live a healthy and long life. This can include things such as excellent quality work, financial security, safe and secure housing, and social connections.
- ✓ focusing on living a healthy life so that as we age, we remain in good health – planning for our future health.
- ✓ prevention and support programmes which can shorten the time that people spend in poorer health and support people to continue to lead connected, fulfilling, and independent lives.

Inequalities experienced across the life course are cumulative and have a significant impact on a person's health, financial security, wellbeing, and independence in older age. This report focuses on age 50 years and older to contribute to our plan for the future, but with consideration for what we can do at any age to achieve a population who age well and thrive in their later years.

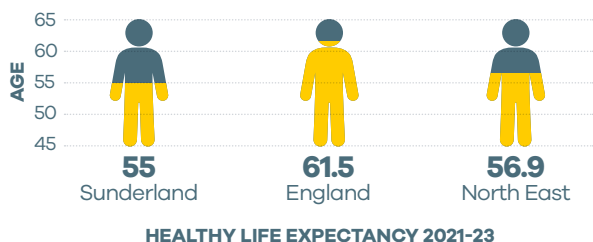
What we know about our ageing population.



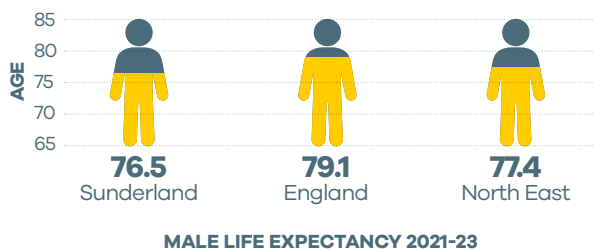
By 2038, 25.6% of Sunderland's population is estimated to be aged 65 and over, compared to 22.9% in 2028.



Healthy life expectancy in Sunderland for men is 55.0 years, lower than the England average of 61.5 years and North East 56.9 (2021-23).



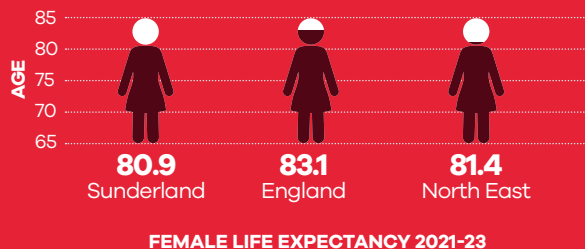
Male life expectancy reduced from 77.3 in 2016-18 to 76.5 in 2021-23, compared to 77.4 for the North East and 79.1 for England.



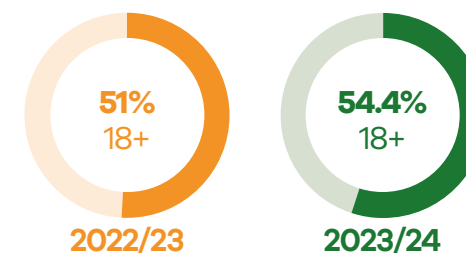
Healthy life expectancy for women is also lower in Sunderland at 55.6 years compared to the England average at 61.9 and North East 57.5 (2021-23).



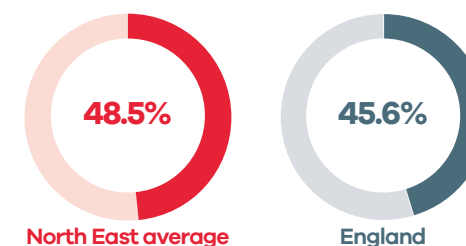
Female life expectancy dropped from 81.4 in 2016-18 to 80.9 in 2021-23, compared to 81.4 for the North East and 83.1 for England.



Social care users in Sunderland



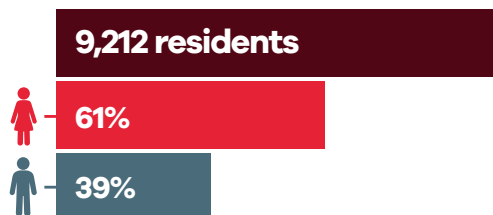
The percentage of adult social care users (aged 18+) in Sunderland who have as much social contact as they would like, increased from 51.0% in 2022/23 to 54.4% in 2023/24.



This is higher than the North East (48.5%) and England (45.6%) averages.

What we know about our ageing population.

Claiming Attendance Allowance

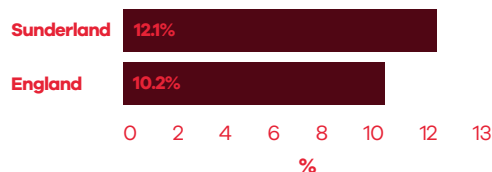


9,212 residents are claiming attendance allowance in Sunderland, 61% are women.

During 2022/23, Sunderland had a rate of 764 per 100,000 residents (aged 65-74) registered blind or partially sighted, this is the highest in the North East and significantly higher than both the England (533) and North East (527) averages.



Estimated prevalence of common mental health disorder of population aged 65 and over was 12.1% in Sunderland, 10.2% in England (2017 data).



62.3% of adults in Sunderland were physically active in 2022/23, similar to both the North East (61.7%) and England (63.4%) averages.



62.3% of adults are physically active



1 in 4 older people are digitally excluded in Sunderland.



of those aged 75 and older have stated they do not know how to use the internet.

Over 68% of people accessing stop smoking services were aged 45 or over (April 2023 to March 24).



The number of adults aged 65 and over whose long-term support needs are met by admission to a residential and nursing care homes in 23/24 was 1,019 per 100,000 population compared to 561 per 100,000 for England.

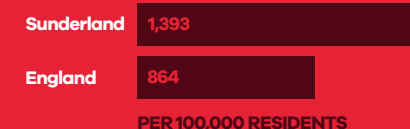


The number of households headed by someone aged 65 or over is expected to increase by 12,583 (+276%) by 2033.

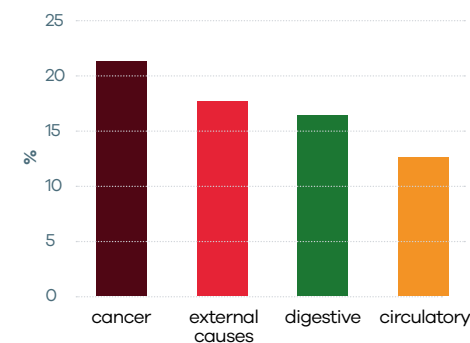
Men are more likely to drink alcohol than women. Men aged 45-64 and women aged 35-54 are most likely to drink alcohol.



In 2023/24 the hospital admission episodes for alcohol-related conditions in those 65 and over was 1,393 per 100,000 population for Sunderland compared to 864 per 100,000 population for England.



The biggest contributors to the life expectancy gap between Sunderland and England were cancer (21.8%), external causes (17.2%), digestive (16.3%) and circulatory (12.6%).



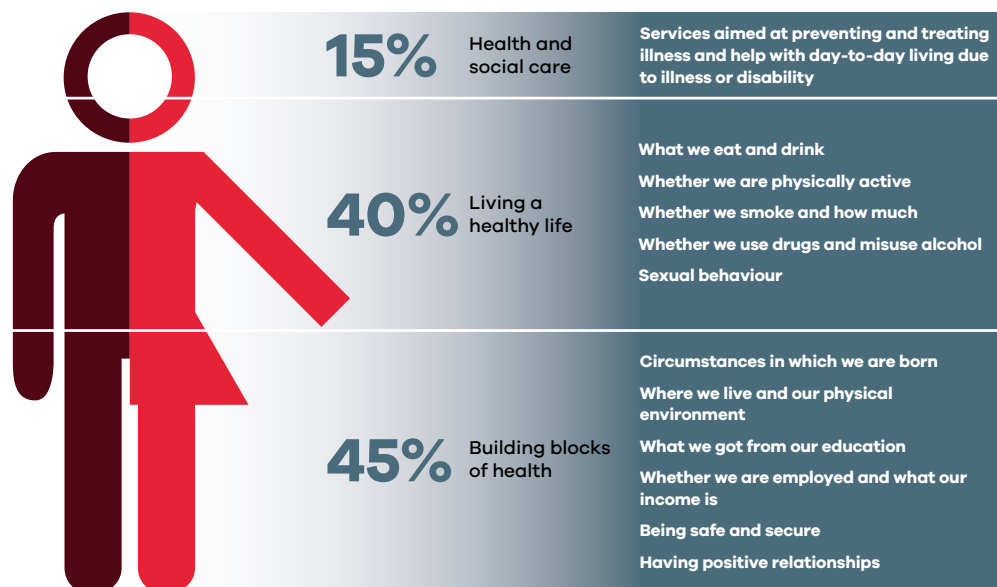
BIGGEST CONTRIBUTORS TO THE LIFE EXPECTANCY GAP BETWEEN SUNDERLAND AND ENGLAND

Healthy places

Our health is shaped by the place in which we are born, grow, live, and work. These factors play the biggest role in our health. These social or wider determinants of health are not experienced equally. This means that the chance of being healthy and ageing in good health is not equally distributed across Sunderland. People living in more deprived areas are generally less likely to experience financial security, good employment, education and housing throughout their lives meaning essential components for good health are missing.

