

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND URBAN PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE

Working with collaborators around the theme of urban public health

What do the public think about public health in London?

The 26th of April this year marked the launch of the Social Science & Urban Public Health Institute, and we asked those who came to tell us what they thought about health in the city. What keeps us healthy, what threatens our health, and what should change?



Our guests were a mix of academic and practitioner colleagues from King's College London, as well as collaborators from third sector organisations and user groups. While this was not a random sample of London's population, it didn't stop our attendees engage in heated debate about what did and didn't promote health in London.

To get an overview of immediate thoughts, people were asked to write on a sticky note answers to one or more of the following questions:

- What do you do to stay healthy in the city?
- What threatens your health in the city?
- What should change to make London the healthiest global city?

These were stuck on a wall and discussed as people gathered.



What did people think?

| | What do you do to stay healthy? | What threatens your health? | What should change? |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|
| TRANSPORT RELATED ISSUES | Cycle, walk, run (x4) Walk up escalators | Cars (x3) Long/tiring commute (x2) | Fewer/no cars (x6) Better transport accessibility More cycle lanes |
| ENVIRONMENT | Use green space (x4) | Air quality (x5) Noise (x2) Dogs off leads | More open/green space (x3) Fewer dogs off leads |
| COMMUNITY/ SOCIAL LIFE | Go out to meet people (x4) | Overcrowding (x3) Community breakdown People who don't recycle | More cohesive community |
| WORK AND LEISURE | Mindfulness/meditation (x3) Use gyms/leisure centres (x2) Swim | Organisational stress | Better work/life balance |
| POLITICS/ POLICY | | Cuts to services (x2) Expensive housing Tories Brexit | More equality (x3) Better housing Fewer chicken shops near schools Social prescribing |

Transport was the most common category mentioned, and the one where there was most agreement in discussions. Using 'healthier' modes like walking and cycling were mentioned as ways to stay healthy; cars and crowded public transport threatened health; and reducing cars in London was the single most mentioned suggestion to make London healthier.

Environment was also important; many people mentioned air, noise and crowds as aspects of the city that threatened their health, and green space as good for health.

Issues that divided commentators gathered around the wall included 'chicken shops' and 'dogs off leads'. Chicken shops near schools were listed as a threat to health, but discussion also raised the potentially health promoting issue of how they are a community asset, and a place to meet. Although some saw dogs off leads as dangerous or unpleasant, and adding to the risks of the city, others thought more dogs would be good for health.

How does this match up to what public bodies are doing to address health in London?

The Mayor of London's recent London Health Inequalities Strategy does address many of these issues: focusing on healthy children, healthy minds, healthy places and healthy communities. The Strategy starts by acknowledging the key role of wider circumstances on health. Many local authority public health departments are focusing on issues such as healthy weight, smoking and sexual health: issues that didn't get mentioned as immediate issues of concern.