Cheshire East

Public Health Annual Report for 2024

The Commercial Determinants of Health

Open Fair Green

Cheshire East Council

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The Director of Public Health would like to acknowledge the contribution of Gisèle Spencer (Public Health ST2) and Joel Hammond-Gant (Health Protection Officer) and thank them for their excellent work on this year's Public Health Annual Report.

Foreword

from **Dr Matt Tyrer**, Director of Public Health

Thank you for reading my Annual Director of Public Health report for 2024.

As Director of Public Health, I am delighted to produce my third independent annual report focusing on the health, wellbeing, and direction of public health action in Cheshire East. Public health is defined as "the science and art of improving health, prolonging life and preventing disease." [1] The Council's Public Health team works with a range of services and partner organisations to deliver a diverse range of meaningful work to improve the lives of Cheshire East residents.

I have chosen to focus this year's report on the impact and influence of the 'commercial determinants of health', which encompasses the many ways in which the private sector has an impact, both positive and negative, on our health and wellbeing.

The growth and advancement of industry and business has led to many vital improvements to the health of our society. However, there is a growing base of evidence showing that the practices, actions, and decisions being taken by certain industries and corporations are having a significantly negative impact on our physical and mental health.

Industries like the tobacco, alcohol, fast food, gambling, and fossil fuels are often referred to as unhealthy commodity industries because they sell and promote products and services that have overall negative impacts on our physical and mental health and wellbeing. As these industries and companies have focused on growing market shares and profits, the negative influence they have on global populations has grown too, with these five major industries responsible for over half of all annual deaths across the world (33 million in total per year, accounting for 58% of all deaths). [2]

The negative aspects of the commercial determinants of health can, and do, affect everyone. It is not something that Cheshire East Council can tackle alone, and much is dependent on policy direction and funding from central government. However, alongside our local partners we are committed to doing everything within our powers to protect and support the residents of Cheshire East.

Local authorities and partnerships are starting to take proactive action to counteract some of the more negative public health impacts of the commercial determinants of health, including managing the influence of advertisements of unhealthy products, increasing smoke-free areas, and using planning powers to limit the numbers and density of hot-food takeaways.

There is still more to be done, however, to continue to advocate for and protect the health and wellbeing of Cheshire East residents as a priority. I hope you find this report enlightening and informative and see that Cheshire East Council is committed to improving the lives and wellbeing of the people it serves.

Dr Matt Tyrer,
Director of Public Health for Cheshire East

1 Faculty of Public Health. 2024. What Is Public Health? Available here
2 Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network. 2019. Global burden of disease study results. Available here

What are the commercial determinants of health?

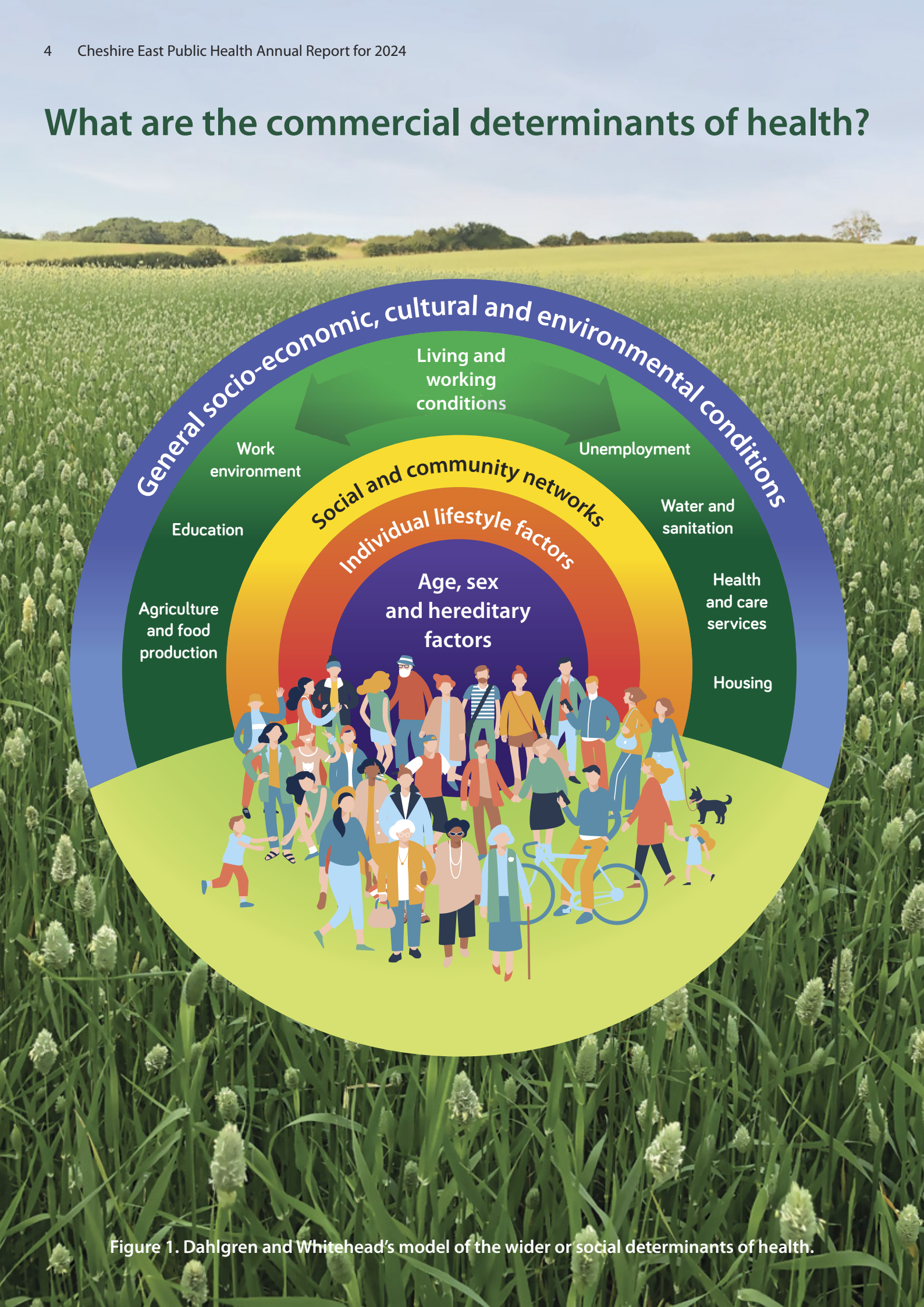


Figure 1. Dahlgren and Whitehead's model of the wider or social determinants of health.

Our health is influenced by a combination of factors relating to where we live, the environment around us, as well as our own individual characteristics and behaviours. Almost every aspect of our lives impacts our health and wellbeing. These factors, known as the wider determinants of health, provide the context for how healthy we are now, will be in the future, and how long we will ultimately live.

The wider determinants of health are shaped by a broad set of forces including global and national economies, government policies, as well as regional and local strategies, as demonstrated in Figure 1 below. It has been well documented in recent years, for example, that both the NHS and local government have been affected by reductions in national funding, or funding that is not proportionate to population growth and service demand, which has influenced the way these institutions have had to budget and plan the delivery of public services. [3, 4, 5]

The **commercial determinants of health** are defined as the various ways by which commercial actors (ranging from global multinational industries, through to local small and medium sized businesses) can influence and impact the health and wellbeing of populations.[6] These commercial actors, particularly the global multinational industries, have the social, economic, and political gravity to shape the world in ways that governments and health departments cannot. [7]

These commercial actors therefore are able to shape the physical and social environments in which people live, grow, learn and work. Recent research has shown that the tobacco, alcohol, gambling, unhealthy food and drink, and fossil fuel industries account for over a third of global deaths each year.[8] This widens health inequalities, as well as negatively impacting health outcomes.[9, 10]

Private industries and businesses can positively contribute to our health and wellbeing, when they make decisions that consider their broader public health implications and strive to uphold their corporate social responsibilities to help to improve the health and quality of the people and environments arounds them.[11] Examples of positive actions and decisions at a global level have included:

- ✔ Improving access to essential, high-quality, safe, effective, and affordable medicines and medical products
- ✔ Improving products and technologies to reduce the risks of harms to health (e.g., the introduction of seatbelts and continued research into vehicle passenger safety, and changing food production processes to reduce salt and/or sugar content in food products)
- ✔ Choosing not to invest financially in products and services that are harmful to health and wellbeing

At a more local level, smaller and medium sized businesses can positively contribute to the health and wellbeing of their workforces and wider population by:

- ✔ Embedding social value within decision making and workforce practices
- ✔ Ensuring fair, equitable employment conditions such as providing living wages, paid sick leave and paid parental leave to improve child health outcomes
- ✔ Providing essential services and products to local people and communities

However, the overall negative health impacts caused by commercial actors – particularly unhealthy commodity industries – have become increasingly apparent.[12] Some commercial actors and industries are known to carry out a range of activities that are harmful to the health of people and the environment,[13] including:

- ✘ Cutting down (deforesting) large areas of trees to make room for mass farming or factories
- ✘ Paying celebrities to act as influencers for certain products, often targeting younger, more easily influenced audiences
- ✘ Lobbying policy makers to minimise regulation, as well as actions to stall and delay regulations