The 'What makes us Healthy and Happy' model shows the complex interaction between individual characteristics, health risks and our physical, social and economic environment. In this section we will discuss the position in Sunderland and how improving the environment can help support good health therefore increase the number of years people live in good health.

What makes us healthy and happy



(McGinnis, JM, Williams-Russo, P. and Knickman, J.R. (2002) The case for more active policy attention to health promotion. Health Affairs 21 (2) pp.78-93)

Commercial Determinants of Health

The Commercial Determinants of Health (CDoH) refer to the ways in which private sector activities and practices influence health and wellbeing, either positively or negatively, throughout our lives, including as we age. These influences often come in the form of products and services such as unhealthy food and drinks, alcohol, and gambling.

CDoH can negatively impact health by shaping environments that encourage unhealthy behaviors. For example, the prevalence of fast food outlets, alcohol retailers, and limited access to nutritious food or safe spaces for physical activity can contribute to poor health outcomes, particularly in older age. Impacts of CDoH are also experienced differently across our population, affecting health outcomes and widening inequalities

The 2022/23 Director of Public Health report for Sunderland focused on the CDoH, highlighting the impact CDoH has on the health of our residents. Recommendations were made to influence and improve CDoH at a local level, and the progress on these is detailed at the end of this report. Continuing to address CDoH is important for improving healthy life expectancy in Sunderland. If we do not focus on both the social and commercial determinants of health, we risk widening health inequalities because the opportunities to make change are not equal throughout our population.



Public and outdoor spaces

Spending time outside and having contact with nature can have many positive effects on health and wellbeing including physical health, mental health, and emotional health. Research has shown that spending time in high quality outdoor spaces has benefits for all aspects of our health⁶. Providing environments where residents can access good quality outdoor space supports living in good health.

All environments should support physical activity equitably across all ages, ethnicities, genders, and abilities, enabling everyone to be active and build long-term active habits and behaviours⁷. In Sunderland, we have many outdoor spaces including our beautiful parks, beaches, and countryside. Most people have some kind of outdoor space with some nature close to where they live, work, or go to school. It is important that we create outdoor spaces that are safe and support active travel, ensuring equity in access for those with disabilities.

In later life, accessing outdoor spaces may become more difficult due to mobility, travel, and financial wellbeing. Supporting older people to make use of our outdoor places can help guard against key health issues like depression and heart disease. Sunderland City Council have included public health considerations in the design and refurbishment of parks, which is considered age friendly for future developments.

“

“I love where I live, it is green and I am surrounded by good neighbours. I am near shops and can get the bus into town when I need it.”

(Ageing Well Ambassador)

”



Healthy Places - Tree Planting in Sunderland

In 2023-24, 13,950 trees were planted in Sunderland. Trees provide shade and cooling, reducing the urban heat island effect as well as improving water management by reducing flood risk and providing drought resilience. They also reduce air pollution and enhance mental and physical wellbeing.

[City sees thousands of new trees take root - My Sunderland.](#)



Housing

Housing is a key determinant of health. Everyone needs a safe place to call home and having a safe, warm, and clean home is essential for good health and wellbeing. The quality and suitability of where we live are crucial in preventing the onset of ill-health, supporting recovery, and slowing the deterioration of certain conditions. In Sunderland, some people live in homes that do not support health – problems like damp, mould and overcrowding can all significantly impact physical and mental health. Nationally, nearly eight million people live in a home that does not meet the government's definition of basic decency, 15% of homes⁸. The Centre for Ageing Better have launched a campaign called 'Safe Homes Now' to highlight the consequences of England's poor-quality housing for various groups [Safe Homes Now | Centre for Ageing Better](#).

Older people's health and wellbeing are more likely to be affected by poor living conditions⁹. A poorly maintained home can make existing problems worse. Unsafe homes can lead to a risk of injury from falls and living alone can lead to loneliness and social isolation in older age. As our older population grows there will be an increased demand for suitable housing. It is important to plan for future housing needs, ensuring equity in the locations new homes are built so all residents have the opportunity to live their older years in their chosen location.

Supporting people to age well at home

It is important that people in Sunderland are supported to live in their own home for as long as they want, but this needs to be in good quality homes that are safe and support health. Homes need to be suitable for people with mobility issues to support people to live independently, be connected and have access to the support they require.

Current availability: Across Sunderland, there are around 4,879 units of specialist older persons accommodation. This includes 2,094 units of residential care and 2,785 specialist older persons homes.

Extra care schemes: There are 12 extra care schemes in Sunderland with a total of 848 apartments available. Extra care housing enables people to maintain their independence and live in their own property for as long as possible, with high-quality care and support delivered by staff who are based on site providing both flexible planned and unplanned care and support as well as practical, emotional and social support that maximizes a sense of wellbeing. CQC reports indicate that all schemes are rated as good or outstanding.

Providers: Sunderland Care and Support (SCaS) deliver a range of social care, and support services to residents across Sunderland. The council has worked with providers of community-based services and has reduced the numbers waiting for community care packages. This has helped more older adults to maintain their independence by receiving care provision at home.

Future need: An additional 1,997 units of specialist older person accommodation are estimated to be required by 2035.

Private rented sector: For older people living in the private rented sector some reassurance can be sought from the recent Renters' Rights proposal. This is to abolish Section 21 'no fault evictions' applying to the private rented sector and the Decent Homes Standard and Awaab's Law, which gives landlords legal obligations to make homes safe within certain time limits. This will provide some reassurance for the rapidly growing number of older people living in the private rented sector including many struggling to cope with costs, damp and mould, poor insulation, or dangerous homes.

Healthy Places - Care Closer to Home

Care Closer to Home is a project which brings together services from across the city that provide preventative care, predicting health problems and reactive or urgent care. This 'One Sunderland' approach to frailty will address a wide range of issues for people with frailty including any immediate or long term physical and mental health problems or social care problems.



Homelessness

Homelessness can affect people of all ages. In Sunderland, the data shows that homeless people are generally under the age of 50. The Centre for Policy on Ageing (CPA) estimated that in England on any one night around 400 older people aged 55 and above may be sleeping rough and make up between 9 and 12 per cent of people sleeping rough¹⁰.

Older people who are homeless are likely to face more health challenges including exacerbation of ill health, social isolation, and digital exclusion.

The average age of death in people experiencing homeless is drastically lower than the general population¹¹. There is also a negative impact of homelessness in earlier age with a higher proportion of people smoking, drinking excessively and with poor mental health - which contributes to poorer health in old age.

Residents can access help through the Housing Options Team (0800 2346084) [Homeless and Housing Advice - Sunderland City Council](#) and advice for older people is available from Age UK [Homelessness and emergency housing for older people](#) | Age UK.

Healthy Places - Assisted Living

Assisted living schemes provided by organisations such as Anchor Housing help people enjoy later life. Specialist housing and care provide choice and opportunity for people to stay at home for as long as they wish.



Financial wellbeing

Poverty is a significant issue in Sunderland. When people do not have enough money to meet basic needs such as heating their home, paying rent, and buying essentials such as food, it has a significant impact on physical and mental health. People cannot live a healthy life in a cold home without healthy food – this will impact how people age. To live a healthy life and age well, residents need to be financially secure. The cost-of-living crisis has had the biggest impact on our poorest residents.

Many people over 60 in Sunderland are living in poverty. According to the 2019 income deprivation affecting older people index (IDAOPI), 21.7% experience income deprivation, which is approximately 14,833 people. This is significantly higher than the England average of 14.2%. Only three wards in Sunderland are better than the England average with 20 of our 25 wards significantly worse than the England average (see figure 1).

Supporting residents to have financial security is a priority for Sunderland City Council. Pension credit tops up income and also serves as a way of qualifying for government means-tested cost-of-living payments. Some older residents eligible for pension credits do not receive them. As of May 2024, there were 55,748 pensioners receiving State Pension, 14,787 of whom were 80 or over, but only 9,293 receiving Pension Credit. It is estimated that full pension credit uptake could, over time, reduce pressure on health and social care services, worth approximately £4 billion per year. Advice about pension credit can be found here [Pension Credit - Sunderland City Council](#) and Age UK Sunderland offer advice and support to older people about accessing benefits - [Age UK Sunderland | Information and advice for later life](#).

Due to the cost-of-living crisis, many residents are living in fuel poverty. This is a significant health risk increasing the risk of strokes and heart attacks. In 2024 the winter Fuel Payment eligibility criteria changed and not all pensioners were eligible. In 2024, Sunderland City Council provided additional funds to residents who were not eligible for the winter fuel payment.

Recent changes have been announced which mean most people of State Pension age will receive the winter Fuel Payment [this coming winter](#). Financial security and the ability of our residents to heat their homes remains an important issue. Residents can find information about financial support available here [Help with debt and finances - Sunderland City Council](#) and [Get help and advice - Sunderland City Council](#).

