

Improving the uptake and quality of NHS Health Checks in Prisons

People in prison suffer significant health inequalities, due to their background before going into prison as many come from deprived communities. This means that they are already disadvantaged in terms of their health and the wider determinants of health and often have complex mental health, alcohol and drug dependency issues. In 2014 the likelihood of prison mortality was 40% greater than in the general population.

Sometimes for the first time in peoples' lives prisoners have good access to healthcare whilst in prison and have the opportunity to make significant improvements, however this is often lost on their release as they return to the same environment and habits.

An audit in 2014 of the NHS Health Check in Prison Programme highlighted that less than one in ten prisons were providing people with a full NHS Health Check as they would be commissioned and delivered in the community. Almost half of the respondents reported that they were not providing NHS Health Checks. Among the remaining 50 prisons reporting provision of NHS Health Checks analysis has suggested that there is considerable variation in delivery.

A task and finish group was set up which involved NHSE, National Offender Management Service and PHE to look at how the programme could be delivered more effectively. Based on the higher levels of need within the prison population and the higher premature mortality the age criteria was widened to include 35-74 years. A new criteria was introduced limiting it to those incarcerated to two years or more. There was a criteria added to ensure that those incarcerated for less than two years would be registered on release to a GP and then they would be picked up in the equivalent community programme. Guidance and standards have been developed and shared with commissioners.

Key challenges are providing high quality delivery, continuity of care after release and ensuring registration with GP's, providing 'prisonified interventions', providing healthy dietary choices in a prison setting and adequate physical activity and evaluating the intervention.