3 British Medical Association. 2016. Health in all policies: health, austerity and welfare reform. Available here
4 Denis Campbell (The Guardian). 2023. Austerity has led to NHS quality of care declining in key areas, study finds. Available here
5 Nuffield Trust. 2023. What was austerity's toll on the NHS before the pandemic? Available here
6 Maani, N. et al. 2023. The Commercial Determinants of Health. University Oxford Press.
7 Maani, N, Petticrew, M and Galea, S. 2023. Commercial Determinants of Health in: The Commercial Determinants of Health. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
8 Gilmore, A.B. et al. 2023. Defining and conceptualising the commercial determinants of health. The Lancet Series, 401(10383), pp. 1194-1213. Available here
9 World Health Organisation. 2023. Commercial determinants of health. Available here
10 Maani, N, Petticrew, M and Galea, S. 2023. Commercial Determinants of Health
11 World Health Organisation. 2023. Commercial determinants of health. Available here
12 Anaf, J, Baum, F and Fisher, M. 2023. Global Health and Equity Burden of Commercial Determinants of Health In: The Commercial Determinants of Health. Oxford: Oxford University Press.p24
13 World Health Organisation. 2023. Commercial determinants of health. Available here
14 Friel, S. et al. 2023. Commercial determinants of health: future directions. The Lancet Series, 401(10383), pp. 1229-1240. Available here
15 Maani, N. Petticrew, M and Galea, S. 2023. Commercial Determinants of Health
16 Lacy-Nichols, J. et al. 2022. The public health playbook: ideas for challenging the corporate playbook. The Lancet Global Health Viewpoint, 10(7), pp. 1067-1072. Available here

How unhealthy commodities profit from poor health

Figure 2 – The drivers of unhealthy commodity industries (Joel Hammond-Gant)

Unhealthy commodities are then pushed out to the public, with companies using various 'industry tactics' to make their unhealthy products more appealing to people and to increase the numbers of people purchasing and consuming them.

More people consuming these unhealthy commodities has been directly linked to people experiencing poorer health, greater rates of non-communicable disease and an increase in health inequalities within communities.

General public

These are just some of the many ways that commercial actors impact our health and wellbeing and widen health inequalities. The actions and decisions taken by Unhealthy commodity industries are ultimately driven by an overarching aim of maximising profits,[17] meaning that they cannot be relied on, or expected to, proactively make more ethical, moral choices to reduce their harmful impacts. Figure 2 above visualises how connected the drivers for growth are with the products put out to the public and the industry tactics they employ.

There is a growing movement within public health, as well as in the wider public sector, research, and voluntary sectors to better communicate the negative impacts of the commercial determinants on society's health, and what businesses, local authorities and broader anchor institutions can do to reduce these harmful impacts.

"Business can and should be a partner for good in creating healthier societies" – Sir Michael Marmot[18]

17 Marmot, M. et al. 2022. The Business of Health Equity: The Marmot Review for Industry. Available here
18 Marmot, M. et al. 2022.

How unhealthy commodity industries profit from poor health

Industry tactics, referred to by some as the "Industry Playbook",[19] are the tactics used by unhealthy commodity industries to distort evidence, lobby regulators and politicians, and advertise products to influence people and markets to buy and use more of their unhealthy products.

These tactics have been well documented since the rise of the tobacco industry in the early 1900s, when doctors and other health professionals were paid to advertise and promote cigarettes, as shown in Figure 3 below. [20]

Figure 3 – Cigarette advertisements published by the tobacco industry in 1931 (top image/source: Stanford School of Medicine) and 1933 (bottom image/source: Stanford School of Medicine).

19 Lacy-Nichols, J. et al. 2022. 'The public health playbook: ideas for challenging the corporate playbook'. The Lancet Global Health 10,7 pp1067-1072. Available here
20 Little, B. When Cigarette Companies Used Doctors to Push Smoking. Available here

How unhealthy commodity industries profit from poor health

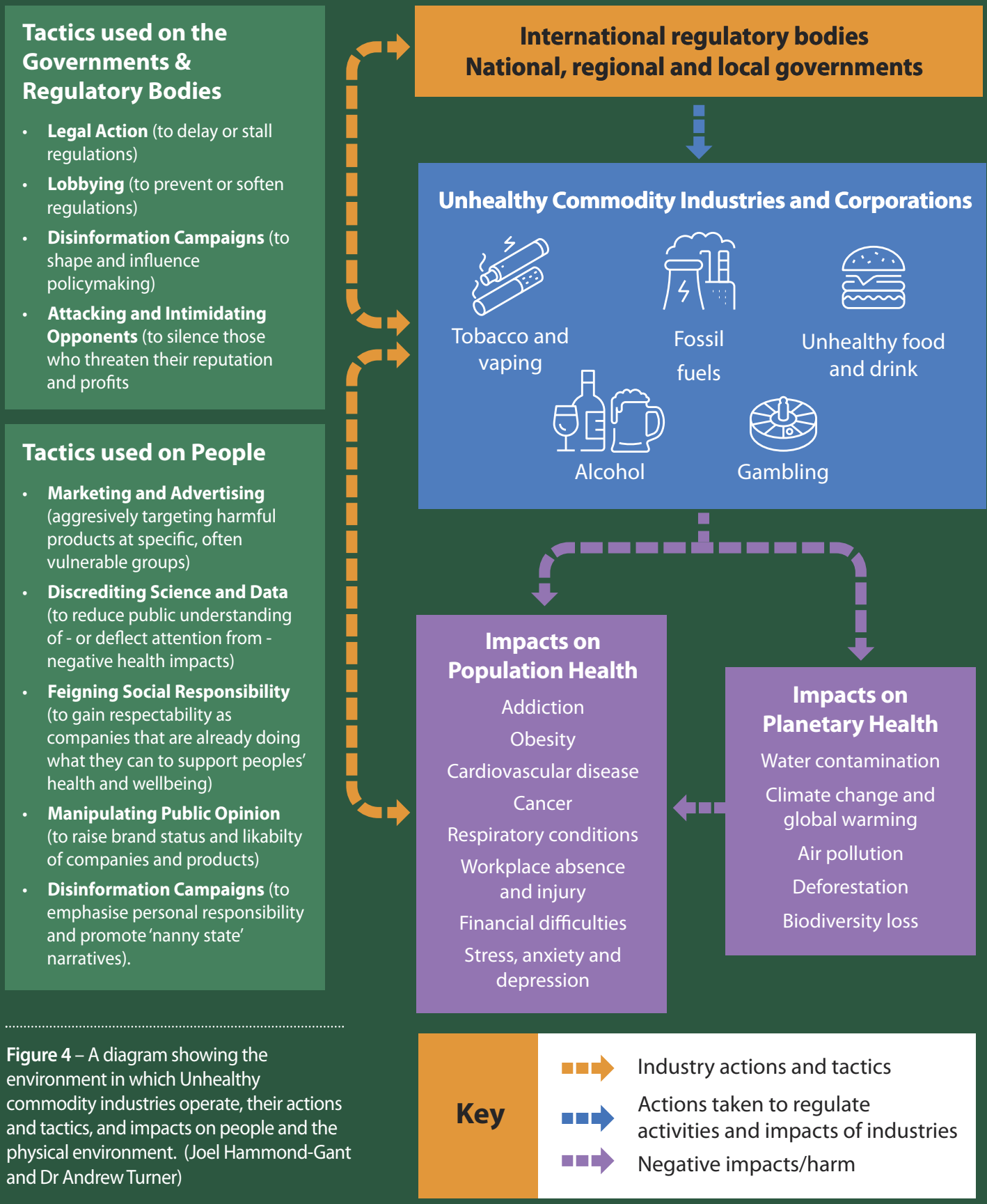


Figure 4 – A diagram showing the environment in which Unhealthy commodity industries operate, their actions and tactics, and impacts on people and the physical environment. (Joel Hammond-Gant and Dr Andrew Turner)

How unhealthy commodity industries profit from poor health

Unhealthy commodity industries have continued to develop these tactics alongside technological advancements, using the availability and accessibility of social media and internet and television advertisements to reach broader audiences, and specifically focus on certain groups and audiences.

The vaping industry, for example, have notably targeted younger generations through use of bright, colourful advertisements and flavours, as well as using paid endorsements and promotions online and on social media platforms. As recently as June 2023, a complete ban on e-cigarette advertising in the UK was recommended following a study completed by The George Institute of over 4,000 people aged 15-30 across the UK, India, China and Australia. [21]

In the biggest legislative step since indoor smoking was legally banned in 2007 (which brought about significant reductions in health problems and hospital admissions caused by tobacco,)[22] the government announced in November 2023 that the Tobacco and Vapes Bill will see all disposable vapes banned in the UK, and ultimately a total ban on tobacco sales by increasing the legal age of buying tobacco each year and creating a 'a smoke-free generation'. [23]

The gambling industry is recognised for its widespread use of marketing and advertisement across many media platforms, but specifically its use of paid celebrity endorsement advertisements. A study carried out by the Gambling Commission found that 60% of people saw gambling adverts or sponsorships at least once a week, with over a third of people claiming to have been specifically influenced by the adverts or sponsorships to spend money on gambling activities.[24]

The football industry in the UK continues to be closely affiliated with the national and international gambling industries, with 8 of the 20 Premier League clubs sponsored by gambling companies and presenting these companies on the front of their shirts,[25] and the English Football League sponsored by Sky Bet.[26] The saturation of gambling within UK football is epitomised by Ivan Toney; diagnosed with gambling addiction after being banned from the sport for breaching betting rules[27] and returning to play 8 months' later wearing Brentford Football Club's gambling-sponsored shirt.