Figure 1: Income deprivation affecting older people index (IDAOPI) in Sunderland, 2019

Area	Count	Value	95% Lower CI	95% Upper CI
England	1,790,712	14.2	14.2	14.2
Sunderland	14,833	21.7	21.4	22.0
Hendon	1,040	42.3	40.4	44.3
Redhill	831	33.5	31.6	35.4
Southwick	824	32.1	30.3	34.0
Castle	799	31.0	29.3	32.8
St Anne's	663	30.2	28.3	32.2
Sandhill	835	30.2	28.5	31.9
Pallion	761	28.9	27.2	30.7
Millfield	580	27.1	25.8	29.6
St Chad's	720	24.1	22.6	25.7
Washington North	560	22.7	21.1	24.4
Ryhope	608	22.6	21.0	24.2
Hetton	656	21.2	19.8	22.7
Silksworth	577	20.8	19.3	22.4
Doxford	534	20.3	18.8	21.9
Houghton	557	18.2	16.9	19.6
Shiney Row	494	18.0	16.6	19.5
Copt Hill	517	17.9	16.5	19.3
St Peter's	587	17.6	16.4	18.9
Barnes	405	15.7	14.3	17.1
Washington Central	497	15.5	14.3	16.8
Washington West	462	15.1	13.8	16.4
Washington East	409	13.8	12.6	15.1
Washington South	322	12.8	11.6	14.2
St Michael's	319	12.5	11.3	13.8
Fulwell	275	9.1	8.1	10.2

Local people have told us that improving financial wellbeing would help them stay happy and healthy as they age.

Ageing Well Ambassadors



Employment

Good quality work supports health and wellbeing throughout people's lives and protects against social exclusion, helping people achieve a healthy life expectancy. Poor work, however, can be bad for health and wellbeing and is associated with an increased risk of illness and death. Insecure, irregular or low paid work can make it hard to secure decent housing, pay bills and buy food. This can have a significant impact on physical and mental health, reducing the ability to live a healthy life and age well. We need to create an environment that provides good quality, secure work for our residents.

Changing work as we age

As we age, the type of work we can do may change. For example, manual employment with a significant amount of physical labour may not be possible for some as they get older. As people age, they may need support to continue working, for example by retraining or moving to more appropriate jobs.

Economic inactivity

Some working age older people may not be in employment or looking for employment (economically inactive) due to health or caring responsibilities. Long term sickness is a major reason for economic inactivity in older people. However, the unemployment rate of older workers is lower than for younger age groups. Almost a quarter of 16–64 year olds in Sunderland are economically inactive (December 2023) [Sunderland's employment, unemployment and economic inactivity - ONS](#).

Support

The Government has announced a White Paper on the 'Plan to Get Britain Working', which aims to increase employment and provide better training. To meet the goals in the paper, employment rates will need to increase most in those aged 18-24 and 50-64.

Almost half of people out of work due to ill health are aged 50 to 64. People in their 50s and 60s who develop new health conditions face challenges in work. Tackling health-related economic inactivity among people aged over 50 means addressing both the practical barriers faced and ageist attitudes and assumptions.

There is support for people over 50 trying to find work. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has a network of dedicated 50 plus champions who help people over 50 find work. In Sunderland, these champions are also Ageing Well Ambassadors, providing valuable information and advice. Like Sunderland City Council, the DWP has signed the Age-friendly Employer Pledge, recognising the benefits of a multigenerational workforce and encouraging other employers to sign up - [Age-friendly Employer Pledge | Centre for Ageing Better](#).

Employment is essential for good health, so we need to work closely with local employers to create opportunities for good quality work. This will lead to substantial benefits to the population as they age.

Adverse weather and climate change

Extreme weather such as hot and cold weather, flooding from heavy rain and snowfall can impact health.

There are likely to be long term shifts in temperature and weather patterns due to climate change and this will not affect everyone's health equally. For example, health inequalities that are a result of climate change are likely to increase for certain groups such as older people, people living in deprived areas and those with chronic long-term conditions.

The Faculty of Public Health recognise climate change as the greatest threat to human health we currently face. It is important to advocate for meaningful change and highlight the role that organisations can play in creating a more sustainable future.

In Sunderland, a Climate Change Risk Assessment has been developed to align with the UK Climate Risk Independent Assessment (CCRA3). This assessment will form the basis of an Adaptation Plan, covering climate risks across various sectors and will consider levels of deprivation and inequalities. The plan will highlight vulnerable areas, such as older people, and develop actions to address climate change.

Healthy Places - Climate Action Sunderland

Climate Action Sunderland is a group of people in the city who are ageing well and are concerned about the environment and the climate crisis. This group seek to offer practical advice, influence public policy makers with reference to the Sunderland and wider North East area, and support other groups or individuals with similar concerns. [Climate Action Sunderland | Facebook](#).



Healthy communities

Healthy communities are places that support the health and wellbeing of their residents. They do this by promoting population health, building on community assets and reducing inequalities. In this section, we will discuss the social circumstances needed to support people to have active and fulfilling later lives, including community and social connections and prevention.

Inequalities

Health inequalities are the unfair and avoidable differences in health between different groups¹⁵. These differences are due various factors including socioeconomic, environmental, and health-related behaviours.

Inequalities and ageing are closely linked. A person's early life affects their health in later life. Inequalities that build up during a person's life can worsen in older age. Poverty, poor health and age-related discrimination can have a significant impact on older people's health.

The Director of Public Health Annual Report for 2021/22 "Same Storm Different Boats" looked in detail at the impacts of the COVID pandemic and inequalities in Sunderland. It provided key recommendations on how to address these issues.

Low healthy life expectancy in Sunderland is a key sign of inequalities. People in Sunderland live shorter healthy lives, spending more years in poor health. To improve healthy life expectancy, we need to address health inequalities and close the gap. This is a very complex issue and will require a whole system approach. Age International have noted that addressing these inequalities in later life can still have a significant impact on the health of older people (Inequality and Ageing | Age International).

To address health inequalities and low healthy life expectancy we must look at what the main causes are. The Segment Tool¹⁶ provides information on the causes of death that are driving inequalities in life expectancy at local area level. For men, the biggest contributors to the life expectancy gap between Sunderland and England from 2020/21 were cancer (21.8%), external causes (17.2%), digestive (16.3%) and circulatory (12.6%). For women the main contributors were cancer (21.5%), respiratory (18.4%) and digestive (16.7%).

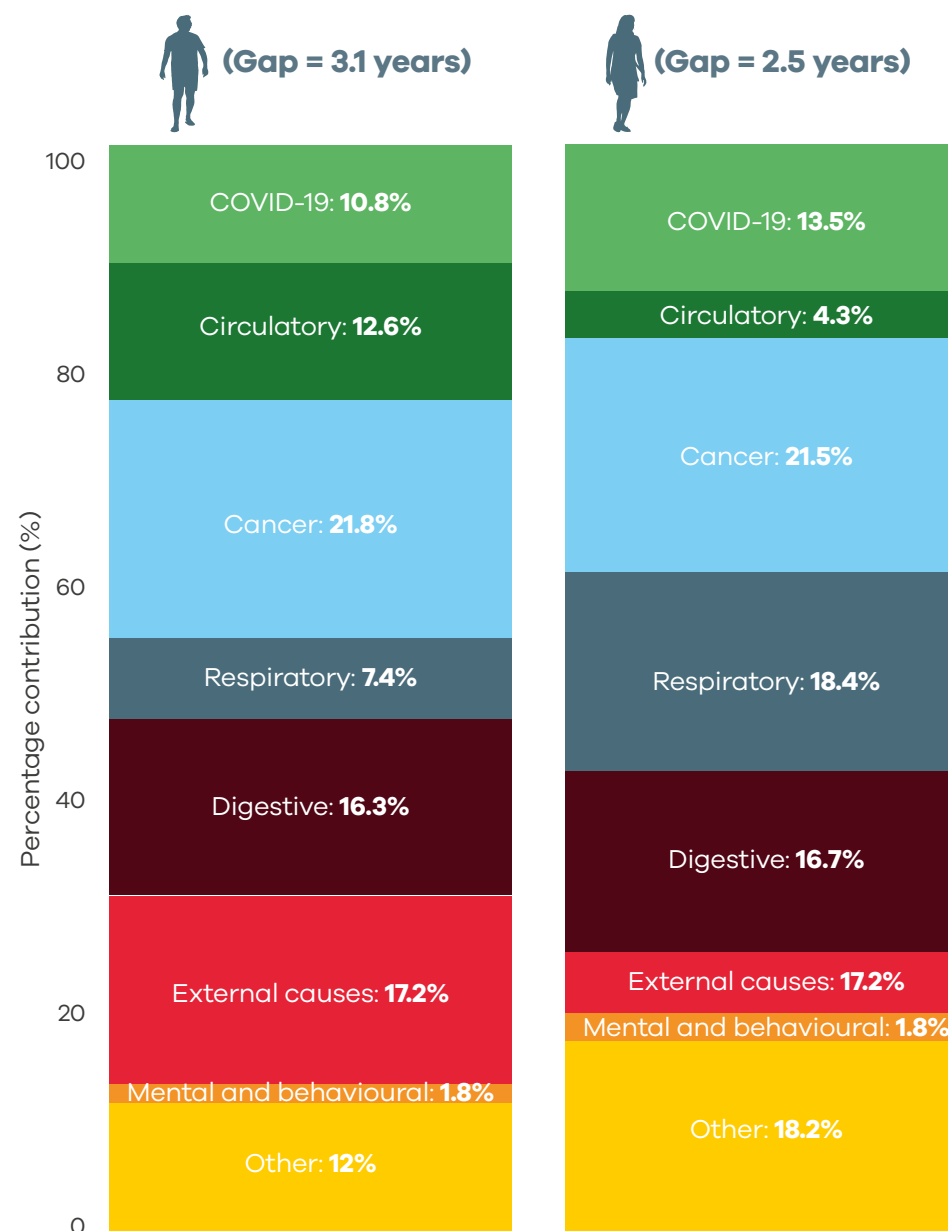


Figure 2: Breakdown of the life expectancy gap between Sunderland and England by cause of death, 2020 to 2021

