



Health in the City

Tackling Complex Health Issues in a Rapidly Urbanising Commonwealth

1. Expert Workshop

An Expert Group Workshop involving over 35 leading planning, health and built environment professionals was convened at Marlborough House in London on Wednesday 28 September, 2011 to discuss one of the most urgent challenges facing the Commonwealth: non-communicable diseases (NCDs). The workshop was led by the Commonwealth Association of Planners, the Commonwealth Health Professions Alliance and the Built Environment Professionals in the Commonwealth.

The workshop was held against the background of the Commonwealth Statement on Action to Combat NCDs and the Port of Spain Communiqué. With a range of expert speakers and attendees the workshop examined the challenges of creating healthy urban environments and looked to form policy recommendations for Commonwealth Governments.

2. Speakers

The following speakers made presentations at the event:

- Vijay Krishnarayan, Commonwealth Foundation
- Christine Platt, President, CAP
- Dr Sundaram Arulhraj, Chair, Commonwealth Health *Professions* Alliance
- Martin Willey, London Healthy Urban Development Unit
- Professor Elizabeth Burton, Warwick University
- Katy Cooper, C3 Collaborating for Health
- Sue Hogarth, The Marmot Review Team
- Marc Sansom, International Academy for Design and Health

3. Background to issues discussed at Workshop

The Commonwealth represents one-third of the world's population and one third of the Commonwealth's 2 billion population lives in slums. The resulting challenges require urgent attention if we are to avoid the worst mistakes of the past. The issue of health and the built environment is one area where urgent action is required.

NCDs account for over half of all deaths worldwide - diabetes, cancer and heart disease are expected to account for 75% of all deaths by 2030. Poor diet, tobacco use, harmful use of alcohol and lack of physical activity all significantly contribute to increasing rates of NCDs. They significantly reduce life expectancy, quality of life and productivity, and they pose a serious threat to the achievement of sustainable development. The state of the built environment has a profound impact on the spread of these and other diseases.

In 2007, the Commonwealth Health Ministers meeting focussed on the increasing incidence of NCDs. In 2009, the Health Ministers meeting focussed on the impact of climate change on

health. It noted with concern that the poorest people in the Commonwealth and those in the most vulnerable regions, particularly the small island states, were at the greatest risk and that this risk will increase over time.

At the Heads of Government meeting in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009 the ‘Commonwealth Statement on Action to Combat Non-Communicable Diseases’ was adopted, in which our Heads of Government committed to addressing this emerging health crisis.

“We [Heads of Government] firmly believe that the incidence and burdens of NCDs can be reduced through comprehensive and integrated preventative and control strategies at the individual, family, community, national and regional levels through collaborative programmes, partnerships and policies supported by governments, the private sector, NGOs and our social, regional and international partners. We therefore call for global engagement of the private sector civil society and governments in efforts to combat these diseases.”

Heads also undertook to strengthen primary care and to support the universal access to medicines for people living with NCDs. They noted that international co-operation is critical to address this phenomenon.

4. Workshop Communiqué

At the conclusion of the Expert Group Workshop a Communiqué was issued which included the following Call for Action:

“We call on CHOGM and individual Governments to implement the following Actions to help tackle NCDs and improve health and well-being in Commonwealth cities:

- i. To commit to inclusive spatial planning as a basis for developing effective policy approaches and actions*
- ii. To ensure that spatial planning, public policy and legal frameworks are based on a sound evidence base informed through effective participation of communities and individuals*
- iii. To devolve power to the local level wherever appropriate to help ensure that communities and individuals have increased responsibility over their own lives and environments*
- iv. To commit appropriate funding to implement programmes and initiatives and promote demonstration projects*
- v. To commit to awareness-raising campaigns building on sound evidence-based research and information*
- vi. To acknowledge that rapid urbanisation in the Commonwealth and its impact on the health and well-being of individuals and communities is an issue for all Commonwealth countries and their donor programmes*
- vii. To support the Commonwealth State of the Cities Programme as an appropriate reporting mechanism on urban issues including health and well-being.”*

The Communiqué was submitted to the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and it is hoped that it will feature at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Perth.

5. Workshop Follow Up

It was agreed at the Workshop that a small group should follow up on the issues discussed at the Workshop. The group is to prepare a Discussion Paper as a basis for consultation before considering potential actions and policy initiatives. A further Workshop is to be held in 2012. Also, the key messages from the Workshop will be taken to the Commonwealth People’s Forum in Perth by CAPs President and Secretary-General.

6. Further Information

For further information about the event and follow up please contact Clive Harridge, Secretary-General, CAP Email: clive.harridge@amec.com or Tel: 07889 247849.

7. Acknowledgements

CAP is grateful to the Commonwealth Foundation for its support in hosting the workshop.

Clive Harridge, Secretary-General, Commonwealth Association of Planners, October 2011