21 Sky News. 2023. 'Complete ban' on UK vaping adverts needed, says medical research group after study on young people. Published 14 June 2023. Available here
22 British Heart Foundation. 2017. How has the smoking ban changed our health? Available here
23 UK Government Department of Health and social care. 2024. Disposable vapes banned to protect children's health. Available here
24 The Gambling Commission. 2023. Understanding how consumers engaged with gambling advertising in 2020. Available here
25 BBC News. 2023. Premier League clubs to ban gambling sponsorship on front of matchday shirts. Available here
26 BBC News. 2021. Betting in football: Could a gambling sponsorship ban ruin clubs? Available here
27 Sky Sports. 2023. Ivan Toney: Brentford striker diagnosed with gambling addiction as FA releases written reasons into eight-month ban. Available here

How unhealthy commodity industries profit from poor health

The tobacco industry has historically been a widespread sponsor and affiliate of teams and franchises across multiple sports, dating back to the inception of Major League Baseball in the late 1800s. By the end of the 20th century, the juxtaposition of having elite athletes and sporting events being associated with the leading cause of preventable deaths became more and more illogical and tobacco sponsorships were gradually banned across most of the world.[28]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the alcohol industry heavily marketed its products as coping mechanisms, encouraging people to drink alcohol to alleviate stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic.[29, 30] Food and drink industries continue to spend significantly more money promoting products high in fat, sugar, and salt – up to 30 times more – than promoting fruits and vegetables,[31] which is known to contribute to people's nutrition choices and the worsening trends in overweight and obese people in the UK.[32]

One key tactic employed by unhealthy commodity industries is to frame the narrative around the use (and in many cases overuse) of their unhealthy products as personal choice, without assuming any responsibility for the growing negative impact that unhealthy products have on our physical and mental health, or the health inequalities amongst communities.

The World Health Organisation in 2021 acknowledged that our choices are individual, but can be easily influenced by the advertisement, digital marketing, and celebrity endorsements paid for by unhealthy commodity industries, which make it harder for people to make the healthy choice.[33]

In 2023, the Chief Medical Officer was clear in stating that the tobacco industry's model has always been to get people addicted to nicotine as early as legally possible, to deliberately keep them hooked on their tobacco products and effectively take their personal choice of wanting or not wanting to use tobacco products away.[34] Gambling and alcohol are known to lead people to addiction, as they both stimulate the brain in similar ways to addictive drugs.[35]

This evidence indicates that, while education and awareness can help people to make more informed and healthier individual choices, health outcomes can be improved by making changes to the environments we live, work, and go to school in each day. An analysis of 14 government strategies and 689 policies on obesity in England found that the policies did not have the intended effect or impact in large part because they relied too heavily on individual behaviour change, rather than focusing on shaping the external influences that drive peoples' behaviours and choices.[36]

28 CNN Sports. 2020. Some motorsport teams remain addicted to tobacco company sponsorship deals, despite tobacco causing 8 million deaths each year. Available here
29 Atkinson, A.M., Sumnall, H. and Meadows, B. 2021. "We're in this together': A content analysis of marketing by alcohol brands on Facebook and Instagram during the first UK Lockdown, 2020. International Journal of Drug Policy, 98(103376). Available here
30 Barbosa, C., Cowell, A.J. and Dowd, W.N. 2021. Alcohol Consumption in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic in the United States. Journal of Addiction Medicine, 15(4), pp. 341-344. Available here
31 O'Dowd, A. 2017. Spending on junk food advertising is nearly 30 times what government spends on promoting healthy eating. The British Medical Journal, 369. Available here
32 The Food Foundation. 2022. Major report highlights impact of Britain's disastrous food policy. Available here
33 World Health Organisation. 2021. Our choices are individual but can be influenced. Available here
34 Professor Sir Chris Whitty. Chief Medical Officer for England on vaping. Available here
35 Mayo Clinic. 2022. Compulsive gambling. Available here
36 Dolly, R.Z. and White, M. 2021. Is Obesity Policy in England Fit for Purpose? Analysis of Government Strategies and Policies, 1992-2020. The Milbank Quarterly, 99(1), pp. 126-170. Available here

The impacts of unhealthy commodity industries

There is now overwhelming evidence that unhealthy commodity industries, particularly the largest, multinational corporations, are having increasingly negative effects on human health, social and health inequalities, and the environment. These corporations and industries are responsible for driving many of the world's greatest health problems including a significant rise in non-communicable diseases and the climate emergency. [37, 38, 39]

The activities and products of four unhealthy commodity industries – tobacco, alcohol, foods high in fat, sugar and salt, and fossil fuels – are responsible for over half of all annual deaths across the world (33 million in total per year, accounting for 58% of all deaths).[40] On top of having a significant impact on peoples' health and wellbeing, these unhealthy commodity industries also have substantial negative financial implications to our health and social care systems.

Tobacco

Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death and cancer worldwide, as well as the largest cause of health inequality in the UK. Around 78,000 people in the UK die from smoking each year, with many more living with debilitating smoking-related illnesses. In most cases these deaths occur after long periods of pain and suffering from conditions including lung cancer, strokes, and heart attacks.[41] The cost of smoking in England in 2022 was estimated at £17 billion, which included a £2.4bn cost to the NHS and a £1.2bn cost to social care systems.[42]

Smoking, including second-hand smoking, increases the risk of developing more than 50 serious health conditions, including multiple types of cancer, heart disease, stroke, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Second-hand smoking increases a person's risk of developing lung cancer by around 25% and is particularly damaging to babies and children, who are more likely to develop severe asthma, respiratory infections and be at risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) than children who are not exposed to second-hand smoke.

Approximately 9.4% of adults in Cheshire East smoke, which is lower than the England average of 12.7%.[43] Local rates of smoking are highest in Crewe and Macclesfield,[44] the two areas of Cheshire East that experience the greatest levels of deprivation and health inequalities. The most recently available data – from 2017 to 2019 – shows that 1,315 deaths in Cheshire East were caused by smoking,[45] equating to 11% of the total deaths during that period.

37 Millar, J.S. 2013. The corporate determinants of health: how big business affects our health, and the need for government action! Canadian Journal of Public Health, 104(4), pp. 327-329. Available here
38 Moodie, R., et al. 2013. Profits and pandemics: prevention of harmful effects of tobacco, alcohol, and ultra-processed food and drink industries. The Lancet, 381(9867), pp. 670-679. Available here
39 Kickbusch, I., Allen, L., and Franz, C. 2016. The commercial determinants of health. The Lancet Global Health, 4(12), pp. 895-896. Available here
40 Global Burden of Disease Collaborative Network. 2019. Global burden of disease study results. Available here
41 Public Health England. 2019. Health matters: stopping smoking – what works? Available here
42 Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). 2023. Economics of tobacco. Available here
43 Public Health Outcomes Framework. 2022. Smoking prevalence in adults (18+) - current smokers (APS). Available here
44 Cheshire East Council. 2023. Health Profiles for Electoral Wards plus Primary Health and Social Care Areas June 2022. Available here
45 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. 2023. Public health profiles. Available here

The impacts of unhealthy commodity industries

This is despite all the work that has been done to reduce smoking through face-to-face stop smoking support, in-hospital support, and support through community pharmacies. It is also despite national bans of tobacco product advertisement, legislation around packaging, and increased taxes on smoking products.

The tobacco industry knows that more deprived groups are more likely to smoke and become addicted to smoking[46] and markets its products accordingly. Although national taxation of tobacco products has increased prices of packs of cigarettes and tobacco, the industry still ensures that it has a selection of 'budget' tobacco products (e.g., £10 for a pack of 20 cigarettes)[47] to guarantee its products remain as accessible as possible to people in more deprived groups, known to be most vulnerable to the impacts of smoking. Prices on 'premium' products have increased to make up for any profit lost to providing the lower priced, budget range.[48]

This epitomises the attitude of the tobacco industry, and unhealthy commodity industries in general, making decisions to drive profits, with minimal consideration of the impacts to public health and wellbeing.

Vaping

Vaping was first introduced as an alternative to cigarette smoking in 2006 and has since been recommended to smokers by professionals as a way of quitting tobacco products. Today, vaping is recommended by the NHS and supported by the Chief Medical Officer as a safe and effective way of helping people quit smoking and other tobacco products.