Prevention

Population prevention means supporting people to stay healthy, happy, and independent for as long as possible and achieving a healthy life expectancy. This goal is just as relevant for a 70-year-old as it is for a seven-year-old. Much of ill health is preventable, which involves stopping problems before they start, focusing on keeping people healthy rather than just treating them when they become ill. And if they do become ill, it means supporting them to manage their health earlier and more effectively.

We all have a part to play in looking after ourselves and investing in our health for later life. Ageing does not mean that we cannot have good health as we grow older. The ability to have a healthy life is not equal across Sunderland, so creating an environment that allows our residents to live healthy lives is very important. We need to support people to acquire the knowledge, skills, confidence and resources to take control of their lives and prevent ill health.

We know that prevention works. In Sunderland all residents have access to the [Links for Life](#) digital platform, which provides information about self-care and support services, linked to this we are working to [reduce digital poverty](#). Another excellent example of how Sunderland residents are being supported to prevent ill health is the evidence-based [strength and balance programme](#) running across the city to prevent falls. The programme not only helps people physically but also provides the opportunity to meet new friends.

A preventative approach requires long-term planning and spending to see the full benefits. If outcomes improve in the short term, a continued investment is likely needed to continue to see these benefits¹⁷. International studies suggests that past investments in prevention have had a significant long-term social return, with around £14 of social benefit for every £1 spent¹⁸.

Sunderland City Council has developed an [Adult Services Prevention Strategy](#). The strategy aims to help residents live safely and independently, especially those living with a disability, long-term health condition or the effects of old age. The goal is to prevent, reduce or delay the need for formal care and support services by working in partnership with individuals and our colleagues in health, care, and voluntary services.

Sunderland faces significant challenges in developing a preventative approach. We need to focus on preventing rising levels of people living with obesity, mental illness, age-related conditions like dementia, and a growing, ageing, and diversifying population, often living with multiple, long-term conditions such as diabetes, asthma, and arthritis. Policy direction is moving more care from hospitals into the community and moving from tackling sickness to improving prevention. The health system in Sunderland will need to build on the collaborative approach to improve the prevention element of health.

Healthy Communities - Links for Life

Links for Life is an innovative programme launched in Sunderland which incorporates social prescribing. There is a growing body of evidence that social prescribing can lead to a range of positive health and wellbeing outcomes. Studies have pointed to improvements in quality of life and emotional wellbeing, mental and general wellbeing, and reducing levels of depression and anxiety. [Links for Life Sunderland](#) is an opportunity to help people make links in their local communities and can promote social interaction and reduce social isolation and loneliness for older people and throughout the life course.



Healthy Communities - Otago Strength and Balance Programme

Otago Strength and Balance Programme is a falls prevention exercise programme for older people. It was designed to prevent falls by strengthening muscles and improving balance. This exercise programme, which is funded by Sunderland City Council, aims to improve independence and confidence and reduce falls, whilst promoting healthy ageing and a lifelong participation in exercise and activity - [Strength and Balance Video](#), [Falls Prevention | Links for Life Sunderland](#)

Co-production

Designing services with the people who will use them is vital if those services are going to succeed.

Co-production is a way of working that involves people who use health and care services, carers and communities in equal partnership; and which engages groups of people at the earliest stages of service design, development and evaluation.

Our thriving Ageing Well Ambassador programme is a great example of how co-production is embraced in Sunderland, with Ambassadors representing the voice of people ageing in Sunderland.

Healthy Communities - We'ar Shining the Light

We'ar Shining the Light is a news team made up of community reporters aged 50 and above from across Sunderland. The team capture stories that break ageing stereotypes and gather positive stories of later life. As well as reporting on arts and culture, sport and nostalgia stories, the team will also shine a light on the challenges faced by the ageing population - [We'ar Shining the Light | Facebook](#).



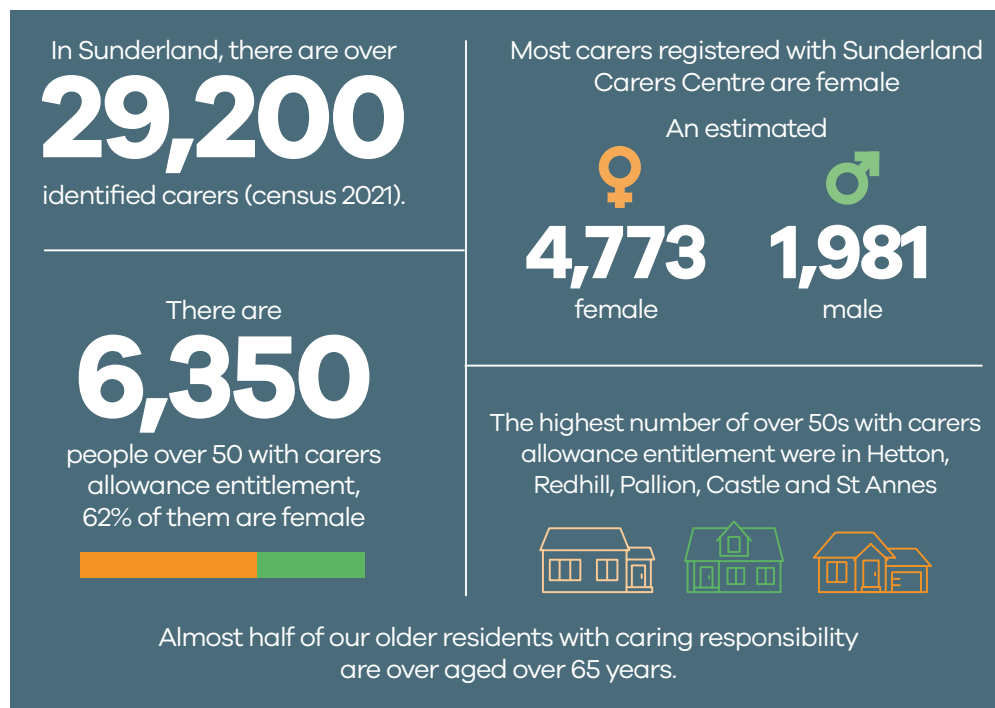
Healthy Communities - Ageing Well Ambassador Programme

The ageing Well Ambassador Programme was initiated by the Ageing Well Delivery Board to engage with local people who are ageing well. An Ageing Well Ambassador is a voluntary role for those aged 50+ living in Sunderland, who will take action to help raise awareness and spread the age-friendly message to others. Ambassadors are co-designers with partners of age-friendly ideas, initiatives, and developments across the city. Ambassadors promote age friendly Sunderland within their workplace, sports team, place of worship, with family and friends or anywhere in their community - [Sunderland Ageing Well Ambassadors](#).

Carers

A carer is anyone, including children and adults who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction. The care they provide is unpaid. Many residents have caring responsibilities, and it is important that they are supported to provide their caring responsibilities alongside maintaining their own good health.

As we age our caring responsibility for loved ones often increases. People may care for children, parents, grandparents and extended family members. Some individuals have multiple caring roles for example, caring for children whilst also caring for their parents. Carers are often of working age, and employment can be affected by caring responsibilities. As our healthy life expectancy in Sunderland is low, many people will have caring responsibilities whilst living with ill health. We must support carers with their caring responsibilities whilst maintaining good health themselves.



Healthy Communities - Sunderland Carers Centre

Sunderland Carers Centre provides support for people who look after others in a personal capacity. They support people who care for their family and friends offering information advice and guidance to carers in and around Sunderland <https://sunderlandcarers.co.uk/>



Some of our residents provide kinship care, which is when a child lives full-time or most of the time with a relative or family friend. Grandparents are most commonly kinship carers, but they can also be older siblings, extended family members and friends. In Sunderland, it is estimated that there are 1,440 kinship carers. (Office for National Statistics 2021 Census). The Kinship Team at Together for Children, provide advice and guidance in Sunderland, for advice email kinshipteam@togetherforchildren.org.uk.

