

Press Release

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Major new survey of 18,500 residents of the North West highlights crucial role of mental wellbeing in improving people's lives

There needs to be much greater attention and effort on improving mental wellbeing to help people live healthier, happier and more productive lives, according to the results of a major new survey of people in the North West launched today, which reveals significant differences in levels of mental wellbeing.

The *North West Mental Wellbeing Survey* was undertaken in response to a growing need to understand more about positive mental health and wellbeing. With a total sample of 18,500 people across Cumbria, Lancashire, Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Merseyside, the survey is the largest, most significant and detailed investigation of the region's mental health and wellbeing ever undertaken. It identified differences between local areas, with people from Warrington emerging as having the highest overall mental wellbeing score in the North West and people in Liverpool the lowest.

The survey, the product of collaborative effort between primary care trusts and local authorities across the region, was led by the Strategic Health Authority (NHS North West), Department of Health and the North West Public Health Observatory.

The survey revealed a clear link between general health and mental wellbeing.

- Those with relatively high mental wellbeing were three-and-a-half times more likely than those with relatively low mental wellbeing to say they were in very good health;

- Those with low mental wellbeing were nearly five times more likely to say that their health was very bad or bad than those with high mental wellbeing.

Other findings from the survey include:

- There were no differences in levels of mental wellbeing between men and women;
- High levels of mental wellbeing were most likely among 25-39 year olds, those living in the least deprived areas and among non-white adults;
- Relatively low levels of mental wellbeing were more likely to be found among people living in the most deprived areas, among 40-54 year olds and among white adults;
- Individuals with low mental wellbeing were nearly three times more likely than those with high mental wellbeing to have not spoken to someone outside their household in the last week;
- People with a relatively high level of mental wellbeing were two-and-a-half times more likely to be satisfied with their lives compared with people with a relatively low level of mental wellbeing;
- People with high levels of mental wellbeing were 2.4 times more likely than those with low levels to have never worried about money in the last few weeks;
- People with high levels of mental wellbeing were 2.4 times more likely than those with low levels to be taking enough exercise to meet Government physical activity targets.

Commenting on the results of the survey, Dr Ruth Hussey, North West Regional Director of Public Health, said: "We all like to feel good about ourselves and the lives we lead. Our mental wellbeing affects everything we do. This survey shows that those with good mental wellbeing have a higher satisfaction with life and are much more likely to be in employment, be educated, be healthy and have closer relationships with others. Now, more than ever, being resilient and flourishing is fundamental to the prosperity of the North West region."

Clare Perkins, Deputy Director of the North West Public Health Observatory, said: "Cooperation between the general public, local authorities and health services

has allowed us to measure what is all too often a hidden element in people's health and wellbeing. We now have a better idea than ever before about which types of communities and community members are most affected by poor mental wellbeing. But of even greater importance, we also have strong measures of what elements are associated with individuals having good mental wellbeing. Such information should help target the right sort of support to those who need it most."

Professor Mark Bellis, Director of the North West Public Health Observatory, said: "The survey highlights the positive roles that good relationships with friends, family, partners and the wider community play in wellbeing. Helping people develop a feeling of belonging to their neighbourhood and that they influence the decisions made about it are critical challenges for all those public services which aim to make the North West a healthier and happier region."

"These findings are significant for the North West as wellbeing plays an important role in tackling health inequalities, particularly in relation to the social determinants of health such as having a job and having strong relationships with others," said Dr Ruth Hussey. "All agencies in the North West need to work together to do more to place this issue at the top of their agendas," she said.

The survey highlighted that individuals can also benefit from being aware of what will improve their wellbeing. "This survey makes it clear that encouraging healthy lifestyles cannot be seen in isolation from improving mental wellbeing. Good mental wellbeing means we are motivated, optimistic and have the ability to making changes in our life, solve problems and tackle goals such as being more healthy," Dr Hussey said. "The *Five Ways to Wellbeing* are five simple actions that we can all take to improve wellbeing in our everyday life: *connect, be active, give, take notice, keep learning*", she said.

The survey findings will be shared with relevant bodies across the North West to support regional and local action to improve mental wellbeing. They will also be used alongside the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing', to increase awareness and individual action. Liverpool PCT in partnership with Liverpool City Council has already adopted the Five ways to Wellbeing as the framework for their Year of

Health and Wellbeing in 2010. This followed on from the launch of Liverpool's public mental health strategy in 2009 that highlighted the importance of addressing both physical health and mental wellbeing.

"More work will be done over the coming months to explore the survey data and help identify pointers for developing policy and practice. Whether the goal is improving health, tackling health inequalities, providing public services, reducing worklessness, community cohesion, providing education or running a business or a family – good mental wellbeing makes a difference to your success," Dr Hussey said.

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For further information and interview requests contact Andy Walker, Head of Corporate Affairs, Our Life, on 0161 237 2031 or 07818 568573 or email andy.walker@ourlife.org.uk

Notes to Editors:

1. The *North West Mental Wellbeing Survey* has been a collaborative effort between primary care trusts and local authorities across the region, with initial leadership provided by the Care Services Improvement Partnership and now by NHS North West, Department of Health North West, the North West Public Health Observatory and Our Life, the North West wellbeing and health campaign. Our Life is supporting the communications activity around the survey launch and also developing tools and mechanisms for local partners to use to engage the public on the five steps to wellbeing.
2. The survey used the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale (WEMWBS). The scale is made up of seven items that cover two dimensions of mental wellbeing - how people feel (pleasure) and being able to function positively. It differentiates well between high and low levels of wellbeing so researchers can understand more about resilience and the attributes of good mental wellbeing.
3. Face-to-face interviews of 18,500 people across the North West were conducted between 1 April and 30 June 2009. Alongside the WEMWBS questions the survey asked another 43 questions on feelings, relationships, life satisfaction, social capital and networks, general health, lifestyles, life events, finance and demographic information, including employment and education.
4. A copy of the survey summary report and the complete report can be downloaded at www.nwpho.org.uk
5. Based on the latest scientific evidence, the new economics foundation created the Five Ways to Wellbeing, a set of five simple actions which can improve well-being in everyday life. Those actions are Connect; Be active; Take notice; Keep learning and Give.
6. Surveys were undertaken in every primary care trust (PCT) area in the North West. A number of PCTs and/or local authorities commissioned additional interviews (boosts) in order to gain robust information at a local level. Those areas were as follows: Blackburn with Darwen; Blackpool; Central and Eastern Cheshire/Cheshire East; Central Lancashire; Western Cheshire/Cheshire West and Chester; Cumbria; East Lancashire; Halton & St Helens; Heywood, Middleton & Rochdale; Knowsley; Liverpool; Manchester; North Lancashire; Sefton; Stockport; Tameside and Glossop; Warrington; Wirral.