However, since the introduction of vapes, the vaping industry has grown exponentially and has become far more than a tool to help people to stop smoking. As the tobacco industry has realised that younger generations are less likely to pick up smoking, it has shifted its focus to influencing more non-smokers to take up vaping[49] by advertising and presenting single use vapes in similar ways to chocolate, sweets, and fizzy drinks; packaged in bright colours with a range of exciting flavours to try.[50]

It has become increasingly clear that vaping products are being marketed to encourage all people, even those that have never smoked before, to take up vaping.[51] It is therefore not surprising to see that the impacts of the marketing strategies and rapid rise in availability and promotion of single-use vapes has led to large numbers of children and young people to take up vaping.[52]

46 Action for Smoking and Health. 2019. Health Inequalities and Smoking. Available here

47 Apollonio, D.E. and Glantz, S. 2020. 'Tobacco manufacturer lobbying to undercut minimum price laws: an analysis of internal industry documents'. Tobacco Control, 29, pp. 10-17. Available here

48 University of Bath. 2022. Tobacco Tactics: Tobacco Industry Pricing Strategies. Available here

49 Legg, T., Clift, B. and Gilmore, A.B. 2023. 'Document analysis of the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World's scientific outputs and activities: a case study in contemporary tobacco industry agnogenesis'. Tobacco Control, 0, pp. 1-10. Available here

50 UK Parliament. 2024. Advertising, marketing and promotion of vaping products. Available here

51 Legg, T., Clift, B. and Gilmore, A.B. 2023.

52 Royal College of Paediatrics and Children's Health. 2023. Children's doctors call for an outright ban on disposable e-cigarettes. Available here

Case Study

Association of Directors of Public Health action against single use vapes

in June 2023, the Directors of Public Health across Cheshire and Merseyside issued a joint statement [60] expressing concern about the increase of the use of vapes in the region, particularly amongst young people, and condemned the "aggressive marketing and advertising strategies from tobacco companies" to target children and young people.

The Directors of Public Health endorsed the advice of England's Chief Medical Officer: ***"if you smoke, vaping is much safer. If you don't smoke, don't vape."***

The joint statement strongly called for a nationwide ban on the sale of disposable vapes, as well as heavier fines for retailers selling vapes to under-18s, increased enforcement powers for local Trading Standards teams, and a consultation around the licensing and regulation of vapes.

Champs Public Health Collaborative

NEWS

Directors of Public Health in Cheshire and Merseyside condemn harmful disposable vapes and 'disgraceful' targeting of children by tobacco companies.

20th June 2023

In Britain over 11% of 11–17-year-olds have tried vaping, and the number of children who have had to attend hospital due to vaping is four times greater than two years ago.[53] The rise in single-use vaping products, particularly amongst young people, has become a national concern, with Trading Standards officials calling it" the biggest threat on our high streets,"[54] and medical research groups urging stricter regulations to ban vaping adverts in the UK.[55] These trends are particularly concerning when we consider that we do not yet fully understand the long-term health impacts of vapes, and that the industry itself is not explicit about the lung scarring, asthma and addiction problems that can come from vaping.[56]

In June 2023, the Directors of Public Health in Cheshire and Merseyside expressed collective concern about the rising numbers of young vape users and emphasised the Chief Medical Officer's advice that vaping is not just some healthy habit to take up, and that vaping products should only be used if advised by a professional to help achieve smoking quits.[57]

The rapid rise in production of single use vape products is also having a significant environmental impact, due to the mass plastic production and mining for lithium battery materials causing harmful emissions and increasing carbon footprints. Concerns are also growing around the improper disposal of vape products, particularly single use vapes, which has a significant negative impact on our environment. It was reported in September 2023 that an average of 5 million disposable vapes are thrown away each week in the UK (equating to 260 million over the course of a year) with only 17% being correctly recycled and disposed of at local household waste and recycling centres.[58] It is a positive step therefore that the UK government has recently announced plans to ban single use vapes.[59]

53 Action on Smoking and Health (ASH). 2023. Use of e-cigarettes among young people in Great Britain. Available here
54 BBC News. 2023. Illegal vapes are biggest threat on High Street, say Trading Standards. Available here
55 Sky News. 2023. 'Complete ban' on UK vaping adverts needed… Available here
56 Brandt, A.M. 2012. 'Inventing Conflicts of Interest: A History of Tobacco Industry Tactics'. American Journal of Public Health, 102(1), pp. 63-71. Available here
57 NHS UK. 2024. Vaping myths and the facts. Available here
58 BBC News. 2023. Five million vapes thrown away every week – research. Published 8 September 2023. Available here
59 Department for Health and social care. 2024. Disposable vapes banned to protect children's health. Available here
60 Champs Public Health Collaborative. 2023. Directors of Public Health in Cheshire and Merseyside condemn harmful disposable vapes and "disgraceful" targeting of children by tobacco companies. Available here

The impacts of unhealthy commodity industries

Alcohol

Alcohol is widely available in the UK, as it is in many countries of the world, with the most recent lifestyle survey data showing that only 20% of respondents aged 16 and over stated they did not drink alcohol,[61] whilst data shows that approximately 1 in every 100 residents in Cheshire East are dependent alcohol drinkers.[62] Excess alcohol consumption can lead to any of over 200 illnesses including cancer, liver disease, and depression. Alcohol-related harms are known to create additional financial burden on individuals, families, and society, costing approximately £21 billion per year and adding a £3.5bn burden to the healthcare system in England.[63] Alcohol use and alcohol-related incidents also result in significant costs to police and fire services.[64]

Figure 6 **Alcohol-attributed hospital admissions (broad definition), 2016/17 - 2020/21**

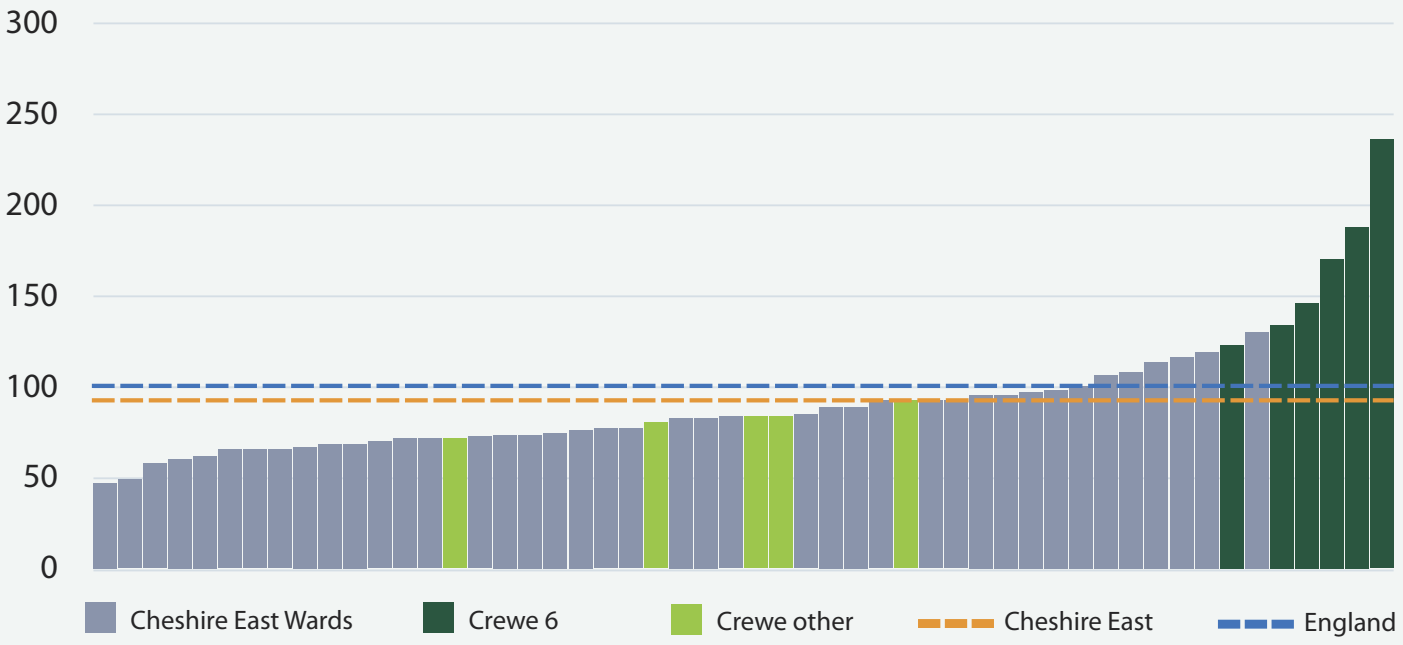


Figure 6 shows that, although average alcohol-attributable hospital admissions are lower in Cheshire East compared to the England average, the levels in all of the six local wards in Crewe – wards with some of the highest levels of deprivation in the country [65] – are considerably higher than the England average. This highlights the inequalities in relation to the use and/or abuse of alcohol in Cheshire East, including that the highest levels of alcohol related hospital admissions are seen among residents of Crewe, Nantwich, Middlewich, and Macclesfield.[66]

Having an alcoholic drink is considered normal by many living in the UK, but it is very easy for drinking to slip into being harmful. In Cheshire East it is estimated that 14,000 people are high risk drinkers and 3,500 are addicted to alcohol.[67] Of the 14–17-year-olds surveyed in Cheshire East, half felt that drinking alcohol was fun and normal.