Support for Kinship Carers can also be accessed from [More than Grandparents](#).

Carers provide vital support for those they care for. We need to ensure that carers are supported in the right way to ensure that they can continue to provide care but also look after their own health and wellbeing. Residents with caring responsibility can access support from the [Sunderland Carers Centre](#).

“

“Being a Kinship Carer is like being a first-time parent all over again. You have to live and experience it to fully understand just how much of a shock to the system it can be. It is a choice I would make again in a heartbeat if I had to, but it is by no means a walk in the park. How easy or how difficult it can be depends massively on the level of support you get from around you.... We are exceptionally lucky to have such helpful caring people who we can turn to as part of the More Than Grandparents group but so many others are not as fortunate. Hopefully one day things will get better but in the meantime I’m just so grateful for everything that More Than Grandparents have done.”

Local Kinship carer.

”

Healthy Communities - More than Grandparents

More than Grandparents is an independent registered charity based in Sunderland run by and for kinship carers and their families. They support kinship families across Tyne and Wear, County Durham, and Northumberland

[More than Grandparents](#)

Connectedness

Connectedness is when we have a close relationship with people or things. Most people need to connect with others, and this can affect every aspect of our lives, including our mental and physical health, and even how long we live.

Social isolation is the absence of social contact. Some factors have been shown to increase the likelihood of older people experiencing social isolation, such as the loss of friends, family, mobility, and income. Older people can be more vulnerable to social isolation. Residents who experience social isolation need support to help them integrate into society in a way that suits them. Safety concerns, physical barriers and age-segregated living and lack of opportunities for social interactions can limit the opportunities people have to meet and interact with other people.

Creating an environment that supports people of all ages and abilities to have the social contact they would like is very important for health throughout life. Supporting spaces for social encounters for older people is key to developing age-friendly neighbourhoods. Local research in Sunderland shows that residents who experienced loneliness want to feel connected to their community¹⁹. Age is a significant risk factor for loneliness and social isolation and those in rural or coastal areas may be at higher risk²⁰. Tackling social isolation through supporting social contact is important for allowing people to 'age in place'. The Links for Life Sunderland programme brings together partners to support residents who may be experiencing social isolation.

In Sunderland we are developing an intergenerational approach, which aims to connect people of all ages, recognising the value of diverse experiences and fostering meaningful interactions across age groups. This can lead to a more inclusive and cohesive community²¹. When different generations work together there can be so many benefits as shown in Figure 3²²:

Figure 3: Intergenerational practice



For many people community groups allow people to get out, be sociable and access additional resources and support.

(Ageing Well ambassador)

Our Ambassadors have reported the importance of volunteering roles: **“opportunities for older people to participate in the community when they retire from paid employment were needed,” and “more opportunities for volunteering.”**

Health protection

Health protection describes the protection of the population from the impact of infectious diseases, environmental, chemical, and radiological threats. Older people are often more vulnerable to the impact of health protection issues.

Our immune system is essential to protect us against infectious diseases. As we age it can weaken making us more susceptible to infection. Maintaining good overall health helps protect us from infection. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how some infectious diseases can significantly affect older people disproportionately.

Vaccination

Vaccination is an important way that we can all be protected from certain diseases. Adults aged 65 and over are recommended to have the pneumococcal, shingles and flu vaccinations. In 2024 respiratory syncytial virus vaccination was added for adults aged 75 years with a catch-up campaign. Adults younger than 65 years with a weakened immune system or certain chronic conditions are also eligible for some vaccinations. Information about vaccination can be found here [NHS vaccinations and when to have them - NHS](#). There are inequalities in uptake of some vaccinations across Sunderland. Reducing these inequalities is a priority as highlighted in the [NHS England vaccination strategy](#).

Screening programmes

Screening programmes can help detect diseases early, even before symptoms appear. Screening helps to keep people healthy including supporting older people to age well. Partners need to work together to help older people understand the benefits of screening and ensuring screening is accessible. Improving uptake in younger people will also help keep people healthy and support them to age well. Details of screening programmes can be found here [NHS screening - NHS](#).

Infection control in care homes

Nursing and residential homes are susceptible to outbreaks of infectious diseases. Good infection, prevention and control in care homes is important to prevent outbreaks and limit the spread of infection, helping people to remain healthy. In Sunderland there is a dedicated community infection control team based within Sunderland and South Tyneside Foundation Trust who work closely with care providers to maintain a healthy environment through education, advice and regular audits.

Healthy people

There are many things that contribute to having a healthy life. In this section we will look at factors that support healthy living, such as physical activity, stopping smoking and reducing alcohol consumption as well as addressing what actions need to be taken to improve the healthy life expectancy in Sunderland.

Healthy life expectancy

Healthy life expectancy at birth is an estimate of the average number of years babies born in a given year would live in good general health. It's a good indicator of the quality of health. In Sunderland the healthy life expectancy is low - 55.0 years for males and 56.6 for females. Both are lower than the England and North East averages (figures 4-7). This means many residents are spending most of their older years in ill health.

Figure 4: Inequalities in life expectancy and health life expectancy at birth for Sunderland compared to England for males 2021-23 (Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care)

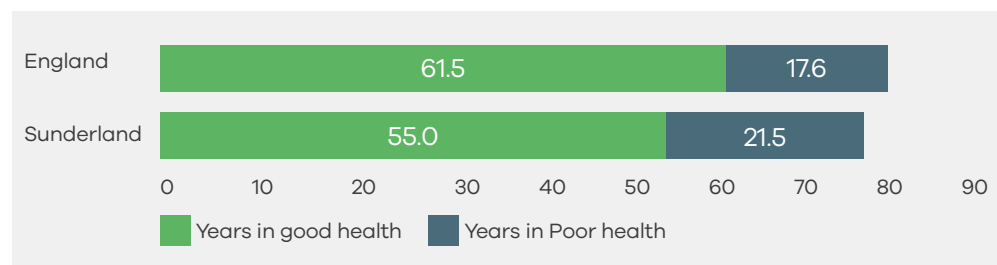
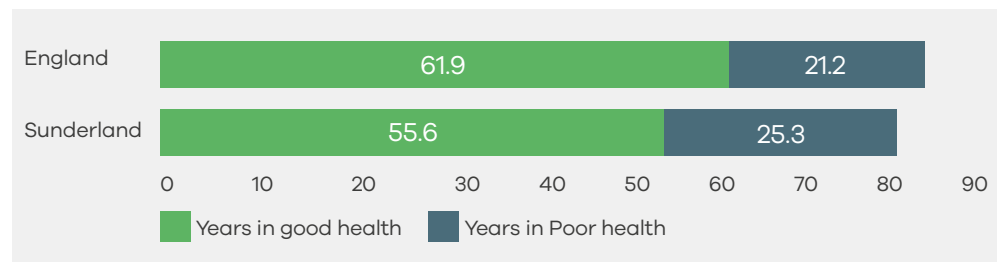


Figure 5: Inequalities in life expectancy and health life expectancy at birth for Sunderland compared to England for females 2021-23



Healthy life expectancy has been declining in Sunderland, similar to trends in the North East and England (figures 4-7). However, the gap between Sunderland and the North East and Sunderland and England has narrowed recently for both males and females. This decline is due to factors such as smoking, alcohol, healthy weight, low levels of physical activity and the cost-of-living crisis. The COVID pandemic has worsened this situation.

Figure 6: Healthy life expectancy over time for Sunderland, North East and England for females

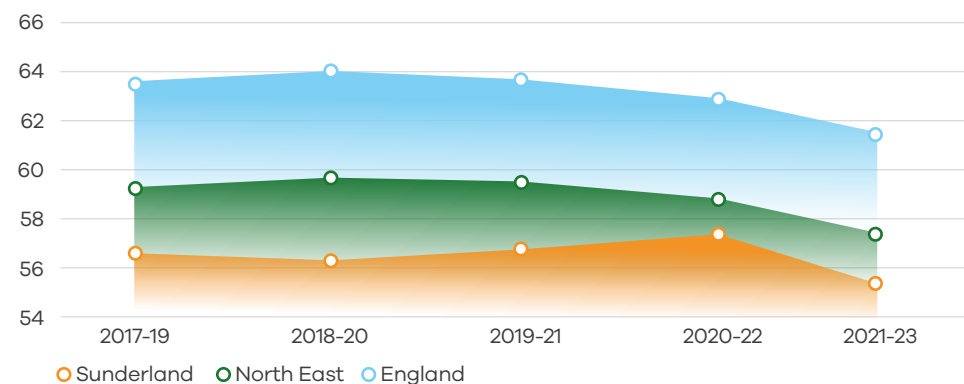
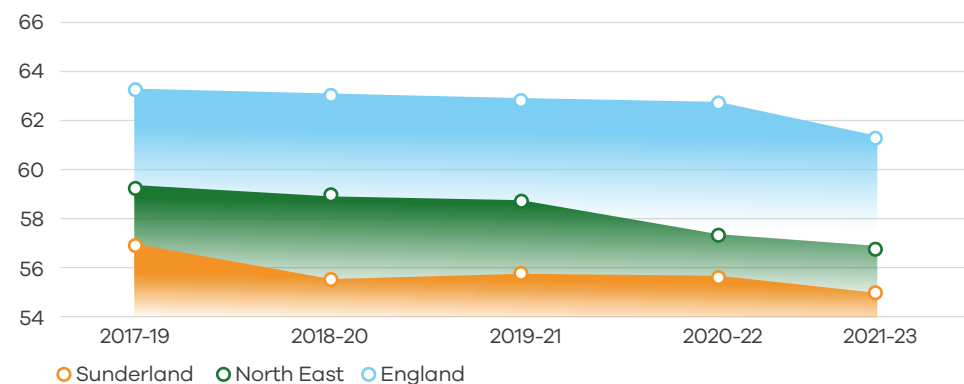


Figure 7: Healthy life expectancy over time for Sunderland, North East and England for males



How we age is influenced by environmental factors such as physical activity, nutrition and access to healthcare. These factors are not experienced equally by our residents. To improve healthy life expectancy in Sunderland opportunities for physical activity, access to good quality food, housing and financial security all need to be improved. Promoting healthy places for everyone is essential. All partners who can impact the factors that influence how we age should work together to address these issues and implement the recommendations in this report.

