

Merton Annual Public Health Report 2022/23

Summary

Health Co-Benefits of Climate Action:

Opportunities For Place-Based Partnership Working



Climate change is perhaps the biggest global challenge of our times, a genuine health emergency. Merton's Climate Change Action Plan sets out actions needed to address climate change by 2050. This Annual Public Health Report highlights how action on climate change can deliver real co-benefits to people's health and help reduce the health inequalities that exist across Merton.

Through six themes it sets out how climate action can also help residents become healthier.

- Active Travel
- Healthy and sustainable diets
- Accessible biodiverse green spaces
- Good green jobs
- Energy efficient healthy housing
- Green health and social care

The report identifies ways that organisations can work together, through place-based partnerships, to capture and maximise health co-benefits. It shows how action on climate change can help to deliver a Health in All Policies approach by having a combined focus on health, sustainability and equity.

This is a summary document setting out the key messages of
Merton Annual Public Health Report 2022/23
Health Co-Benefits of Climate Action: Opportunities for Place-Based Partnership Working

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Key Messages

1 Climate change, the long-term increase in the temperature of the Earth's atmosphere caused by release of greenhouse gases (GHG), is recognised as one of the greatest global health challenges. This is due to numerous direct and indirect health risks associated with rising temperatures. They include heat waves, floods, wildfires, food insecurity, virus spread and their impact of endangering livelihoods.

2 Climate action to reduce GHG mitigate the above risks. They have a number of other positive health impacts, called co-benefits, addressing some of the most pressing current public health risk factors, especially air pollution, physical inactivity, unhealthy diets and poor mental wellbeing.

3 Focussing on health co-benefits of climate action can lead to substantial cross-sectoral cost savings and increased public support. The latter is due to diversification of arguments and a near-term and more localised positive policy framing for climate action.

4 Maximising health co-benefits of climate action requires system thinking, integrated planning and policies, and tools to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of actions on multiple cross-sector outcomes.

5 In Merton, there are good foundations to build on. They include the council's strong commitment to climate action, the NHS Green Plan, the recent Integrated Care System (ICS) reforms that strengthen place-based partnership working, and the approval from Merton's Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) of a Health in All Policies (HIAP) framework explicitly considering health, equity and sustainability together in all policies.

6 This Annual Public Health Report aims to increase awareness of the health co-benefits of climate action and to highlight further opportunities for partnership working in Merton. The report is divided into six themes, areas of climate action that offer most opportunities for health co-benefits, namely active travel, healthy and sustainable diets, accessible biodiverse green spaces, good green jobs, energy efficient healthy housing, and green health and social care.

7 The main health co-benefits of climate action are due to improved air quality, increased physical activity, healthier diets and better mental wellbeing. In addition, the focus of climate action on energy efficient healthy housing and good green jobs offers opportunity to improve two major determinants of health. There is strong evidence for all of the above to translate into substantial reductions of long-term conditions, premature deaths and associated health and care costs.

8 While looking to maximise health co-benefits of climate action through a system-wide approach, this also lends itself to better understanding and mitigating any potential negative health impacts of climate action, such as injuries from more active travel, pollen allergies from green spaces, reduced ventilation from energy efficient homes; as well as practical, joined up problem solving when there are perceived or real trade-offs between health and climate policy.

9 Equity is an essential consideration for all climate action and its consequences, including health co-benefits and negative health impacts, to reduce inequality. It means health co-benefits of climate action need to be purposefully designed to be widely affordable, accessible and acceptable. This is why Merton's HIAP framework explicitly promotes consideration of equity alongside both health and sustainability.

10 Health co-benefits of climate action must not distract from reducing GHG and the root causes of climate change such as unsustainable and unequal growth, consumption and development.



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