61 Office for National Statistics. 2018. Adult drinking habits in Great Britain: 2017. Available here
62 Office for Health Improvement & Disparities. 2014. Estimates of Alcohol Dependence in England based on APMS 2014, including Estimates of Children Living in a Household with an Adult with Alcohol Dependence. Available here
63 Nuffield Trust. 2023. Alcohol-related harm and drinking behaviour. Available here
64 Institute of Alcohol Studies. 2020. The Costs of Alcohol to Society. Available here
65 Cheshire East Council. 2019. Crewe Deprivation 2019 to 2010 Swipe Map (data from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government Index of Multiple Deprivation). Available here
66 Cheshire East Public Health Profiles and Tartan Rug. Available here
67 Cheshire East. 2023. Substance Misuse Full report. Available here

Further to this, drinking levels at age 15 are higher in Cheshire East than for England general[68], showing that such perceptions are associated with drinking behaviour.

For years the alcohol industry has marketed certain drinks towards younger customers through creating sweet and colourful options. Unlike the tobacco industry, the alcohol industry is still permitted to advertise their products in England.[69] Through their advertising the alcohol industry lures new customers by giving the impression that drinking is attractive, fun, and normal, through sponsorships. It could be argued that advertising alcohol products just makes people aware of what is on offer, but the industry wouldn't pour millions into advertising if it wasn't effective.

Quite the opposite, it has been shown that advertising increases both how often young people drink and how much.[70, 71]

The alcohol industry is also targeting women as a potential growth area, as women historically drink less than men[72]. They have been working hard to normalise drinking as a way to unwind at the end of a day, through 'girls' nights', or by pushing supposedly healthier options.[73] The alcohol industry publicly advocates for personal choice and personal responsibility when drinking, with phrases such as 'drink responsibly' to deflect from their own role in driving alcohol harm and to avoid increased regulation.[74]

Case Study

Lower My Drinking

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, in collaboration with Champs (Cheshire and Merseyside Public Health Collaborative) developed the free Lower My Drinking app, available from any smart phone or smart device.

The Lower My Drinking app empowers people to understand why they drink, and gives expert advice and tools to help them to reduce drinking to within the recommended guidelines of 14 units a week or less. The app allows users to set realistic drinking goals, track progress, review drinking habits, compare weekly drinking levels and uses notification alerts to help to keep users to stay on top of managing their drinking levels.

Since its release, the app has been downloaded over 2,400 times and continues to help people in Cheshire East and the rest of Cheshire and Merseyside.

68 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. 2023. Public health profiles 'Child and Maternal Health'. Available here
69 Brotzman, P. 2018. Trouble Brewing: Making the Case for Alcohol Policy. New York. Available here
70 World Health Organisation. 2018. Global status report on alcohol and health. Available here
71 European Alcohol Policy Alliance. 2017. European report on alcohol policy. Available here
72 World Health Organisation. 2018. Global status report on alcohol and health 2018. Available here
73 Brotzman, P. 2018.
74 Brotzman, P. 2018.

The impacts of unhealthy commodity industries

Food and drink high in fat, sugar, and salt

We live in a world where it is a constant battle to eat healthily, and this is no accident. Heavily processed food and foods high in salt, sugar, fat, and refined carbohydrates are addictive, and are aggressively marketed to the public.[75] It is generally cheaper to purchase an unhealthier option in supermarkets, and they are also quicker and easier to prepare and cook, compared to cooking with fresh ingredients.

Food and drinks that are high in fat, sugar and salt now make up around half of all foods eaten in Western countries like the UK.[76] These foods are high in calories but low in the vitamins and nutrients our bodies need to stay healthy; [77] contributing to the average adult eating 300 more calories than they need each day.[78] Poor diets and excess calorie intake lead to significant levels of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers, and muscular conditions and cost the NHS £6.1 billion every year.[79]

A diet containing lots of processed, salty, fatty, and sugary food and drinks commonly causes people to become overweight or obese and contributes to malnourishment, diabetes and other non-communicable diseases.[80] Just over 1 in 3 adults manage to eat 5 daily portions of fruit and vegetables in Cheshire East.[81] Around 41.4% of adults are overweight in Cheshire East, and 21.1% are classified as obese.[82] The picture for children is similarly worrying, with more than 2 in 10 children aged 4-5 being overweight or obese in Cheshire East, with this figure rising to over 3 in 10 by the age of 11.[83]

Changing working patterns and financial constraints such as the recent cost of living crisis have made it more difficult for people and households to stick to a diet consisting of a variety of fresh and healthy foods. It is widely agreed that the most effective way to improve diet would be to change national and international policy to acknowledge that the issue is not just down to individual choice.[84]

The UK Health Security Agency [85] noted the critical role that businesses can have in helping people to adopt and maintain healthier eating and exercise habits, by:

- promoting general physical activity amongst employees and encouraging them to take regular breaks to reduce inactivity and sedentary days
- offering healthier choices in workplace canteens and/or ensuring sufficient fridge space to enable employees to bring fresh food and packed lunches with them to work
- maintaining the conversation with staff about healthy nutrition and exercise habits, and using the promotion of national campaigns to encourage employees to take part in fun and motivational challenges (e.g. Couch to 5K and Healthy Eating Week)
- engaging the whole workforce and ensuring that different employees' and teams' working patterns are taken into account with any work to promote and improve nutrition and exercise choices amongst employees

75 Gearhardt, A.N. et al. 2023. 'Social, clinical and policy implications of ultra-processed food addiction'. British Medical Journal, 383. Available here
76 Wood, B. et al. 2021. 'Market strategies used by processed food manufacturers to increase and consolidate their power: a systematic review and document analysis'. Globalisation and Health, 17. Available here
77 Wood, B. et al. 2021
78 Gearhardt, A.N. et al. 2023
79 Gearhardt, A.N. et al. 2023
80 World Health Organisation. 2023. Noncommunicable diseases. Available here
81 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. 2024. 'Percentage of adults aged 16 and over meeting the '5-a-day' fruit and vegetable consumption 2021/22'. Fingertips Public health data. Available here
82 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. 2024. 'Cheshire East Obesity Profile 2021/22'. Fingertips Public health data. Available here
83 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. 2024. 'Prevalence of overweight (including obesity) (4-5 yrs and 10-11 yrs) 2022/23'. Fingertips Public health data. Available here
84 Government Office for Science. 2007. Foresight: Tackling Obesities. Future Choices Project Report. 2nd Edn.
85 UK Health Security Agency. 2018. 5 ways businesses can help employees eat well and move more. Available here

The food and drink industry is dominated by a small number of major corporations; making it very difficult for new companies to successfully break into the food and drink market.[86] The lack of competition within the market means that this relatively small number of major corporations have considerable influence over the setting of food and drink prices, and can exploit this to maximise profits, even if this means marketing and promoting unhealthy food and drink products to people.[87]

In the less affluent and more deprived areas of Cheshire East, there are more hot food takeaways and fewer healthy food establishments per square mile, compared to the more affluent, less deprived areas.[88, 89] This pattern is not a coincidence and mirrors what is happening across the country.[90] The local food landscape has a major influence on our behaviours and the more fast-food and takeaway outlets there are around us is likely to influence us to opt for these unhealthier food choices more often. Children and young people can also be influenced by the number and availability of unhealthy food outlets in their local environments. Public Health England emphasised the need for local authorities and national governments to create healthier environments to help to tackle obesity and health inequalities.[91]

The licensing powers granted to local authorities provides the responsibility and authority to review personal and premise licensing applications for the sale and supply of alcohol, provision of entertainment, and/or late night refreshments. The 2003 Licensing Act requires local authorities to consider **Crime and Disorder, Public Safety, Preventing Public Nuisance, and Protecting Children from Harm** to determine whether a licensing application should be granted. The Local Government Association stated that, whilst public health factors into all four of these statutory objectives, it can be difficult for public health to be an effective, responsible partner within the licensing process.[92]

In 2023, the government launched a Food Data Transparency partnership, which provides people with the facts and information they need to make more ethical, sustainable, and healthy dietary choices.[93] It is clear, however, that focusing solely on improving individual choice will not solve this issue. These health problems can only be solved by holistically addressing the causes and factors that lead people to unhealthy diets, being overweight, and obesity, including tackling the commercial determinants of health and the availability of healthy and unhealthy food choices provided within everyone's individual environment.

Case Study

Healthier Food and Drink Advertising Policies

In January 2024, Knowsley Council became the first local authority in the North West to introduce a policy aimed at reducing the advertisement of unhealthy food and drink products. Its Healthier Food and Drink Advertising Policy prioritises the health and wellbeing of residents, tackles climate concerns and reduces health inequalities by limiting the promotion of unhealthy foods and drinks on council-owned advertising spaces.

The policy uses the well-established Nutrient Profiling Model to classify foods and identify which advertisements are promoting products high in fat, salt and sugar that need to be restricted and/or replaced by healthier promotions.

Cheshire East Council is also preparing a similar approach to encouraging the promotion and advertisement of healthier food and drink across the borough, which is hoped to be finalised by the end of 2024.