Smoking

Smoking has a big impact on how we age. It is the leading preventable cause of illness and death in Sunderland, the North East and England. Smoking causes the most harm to the poorest and most vulnerable people, adding to health inequalities. There is no safe level of exposure to tobacco smoke including second-hand smoke (passive smoking). Smoking can cause heart disease, lung cancer and other health problems. Stopping smoking is one of the biggest interventions to support living longer and achieving a healthy life expectancy.

Smoking in Sunderland²³:

- **12.3% adults smoke.** The highest smoking rate is amongst younger age groups, and the lowest rate is amongst those aged over 65.
- **17.9% of 55–64-year-olds and 10% of over 65s smoke.**
- **Each year approximately 512 people die from smoking related illness in Sunderland.** For every death around 30 smokers live with a smoking-related disease.
- **4,846 people were admitted to hospital because of smoking** related cause in 2019-20.
- Between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 about **68% of people accessing stop smoking services were aged 45 or over.**



The Sunderland Smokefree Partnership has an action plan and performance framework to achieve a smokefree future in Sunderland. This has also been informed by the findings of the Smoking Health Equity Audit. There is dedicated support in Sunderland to help residents stop smoking - [Home - Sunderland Smoking Service](#). Supporting people throughout the life course to access this service will reduce smoking rates and improve overall health.

Alcohol

Like smoking, drinking alcohol affects how we age. Alcohol increases the risk of injury, worsening of health problems, increasing risk of some cancers and speeding up ageing. Older people may feel the effects of alcohol more strongly, increasing their risk of accidents such as falls and fractures. This is especially true for older women. Limiting alcohol consumption significantly supports healthy ageing.

Men are more likely to drink alcohol than women and men aged 45–64 years and women aged 35–54 years are most likely to drink alcohol. We also know that admission for alcohol related conditions in 2022/23 for those over 65 in Sunderland was 1,177 per 100,000, which is significantly higher than in the North East at 1,043 and England at 809.

Some individuals may develop a harmful dependence on alcohol in response to significant life changes, such as the loss of a spouse or loved one, relocating to a new home, or experiencing a decline in health. These events can lead to feelings of loneliness, boredom, anxiety, or depression, which may increase the risk of increased alcohol consumption. Additionally, alcohol consumption can significantly exacerbate the symptoms of perimenopause, further impacting health and wellbeing.

Reducing alcohol harm is a key priority within our [Healthy City Plan](#). Whilst progress has been made, most health outcomes remain poorer than the England average. The harms caused by alcohol place a significant burden on individuals, families, and communities. It contributes to health inequalities and is one of the primary causes of premature death. Sunderland has the highest rate of alcohol-specific mortality in England at 31.4 per 100,000 compared to 15.0 per 100,000 for England²⁵.

Sunderland has a Drug and Alcohol Harm Reduction Partnership, which has a strategy, “Calling time: it’s time to rethink drink”, with a supporting action plan. Residents have access to an Integrated Drug and Alcohol Service [Drug and alcohol support in Sunderland | Change Grow Live](#).

Healthy weight and nutrition

Healthy weight and good nutrition help prevent chronic diseases, maintain muscle mass, prevent bone loss, support a healthy immune system, and maintain brain health supporting us to age well.

Living with obesity is a significant and complex public health issue. It can affect health and wellbeing and increases the risk of developing a range of diseases including certain cancers, high blood pressure, and type 2 diabetes. In Sunderland about 30.2% of 55–64-year-olds (11,899) and 27.2% of 65 years and older (16,078) are living with obesity (data from NECS ICB).

Food poverty is a significant issue for some populations and affects access to healthy and nutritious food. Some older people are at risk of malnutrition, and it is estimated that one in ten people over the age of 65 are at risk. Being underweight in older age is linked to an increased risk of falls, a weakened immune system and increased risk of infections. People living in their own home may be at increased risk of malnutrition as they age.

For people to have a healthy older life we must develop an environment that supports people to maintain a healthy weight and have access to healthy food. Sunderland has a Healthy Weight Alliance, which has an action plan to tackle the issues linked to healthy weight. There is also a [Sunderland Weight Management Programme](#) for residents who need support. Supporting people as they age to maintain a healthy weight and eat a nutritious diet will help residents to thrive by preventing obesity, malnutrition and being underweight. More detail about actions being taken to support the health weight agenda can be found in our [Health City Plan](#).

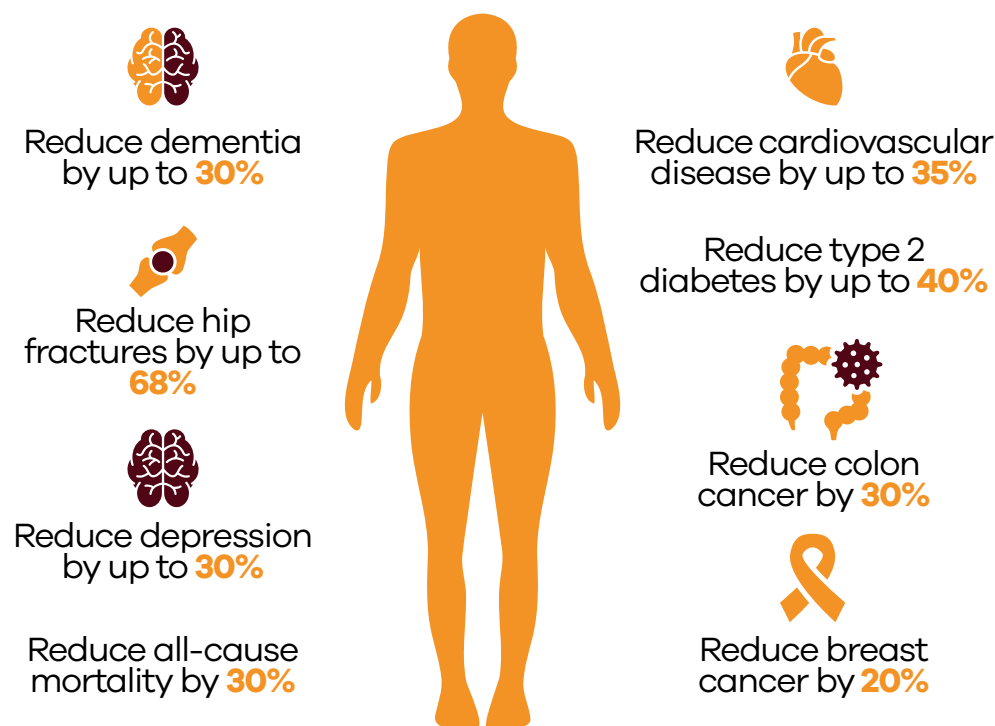
Physical activity

Being active and taking part in physical activity can have many positive effects on quality of life and how we age. It is important for individuals to be physically active to achieve a healthy life expectancy. As we age the type of activity we can do may change, so it's important to have age-appropriate activities to remain physically active. Creating an environment that supports health is essential if we are to impact the low healthy life expectancy in Sunderland.

In Sunderland, an estimated 63.4% of adults were physically active in 2022/23, which is lower than the North East (67.7%) and England averages (67.1%).

The UK Chief Medical Officer²⁶ recommends that adults and older people should be active, sit less, build strength, and improve balance. People should aim for 75 minutes of vigorous intensity exercise, 150 minutes of moderate intensity exercise or a combination of both across a week. Adults are advised to undertake strength-based exercise at least two days a week. This can help delay the natural decline in muscle mass and bone density that starts from around age 50.

Figure 8: What are the benefits of physical activity?



In Sunderland there are many activities available for different age groups. However, inactivity is an inequality and not being active is not just about personal choice, it can also be associated with lack of access. Improving access to activities and good quality outdoor space is important especially for people who are usually less active. The benefits of increasing physical activity can be seen throughout life - [Active Sunderland delivery plan](#).