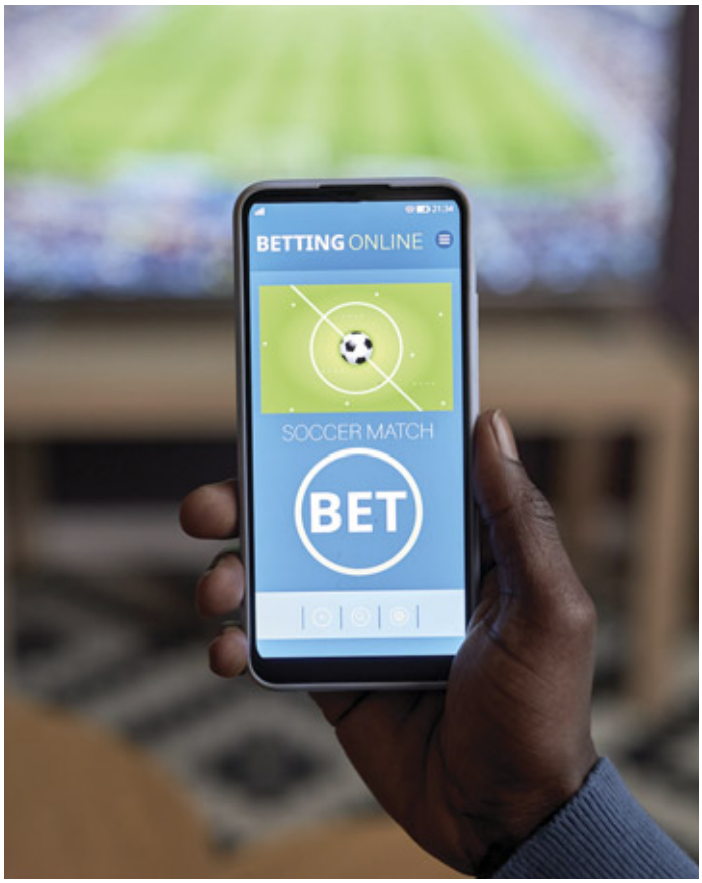
86 Wood, B. et al. 2021
87 Wood, B. et al. 2021
88 Cheshire East Council. 2019. Excess Weight Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. Available here
89 Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. 2022. Government food strategy. Available here
90 Public Health England. 2018. England's poorest areas are fast food hotspots. Available here
91 Public Health England. 2018.
92 Local Government Association. 2020. Public health and the Licensing Act 2003: Guidance on effective participation by public health teams. Available here
93 Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. 2022.

The impacts of unhealthy commodity industries

Gambling

The gambling industry uses the same Industry Playbook methods to influence people and drive profits by marketing through a variety of media – television adverts, social media, and celebrity endorsements to name a few – to target certain products or messages at specific groups. It has arguably become one of the most innovative health-harming industries of recent times in its mission to maximise profits.

Alongside the continuous improvement of mobile technology and internet accessibility, the industry has rapidly transformed and developed its offering of products to offer people 24-hour-a-day access to gambling games and services, as well as the ability to reach audiences and users across high, middle, and low-income countries. The UK's online gambling market has grown rapidly in recent years, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is reflected by its dominance in the European market (over 30% of the total online gaming and gambling revenue) during this period.[94]



A large study completed by the Gambling Commission found that 60% of respondents saw gambling adverts or sponsorships at least once a week, with over a third of people claiming to have been prompted or influenced to spend money on a gambling activity by advertising they had seen in the previous 12 months.[95]

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities recently reviewed evidence on the financial impacts of the gambling industry in England, estimating that harmful gambling costs the government over £400 million each year. It also reports that the health impacts caused by harmful gambling costs an additional £1.35 billion per year.[96]

The negative health impacts caused by gambling, just like other unhealthy commodities explored in this report, disproportionately affect those living in the most deprived areas. It is estimated that betting shops are 10 times more likely to be found in poorer and more deprived areas than more affluent and less deprived areas.[97] This is evident in Cheshire East, where 13 (43%) of the 30 licensed gambling premises in the borough, are in the town with the highest levels of deprivation, Crewe.[98]

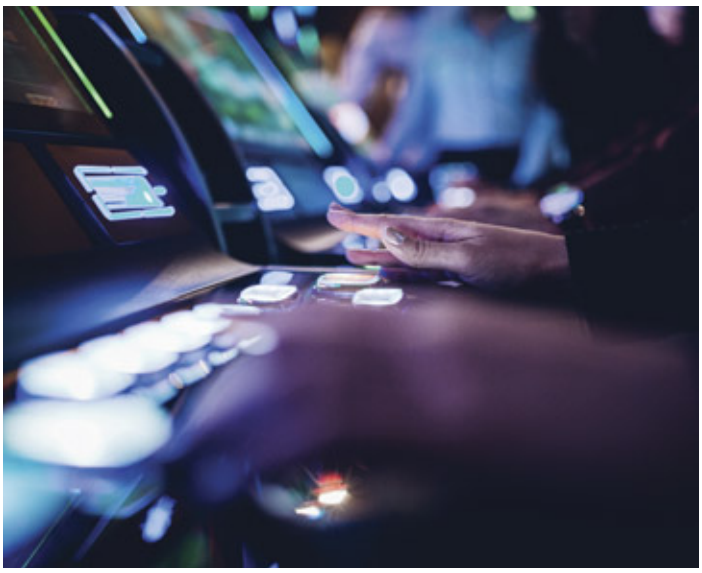
Gambling harms can destroy lives and have significant negative health, economic, and social consequences on individuals, families, and households. Gambling is associated with increased financial difficulties and debt, increased rates of family violence, homelessness, substance misuse and suicide. Based on the government's estimates of the proportion of the population who have a problem with gambling, are at-risk, or are impacted by another's gambling, there are approximately 2,000 residents in Cheshire East are currently dealing with a gambling problem, 15,000 are gambling at at-risk levels, and over 28,000 are negatively affected by another person's gambling.[99]

94 IDnow. 2023. Online gambling regulations in the UK – an overview. Available here
95 Gambling Commission. 2020 Gambling behaviour in 2020: Findings from the quarterly telephone survey. Available here
96 Office for Health Improvement and Disparities. 2023. The economic and social cost of harms associated with gambling in England. Available here
97 Sky News. 2023. Betting shops 10 times more likely to be found in UK's poorest areas. Available here
98 Cheshire East Council. 2023. Statement of Gambling Principles 2023-26. Available here

Steps have been taken by the government to refresh gambling laws to better protect people from the increased risks of gambling harms brought about by smartphone and online gambling accessibility.[100]

However, the new rules and regulations will not entirely prevent people from experiencing gambling harms and does not address the issue of the prevalence of gambling in people's environments.

In June 2022, the Association of Directors of Public Health issued a clear statement that all members of society have the right to live without unnecessary and preventable risk to health and safety from gambling products and the gambling industry. People who do choose to gamble should be safe from preventable harm, regardless of their ability to protect themselves.[101]



Case Study

Sefton and Halton Councils – Tackling Gambling Related Harms

Sefton Council worked in collaboration with the charity, Beacon Counselling Trust, to deliver training to front-line, public-facing staff to help these staff to feel more confident and enabled to have conversations with members of the public around harmful gambling and helping people impacted by gambling to access appropriate help and support.

Beacon Counselling Trust carried out workshops in primary and secondary schools in Halton Borough, which aimed to educate pupils, parents/carers and teachers on the harms of gambling, with online resources available for staff, teachers and the public to continue to access.

As the Licensing Authority for Cheshire East, Cheshire East Council continues to follow its Statement of Gambling Principles and Licensing Objectives to protect children and vulnerable people from gambling harms and exploitation, ensuring gambling is conducted in a fair and open way, and preventing gambling links to crime and disorder.

99 Office for Health Improvement & Disparities. 2023. Gambling-related harms evidence review: summary. Available here
100 Department for Culture, Media and Sport. 2023. Major reform of gambling laws to protect vulnerable users in smartphone era. Available here
101 Association of Directors of Public Health. 2022. Protecting the public from being harmed or exploited by gambling and the gambling industry. Available here
102 Friel, S. 2023. 'Climate change mitigation: tackling the commercial determinants of planetary health inequity'. The Lancet, 402(10419), pp. 2269-2271. Available here

The impacts of unhealthy commodity industries

Fossil fuels

Climate change is arguably the greatest global health issue of our time. Without effective climate mitigation, the world we know will be unrecognisable by the time a child today reaches old age. Unhealthy commodity industries, whose main driver is to increase profits, have been known to maximise production, distribution, and purchase of fossil-fuel reliant products and services. These practices include political and financial lobbying, influencing scientific research to try to discredit other scientific research and data, and encourage climate change denial.

Through lobbying of politicians and governments, industries and corporations can influence the creation and approval of policies that are favourable to their business interests and reduce any regulations that could enforce greater use of renewable energy sources, reduce fossil fuel dependency, and reduce harmful environmental practices.