Ambassadors have told us how important physical activity is to them and the importance of access: **“Keep as fit as possible enjoying activities regardless of any ill health, eating well, walking, learning new stuff and being active in the community.”**



Healthy People - Change the Game

Change the Game Southwick is a Football Foundation and Sport England 5-year funded project, to encourage residents to become more active and involved in their local community. It is delivered through a partnership with Sunderland City Council, Foundation of Light, Everyone Active, Leisure United, Durham FA and RISE NE - [Change the Game - MySunderland](#) [Walking Football Change the Game](#)



Healthy People - Everyone Active

Everyone Active manage seven leisure facilities on behalf of Sunderland City Council. They are a key member of the city's Active Sunderland Board and through a partnership approach have an aim to deliver an 'Active Sunderland - a city where everyone is as active as they can be' [Find your nearest leisure centre - Everyone Active](#)

Chronic health conditions

A chronic health condition is a persistent condition that requires ongoing medical attention or limits daily activities. These conditions can result in poor health as we age. People living in the poorest areas are most likely to develop multiple long-term conditions at an earlier age, which makes them more likely to age in poorer health. Therefore, it is important to focus on supporting people in the most deprived areas.

Chronic conditions can interact making it harder for older people to maintain independence and quality of life. National analysis shows the number of chronic conditions increases with age and is higher amongst more disadvantaged areas²⁹.

Chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease affect more people in Sunderland and at an earlier age compared to the national average. Many risk factors leading to chronic disease are preventable and a healthier and more supportive environment can reduce the development of chronic disease.

Access to health care was a significant concern for older people in Sunderland. Whilst some people felt that they were able to access services easily, some people felt there was a need for better “health facilities locally” and “accessible health services.”

Ageing Well Ambassadors



- In 2022/23 the prevalence of diabetes (17+ years) was **8.5%, above the England average of 7.5%**
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease prevalence in 2022/23 was **3.3%, higher than the North East (2.8%) and England (1.8%).**
- Coronary heart disease prevalence (all ages) in 2022/23 was **4.4% in Sunderland, higher than the North East (4.0%) and England (3.0%).**
- Preventable mortality for circulatory diseases (under 75) was **higher in Sunderland (98.0 per 100,000) compared to the North East (90.8) and England (77.8).**
- The under 75 mortality rates from respiratory diseases considered preventable is **higher in Sunderland at 29.5 per 100,000 compared to the North East (24.2 per 100,000) and England (17.0 per 100,000).**
- Estimated prevalence of **frailty in those aged over 65 years is 32.7%.**
- In people aged over 65 with frailty the rate of emergency hospital admission due to falls was **higher in Sunderland (2,586 per 100,000) compared to England (1,933) and the North East (2,454).**
- There are inequalities in frailty prevalence, with **higher rates and earlier onset in the most disadvantaged areas.**

The importance of equitable access to healthcare, especially for those with chronic conditions is an important aspect of supporting our population to age well and reducing the health inequalities that can exacerbate the ill health people with chronic conditions experience.



Healthy People - Front door service Age UK

The Front Door service from Age UK offers residents a single point of contact from which calls are triaged to ensure people receive the right level of support at the right time, and that they are directed to the right service.

[Age UK Sunderland Front Door Service.](#)

Healthy People - Age UK Sunderland Dial-a-Driver

Age UK Sunderland Dial-a-Driver is a service aimed to help people attend non-urgent appointments using a team of volunteer drivers who provide transport with their own cars. The service is available to anybody aged over 60 and a resident within Sunderland. [Dial a Driver Scheme](#) (ageuk.org.uk).



Mental health

Maintaining good mental health is essential for a healthy life. As people get older their mental health can be affected by things such as ill health, losing a loved one, retirement, poor physical health, reduced mobility, loss of independence and social isolation. Social connections are important for individuals to thrive. However, as people age, they often spend more time alone. Loneliness and social isolation can be linked to higher rates of depression.

Some groups of people have a higher risk of mental health issues including people in residential and nursing facilities, living with long-term physical conditions and disabilities, living with dementia and neurodegenerative diseases, living in poverty, older carers and people from minority communities and migrants³¹.

The estimated prevalence of depression in over 18s in 2022/23 was 15.1%, which was higher than the England average of 13.2%³².

The age-standardised suicide rate in Sunderland for 2018-22 was highest for males aged 45-64 years at 37.1 per 100,000. As a comparison the overall suicide rate for those aged 10 and over for the period 2021-23 was 13.0 per 100,000, which was slightly lower than the North East average of 13.8 per 100,000.

Dementia is another key reason for loss of independence in older age. It involves a decline in brain function leading to reduced mental health. Dementia is not a disease itself, but a collection of symptoms caused by diseases such as Alzheimer's disease and vascular dementia. Symptoms usually worsen over time, and, in later stages, people will usually need help from friends or relatives. In some cases, they will need constant care in the community or in a care home. Dementia also impacts physical health in later stages.

In 2023, the estimated dementia diagnosis rate for Sunderland residents aged 65 and over was 63.1% (those with dementia who are diagnosed). Dementia prevalence is estimated to be 0.1% for 55-64 years and 4.2% for those 65 years and over, affecting 2,454 people. In Sunderland, there are a number of pieces of work focusing on supporting people with dementia and their carers such as an all-in-one information document produced by Healthwatch in collaboration with partners and an increase in partners using dementia awareness training. Sunderland's Ageing Well Delivery Board members are working together to support people affected by dementia in Sunderland.

Improving mental health

Evidence suggests that happiness and wellbeing can be significantly influenced by incorporating the five ways to wellbeing into daily life five steps to mental wellbeing – NHS³³:

- **Connect:** Build and maintain positive relationships with others.
- **Be active:** Look for ways to be active every day and enjoy the benefits of physical activity.
- **Take notice:** Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling and appreciate the present moment.
- **Keep learning:** Try something new, learn new skills, or expand your knowledge and interests.
- **Give:** Giving to others is good for you, and can be as simple as a smile, a thank you, or a kind word.



Supporting residents achieve the five ways to wellbeing is important to improve overall health and wellbeing in our city.

Sexual health

Sexual health is an important part of health and wellbeing. It can impact mental health, physical health, and relationships. There are many misconceptions about sexual activity in older age, which can impact healthcare and health seeking behaviour. An outdated view that older people are not sexually active can impact health seeking behaviour and dismissal of sexual health concerns in older people. Older people starting new relationships may lack information on safer sex practices and the use of protection methods such as condoms.

In 2017, a report from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA) found that over 80% of those aged between 50-90 years were sexually active. Maintaining sexual activity has been linked with healthier ageing. However, there has been a recent rise in the rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in older people in the UK.

Sunderland Sexual Health Service offer advice and testing to all ages, with an online booking system. SHIFT offers sexual health advice to people aged over 45. Ensuring that middle-aged and older people are aware of these services, that services are age friendly, improving education and reducing stigma about taking care of our sexual health as we age are important for overall healthy ageing and wellbeing.

Oral health

Oral health is an important part of general health. Maintaining good oral health throughout life is important for self-confidence, wellbeing, and the ability to socialise and work without pain, discomfort, and embarrassment. In Sunderland, as in many other areas, access to dentists is an issue and people may not be getting the care they need to maintain good oral health.

More older people are now keeping their own teeth for longer, which is positive and indicates a better quality of life. However, this has implications for dental provision, residential carers, and home carers.

Oral health supports general health and helps individuals participate in society and achieve their potential. Oral diseases include dental caries, gum disease, tooth loss, oral cancer, and birth defects such as cleft lip and palate. Most oral diseases share risk factors with long term conditions and chronic diseases, including, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes. These risk factors include tobacco use, alcohol and sugar consumption³⁴.

Caring for older patients or older family members oral health can be challenging due to reduced mobility and loss of cognitive ability. Older people with poor oral health may experience pain and discomfort and problems with their mouth and jaw. This could lead to difficulties eating and drinking causing nutritional deficiencies and impacting on their wider health. It is important that all older people are given the support and opportunity to maintain good oral health.

There are inequalities in oral health, which are impacted by a number of factors such as access to dentists, consumption of high sugar foods and smoking. Reducing these inequalities and improving access to dentists are important to support our residents to maintain good oral health. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has recently announced plans to expand community water fluoridation in the North East of England, which will include Sunderland. [Consultation on community water fluoridation expansion in the north east of England: government response - GOV.UK](#).

Care and residential homes

Care and residential homes provide companionship and meet the health and social care needs of older people. Sunderland has a high standard of provision with 96% of the 50 residential and nursing homes rated as good or outstanding by CQC and no home rated as inadequate [Care Quality Commission \(cqc.org.uk\)](#). Sunderland City Council works closely with care providers, supporting them to offer the best care in a healthy environment.

Sunderland has a high rate of adults aged 65 and over whose long-term support needs are met by admission to residential and nursing care homes. In 2023-24 the rate was 976.0 per 100,000 population. This was almost double the national average of 560.1 per 100,000 and higher than the regional average of 710.1.