The fossil fuel industry has spent millions on disinformation campaigns that seek to promote (highly polluting) gas and propane appliances, whilst also criticising and disinforming about electric alternatives, to help them to make record-setting profits.[103] These negative tactics date back to the 1960s when oil companies actively sought to slow down and hide research into electric vehicle technologies – which ultimately stalled the development of the electric car – to maintain continued reliance on petrol and diesel for vehicle fuels.[104]

Many companies have accepted they cannot deny climate change outright and must show public support for the wider green energy agenda, so have shifted their strategy from denying to delaying. These companies and industries are using greenwashing – disinformation published or promoted by industries and companies to present themselves as environmentally responsible in the public eye – to obscure their continuing extraction of fossil fuels.[105]

Despite the growing understanding of the harmful impacts of fossil fuels, and the UK's commitment to international climate agreements and carbon neutral targets, its energy consumption is still heavily reliant on fossil fuels (providing

78% of total energy), with only 16% from renewables and 6% from nuclear energy sources.[106]

This is consistent with reporting that since 2015, fossil fuel industries received £20 billion more funding from the UK government than renewable energy industries, with around 20% of this funding intended to support new extraction and mining[107]– both of which are environmentally-damaging practices.

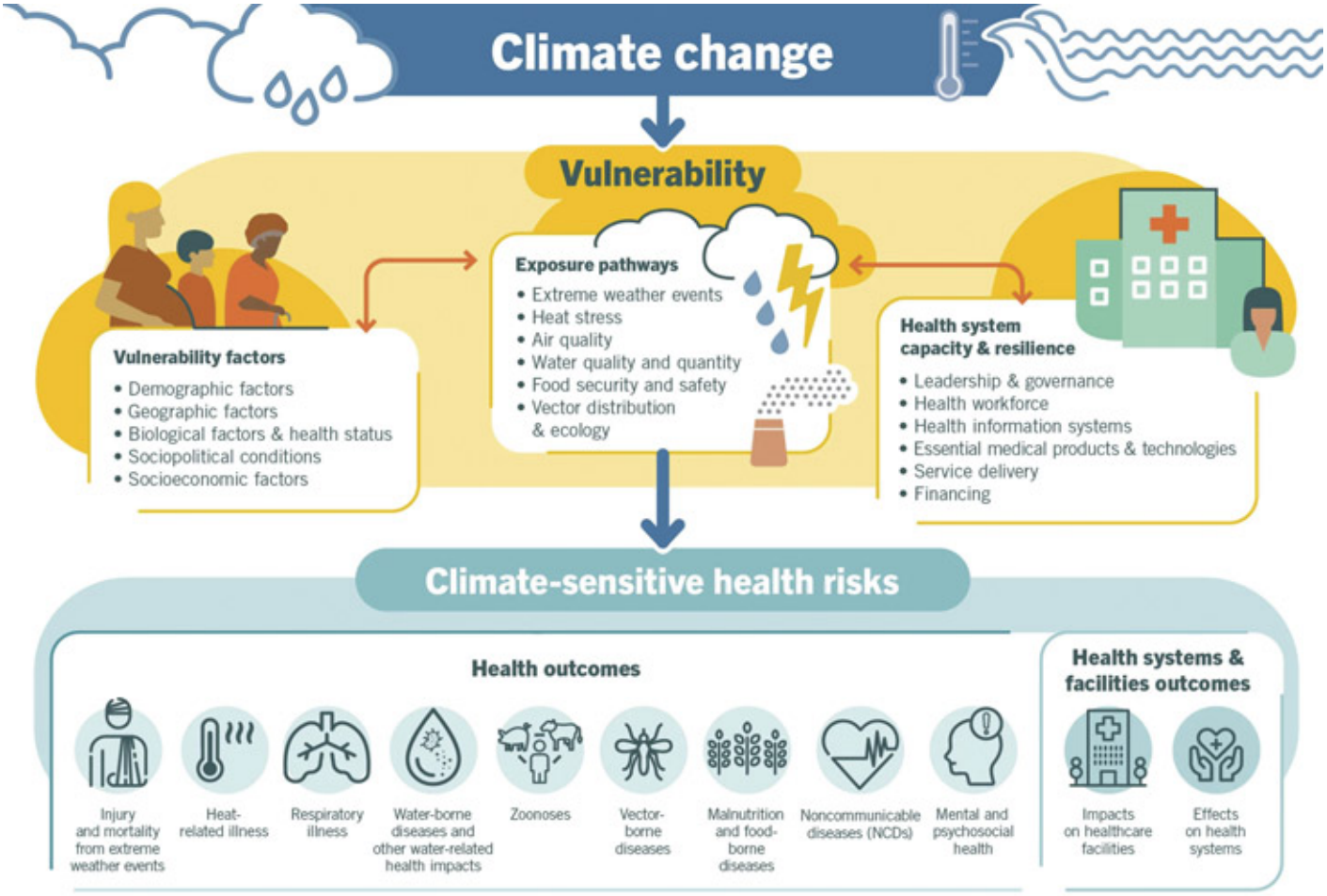
The UK government also lifted a ban on fracking – the extraction of natural gas and oil from shale rock by causing fractures in the rock formations – in September 2022.[108] Government climate advisers and environmental think-tank organisations are united in arguing for greater investment in renewable energy sources, and that this is the most effective way to reduce carbon emissions as well as household energy bills.[109]

The use of fossil fuels contributes significantly to the pollution of our air. In addition to climate change and global warming, the continued use of fossil fuels around the world has led to significant levels of air pollution and poor air quality. Poor air quality is linked to numerous health issues including stroke, heart disease, lung cancer, respiratory disease, and asthma.

In April 2021, Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah was the first person in the UK to have air pollution listed as their cause of death, after the coroner's inquest found that air pollution had materially contributed to her death at age 9.[110]

103 Marsh, R. 2022. Big Oil has engaged in a long-running climate disinformation campaign while raking in record profits, lawmakers find. Available here
104 Goldenberg, S. 2016. Oil company records from 1960s reveal patents to reduce CO2 emissions in cars. Available here
105 Earth Justice. 2024. For Big Oil and Gas, Greenwashing is the New Climate Denial. Available here
106 Poynting, M. 2023. What are fossil fuels? Where does the UK get its energy from? Available here
107 Horton, H. 2023. Fossil fuels received £20bn more UK support than renewables since 2015. Available here
108 Stallard, E. 2022. Fracking ban lifted, government announces. Available here
109 Harrabin, R. Government climate advisers say cut fossil fuels to lower energy bills. Available here
110 BBC News. 2021. Air pollution: Coroner calls for law change after Ella Adoo-Kissi-Debrah's death. Available here

Figure 8: An overview of health risks associated with climate change. Source: World Health Organisation



Climate change presents a fundamental threat to human health; it can be the cause of several negative health risks and outcomes, which can also increase demand and impact on healthcare services, as shown in Figure 8. It is unequivocal that climate change affects human health and that climate risks are appearing faster and becoming more severe sooner than research had previously predicted.[111] The World Health Organisation estimates that 3.6 billion people in the world already live in areas highly susceptible to the impacts of climate change.[112]

As air quality, climate change, global warming and severe weather events worsen and/or become more frequent, it is inevitable that the health, wellbeing, and livelihoods of people in Cheshire East and across the UK will continue to be put at greater risk.