There is a considerable amount of work ongoing to address the high admission rates, including completing a diagnostic review of the urgent and emergency care system. Findings have been used to improve outcomes and reduce the number of admissions to permanent care. The use of reablement at home and bed based reablement has also been expanded - to maximise opportunities to support the return to baseline or level of independence for individuals who can then return home with support. Many residents seek 24-hour care for their loved ones for assurance with safety and care needs. However, it's important to consider if 24-hour care is the best option. Families and healthcare professionals are being supported to explore different options when making decisions about care.

We must plan for the future to reduce the admission to residential and nursing homes rates - prevention is key. We must support residents to live and age well by creating an environment to support a healthy life. The support we need to prioritise is wide-ranging and outlined throughout this report—from ensuring access to healthy, safe homes and environments that encourage physical activity, to improving availability of nutritious food.

Summary

How we age is not inevitable, it is shaped by our experiences throughout life. Maintaining good health in our early years can have a big impact on our health in later years. While individuals can take steps to improve their health and how they age, the biggest influence on healthy life expectancy in Sunderland is the environment. Creating a healthy and sustainable place is essential to support prevention of ill health. Improving the environment can increase the healthy life expectancy of our residents. Recommendations of how we can achieve this in Sunderland are detailed on the next page and will also be included in the refreshed Sunderland Healthy City Plan. Our vision is for everyone in Sunderland to have healthy, happy lives, with no one left behind.



Key recommendations

1. Healthy Places

Create environments that support residents to be able to live healthy lives and age healthily by:

- Working with partners to create an environment which supports residents to age well physically and mentally.
- Continuing to work across the council and with partners to ensure health is considered in all we do and is supported by Integrated Impact Assessments that consider the ageing well agenda.
- Further develop Sunderland as an age-friendly city through the Ageing Well Ambassadors, age friendly businesses and policies.
- Working with partners to ensure that we have good quality and well-maintained housing, which enables people to maintain their independence for longer.
- Supporting people to have financial security by accessing benefits such as pension credits.
- Working in partnership with local employers to provide opportunities for good quality employment and to adapt workplaces to make the best use of the expertise of an ageing workforce and supporting people with chronic conditions to remain economically active.

2. Healthy Communities

Support healthy ageing through healthy communities by:

- Working with partners and providers through initiatives such as Links for Life to prevent ill health by creating healthy communities and environments.
- Working with partners in health and social care to ensure that services are developed collaboratively with the people they are for and that they are inclusive and accessible for all ages.
- Working with partners to ensure that carers have support to maintain their own health and wellbeing whilst providing care to their loved ones.
- Helping people to stay connected as they age, digitally through the Sunderland Digital Inclusion Plan and physically through intergenerational approaches and age friendly neighbourhoods.
- Understand the diverse needs and cultural aspects of healthy ageing across all communities.

3. Healthy People

Support people to age well through living well by:

- Working with partners to develop age friendly health services and supporting residents to access them.
- Improving the understanding of how dementia affects residents and their carers and supporting the development of an action plan to improve the services and support available to those affected by dementia.
- Protecting the health of people as they age through good information and access to vaccinations and screening programmes as well as preventing the impact from adverse weather events.

Update from recommendations in 2023

Update from recommendations in 2023

Recommendation 1: Leading on the development of a framework for local action which will take a comprehensive approach to rebalancing the impact of commercial determinants on our residents, embedding strategies into the City Plan to address demand and supply of both healthy and unhealthy commodities, and incorporating into the Integrated Impact Assessment toolkit.

- Local framework and action developed and being implemented
- Commercial determinants of health (CDoH) prompts are included within the Council's approach to Integrated Impact Assessment
- Commercial determinants will be reflected in the 2025 refresh of the Healthy City Plan
- Healthy weight strategic priorities 2024/25 reflect CDoH
- Input on regional position statements – tobacco, alcohol, gambling
- Public health considerations in parks checklist includes CDoH

Recommendation 2: Ensuring commercial determinants are considered within our current Local Plan as well as when reviewing for the potential to implement existing powers to restrict the number of unhealthy commodity retail units and support the vision of vibrant, healthy communities.

- Local Plan review commenced; it will consider CDoH
- Public health receiving planning consultations and HIA from developers, providing opportunities to assess and respond to relevant planning consultations from a public health perspective
- Public health responded to the Planning Obligations Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) review
- Contributed to new statement of principles (gambling) for Sunderland
- Hot Food Takeaway policy continues to inform planning decisions
- Pavement Licenses Schemes became permanent under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 – Public health are working with licensing to review how smokefree areas are addressed in legislation
- Public health continues to participate in all alcohol licensing applications

Recommendation 3: Focusing on a geographical area in the city that has high number of unhealthy commodities and high levels of non-communicable diseases, work with residents and businesses to develop a partnership approach to reduce the number of unhealthy commodity retail and exposure in the area.

- Agreed an area for partnership approach
- Scoping of ideas in partnership with local businesses, public health and regeneration team

Recommendation 4: Working with business across the city to enhance the positive contributions to health and wellbeing through policies such as the 'Real Living Wage', Low Carbon Framework and through good employment practices and programmes such as 'Better health at Work Award' and the Workplace Health Alliance.

- Sunderland Workplace Health Strategy (2024)
- Workplace Health Alliance engaged 147 businesses / 35 submissions for Better Health at Work Awards 2024. Low carbon specific Workplace Health Alliance session delivered
- Public Health engaged in low carbon agenda, work currently taking place to consider further opportunities to align public health and low carbon considerations
- Health and Wellbeing Board agreed low carbon 'Marmot principle' should be a Healthy City Plan priority in the 2025 refresh
- Sunderland Community Wealth Charter signed by City Board members
- Over 30 venues are signed up to the Breastfeeding Friendly Sunderland Pledge. Venues are being encouraged to register and show support for breastfeeding families in the city

Recommendation 5: Working with retailers locally to promote harm reduction alternatives to smoking such as e-cigarettes or alternatives to junk food, such as low sugar options. We should also encourage businesses not to stock high strength alcohol.

- Sunderland Good Food Charter in place – the mission to develop a local food system that delivers healthy, affordable, sustainable food for everyone in Sunderland
- There are plans to work with food businesses around healthy options and offer to support healthy weight agenda, identifying scope of pilot
- Public health continues to contribute to all licensing applications ensuring model conditions are applied including the restriction of alcohol by volume (ABV) content to 5.5%
- Guidance and regulations on e-cigarettes included in Trading Standards Responsible Retailer Information Pack and new page on LA website to report illicit products

Recommendation 6: Working with local authorities across the North East and other partners across the system, identify opportunities for treatment services to become independent of industry funding or influence and to ensure the treatment is evidence-based.

- Review of content linked to Health Champions delivery and youth education programs to ensure it is free of industry-driven “nudges” and avoids any references to industry contributions toward harm prevention.

Recommendation 7: Committing ourselves and encouraging partners to move away from stigmatising language, such as ‘problem drinker’, ‘problem gambler’, and ‘lifestyle choices’ in all our communication discussions and interventions

- Promotion of communications toolkit for North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board’s Stigma Kills campaign
- Healthy City Plan refresh (2025) will avoid stigmatising language and imagery
- Consultation with voice of lived experience

Recommendation 8: Commissioning and procurement teams across Sunderland should consider an ethical procurement financing model where investment is directed to source cost-effective supplies from socially responsible vendors

- Sunderland Community Wealth Charter (signed by City Board members) includes commitments to harness and grow local wealth and a commitment to social value in contracts for the benefit of local people, the Voluntary Sector Alliance and volunteers

Recommendation 9: Using the learning from tobacco control experience in terms of the role of regulation, legislation, and advocacy for approaches to mitigate the negative and promote the positive impacts that industries have on the health and wellbeing.

- The council supported and endorsed the recommendations in relation to increasing the age of sale of tobacco until no-one can legally buy tobacco, as part of the Smokefree Generation consultation
- Advocating for CDoH to be considered throughout the LA’s work, including regeneration plans and the Health City Plan

Recommendation 10: Working with public health colleagues to seek to develop a regional approach to the commercial determinants of health across the North East.

- Continue to work with Balance North East to support regional approaches to advocate change, encouraging government to prioritise the interventions which decrease the affordability of alcohol – such as Minimum Unit Pricing (MUP)
- Continue to work with Balance North East to support advocacy around alcohol marketing to children and vulnerable people, aligning with restrictions proposed for ‘unhealthy food and drink’ in the Health and Care Bill, including a 9pm watershed on TV and on-demand service
- Fresh continues to advocate for changes to regulations and influence policy to make tobacco obsolete, including approaching North East MPs and representing the region at parliamentary committee discussions on the Tobacco and Vapes Bill

Recommendation 11: We will continue to improve understanding of the commercial determinants of health, and industry tactics, with our partners across the city.

- Presentations to various partnerships, including the Health and Wellbeing Board, associated delivery boards, the City Board and Sunderland BID
- Statement of Licensing Policy – consultation and feedback, including Minimum Unit Pricing and CIP engagement work



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