111 World Health Organisation. 2023. Climate change. Available here

112 World Health Organisation. 2023

The impacts of unhealthy commodity industries

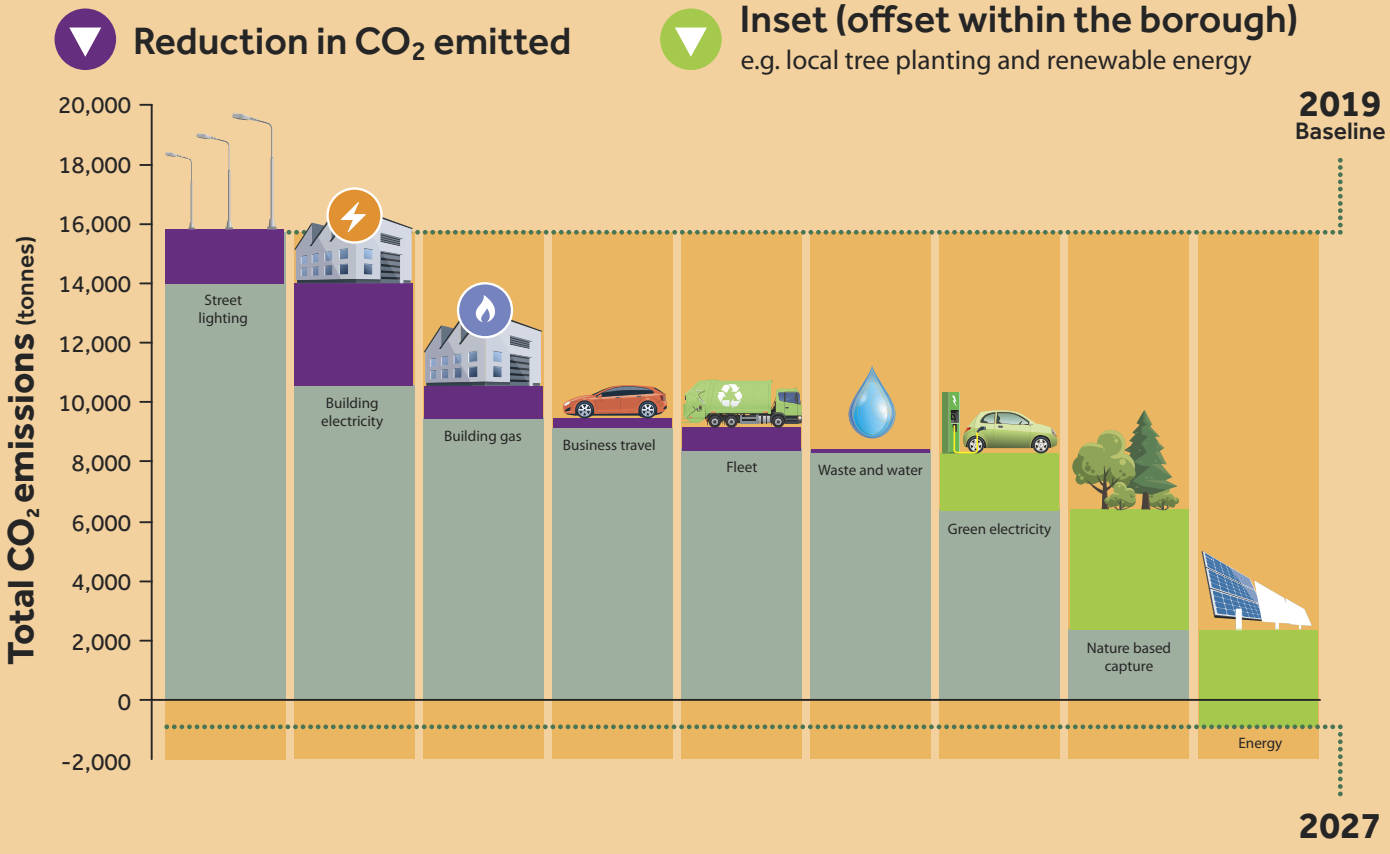
Case Study

Cheshire East Council's carbon neutral pledges

In May 2019, Cheshire East Council unanimously voted to acknowledge the government's declaration of. Councillors also asked that the council fast-track the development of a Cheshire East Environmental Strategy[113] to ensure that the council and partners are working effectively to meet common climate and environment goals.

In the same month, the council also committed to becoming a carbon neutral council (by 2027). The Carbon Neutrality Action Plan[114] set out the council's strategies and priorities to ensure it meets this important commitment. As well as undertaking specific projects to reduce or offset the council's carbon emissions, the Action Plan commits the council to continue to raise awareness of the environment and climate emergency, working with suppliers, and influencing behaviour change from individuals and households through to big businesses.

In January 2022, Cheshire East Council made a further pledge to make Cheshire East a carbon neutral borough by 2045. This is not something that the council can achieve on its own and it will take a committed, collaborative effort with Cheshire East residents and businesses alike to meet this important goal. During 2024, the council will be publishing its first 5-year action plan to set out the clear direction for achieving carbon neutrality as a borough.



113 Cheshire East Council. 2020. Environment Strategy 2020-24. Available here

114 Cheshire East Council. 2020. Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2020-2025. Available here

Opportunities for positive action

The most effective way to reduce the influence of unhealthy commodity industries, and the harmful impacts to health they cause, would be through **national changes to legislation and regulations to more effectively govern how these industries and corporations operate**

Opportunities for positive action

Figure 9 below shows the different kinds of public health interventions and actions that Cheshire East Council, other local authorities, and the UK government can put in place to protect our most vulnerable residents, and improve the health and wellbeing and quality of life of all UK residents.

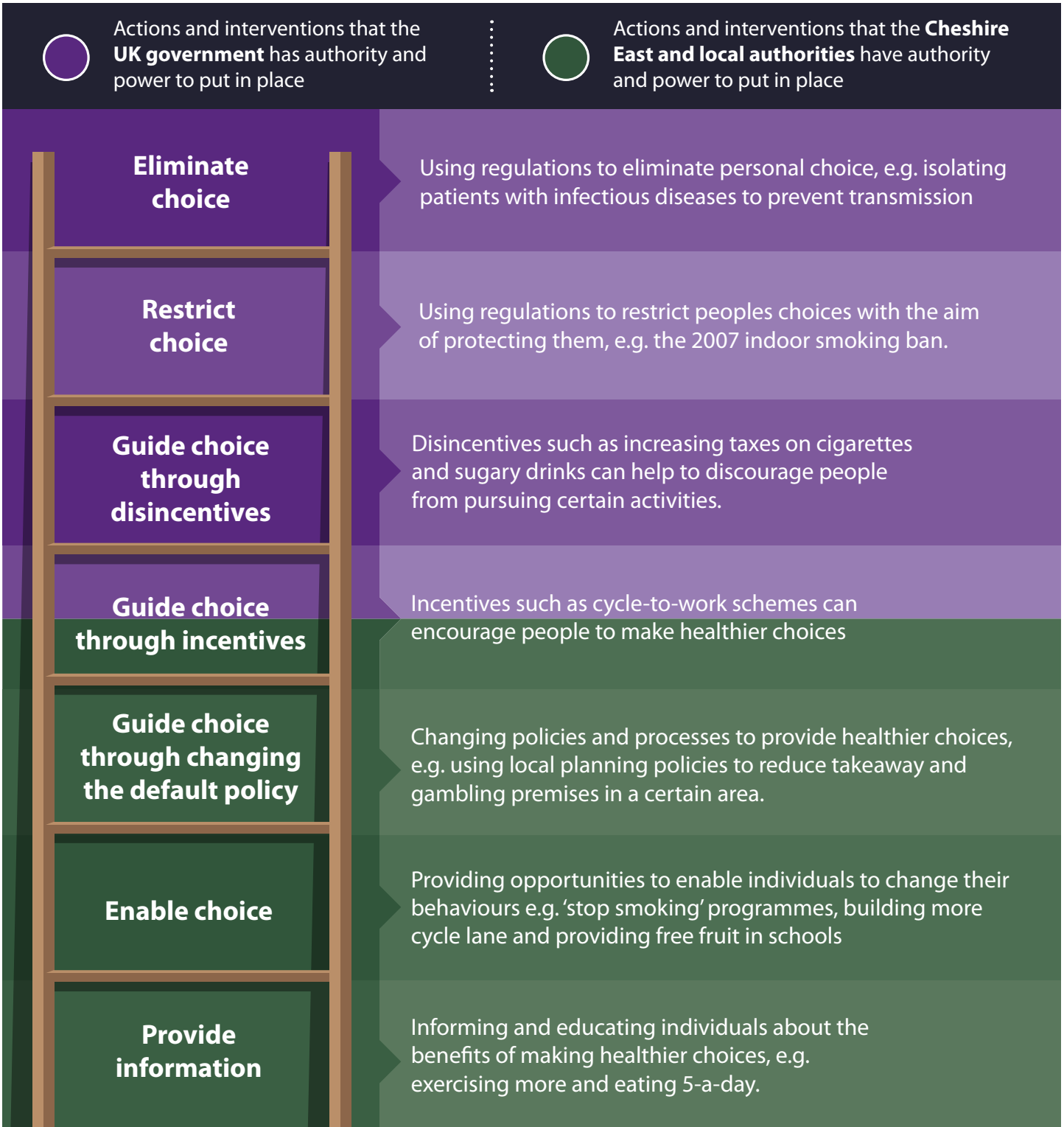


Figure 9: The Nuffield Intervention Ladder, demonstrating the different types of public health interventions that the government, local authorities and other authorities are able to deploy.

In the absence of a coordinated approach by central government, some of the opportunities for positive action available to Cheshire East Council includes:

- Producing a Cheshire East Position Statement on tackling the negative health impacts of the commercial determinants of health and influence of unhealthy commodity industries on residents.
- Encouraging the Champs Public Health Collaborative to produce a similar position statement for local authorities, partners and industries across Cheshire and Merseyside.
- Advocating for caps and limits on exposure to unhealthy commodities such as tobacco, alcohol and gambling products in certain settings and locations
- Establishing an advertising and sponsorship policy to reduce our residents' exposure to the influence of Unhealthy commodity industries
- Putting in place a cumulative impact policy for alcohol and the night time economy strategy through licensing, to reduce the overall impacts of alcohol use/abuse
- Using planning powers and the local plan to restrict density of high fat, salt, sugar foods, tobacco, alcohol and gambling
- Using regulatory powers and enforcement action to regulate and reduce avoidable exposure and harms from illegal sales of alcohol, tobacco and vapes
- Using social value and climate impact as additional key factors within procurement and commissioning processes
- Working with other local authorities and regions to continue to enhance and develop the Cheshire East approach to reducing the negative impact of commercial determinants of health
- Securing endorsement and support for creating a position statement and Cheshire East approach to CDOH with the Cheshire East Health and Wellbeing Board, Adults and Health Committee and Scrutiny Committee.
- Using the council's status and influence as a local Anchor Institution and lead the local business sector by example in ensuring that employee policies are conducive to good health and wellbeing, do not widen inequalities, and take meaningful action to address pay gaps.
- Continuing our planned action to become a carbon-neutral organisation by 2027 and a carbon-neutral borough by 2045, Cheshire East Council will be further helping all businesses across Cheshire East to improve their long-term environmental and sustainability impacts, and ultimately reduce the health impacts of climate change and global warming on our residents.

Notes: