

Physical Activity Case Study

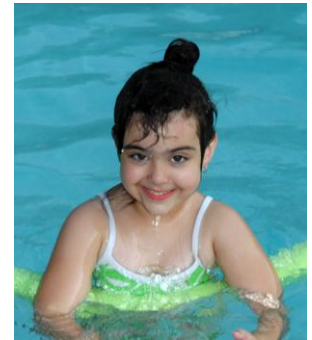
Colwyn Bay Leisure Centre

In September 2007, the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) was approached to assist in a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) on the proposed Health Precinct project in Colwyn Leisure Centre. The HIA was carried out to identify the Health Precinct's potential impacts on health and wellbeing, any gaps in provision that could affect its delivery to the local population, and any health inequalities present within it. It was also considered to 'add value' to the project proposal, by actively engaging with local stakeholders in a participatory workshop. These stakeholders included community and voluntary groups, local authority representatives, and local public health practitioners.

What is Health Impact Assessment?

Health Impact Assessment is a process which supports organisations in assessing the potential consequences of their decisions on people's health and wellbeing. The Welsh Assembly Government is committed to developing the use of HIA as a key part of its strategy for improving health and reducing inequalities.

HIA provides a systematic framework that is also flexible and practical, which can be used to consider the wider effects of local and national policies or initiatives, and how these in turn might affect people's health. HIA works best when it involves people and organisations who can contribute different kinds of relevant knowledge and insight. The information is then used to build in measures to maximise opportunities for health, and minimise any risks. The process also provides a way of addressing the health inequalities that continue to persist throughout Wales. The systematic approach of HIA uses the wider (or social) determinants of health as a framework for appraisal, resulting in realistic recommendations. WHIASU was established to support this process in Wales, and to provide advice and guidance to those wishing to undertake a HIA. A rapid approach, where the HIA is undertaken over days or weeks, was considered highly suitable for the Conwy Health Precinct, as the process had already gone through a comprehensive process of option appraisal.



Conwy Health Precinct

The concept of a Health Precinct project is the development of a place where exercise and health professionals can work together to develop innovative and evidence-based solutions to improving the health of local people through physical activity, whether for ill health prevention, exercise by prescription, chronic disease management, or rehabilitation from acute or chronic ill health. A Health Precinct also offers the opportunity to deliver other health services, such as a Sexual Health Clinic.

The Conwy Health Precinct project was a joint venture between Age Concern, Conwy and Denbighshire NHS Trust and Conwy County Borough Council, forming part of a refurbishment programme of Colwyn Leisure Centre. This collaboration was set up to support a wide range of local residents to move seamlessly from medically-supported therapy to community-based physical activity, and to also provide an opportunity to integrate an important social element into the delivery of exercise programmes.

Partners Involved

- *Conwy County Borough Council and Conwy Local Health Board* made up the Health Precinct team, comprising of health professionals, exercise physiologists and qualified exercise professionals.
- The *Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit*, a partnership between Public Health Wales and Cardiff Institute of Society and Health, within Cardiff University's School of Social Sciences.
- *Building Strong Bridges* is an initiative aiming to strengthen working partnerships between the voluntary sector and the NHS in Wales.
- The role of the *Conwy Health and Well-being Partnership Team* has been to develop, drive forward and support the implementation of the Healthy Conwy Strategy, and performance manage it.

Summary of Recommendations

Twenty participants, including representatives from a variety of voluntary organisations, patient groups, the Local Health Board, the Local Authority and service users attended a stakeholder workshop. They used a Health and Well-Being Determinants Checklist to assist in focusing their thoughts and making judgements as to the likely impacts of the proposed strategy on different health determinants.

After identifying the potential impacts on the health and wellbeing of vulnerable and disadvantaged population groups (with regards to age, income, location, discrimination and other social disadvantage), recommendations were made to offer opportunities for maximising potential improvements to peoples' health and wellbeing, and to minimise any potential harmful effects in these areas arising from the proposed Health Precinct. These recommendations included:

Transport and Access

Local public transport needed to be improved, and included as a partner in the project. This could also have included a public transport drop-off point close to the main entrance, with a shuttle running from the main gate. In addition to more disabled parking, pass spaces could be given to referral patients, and cycle racks needed to be built. The building's single entrance was insufficient, especially at busy times such as during school visits. If services were timetabled to avoid peak traffic times in the local area, then transport-related issues could be avoided.

Awareness and Support

The referral process needed to be made clearer, and a Directory of Services given to show what was offered on the scheme, and who to. The development of an outreach service and peer support scheme was suggested to build confidence in individuals intimidated by public activities. Awareness of the Health Precinct could be raised through newsletters and public open forums, and community organisations could take responsibility for raising awareness within their own groups.

Establishing a regular interface between different social groups would aid social inclusion, and appropriate services would have to be made available to everyone needing them, regardless of condition, age or social group. It was suggested that incentive schemes could be set up, such as "bring a friend and get free coffee", to encourage participation.

Developing schemes locally would help ensure that cost would not prevent people from enjoying long-term physical activity. To further aid with cost issues, adequate signposting needed to be given towards welfare benefits advice.

In terms of care, a ready supply of holistically-trained professionals would need to be ensured, as well as ongoing, full risk assessment of individual patients and of services to be carried out for the more complex medical conditions. Good signposting to voluntary support groups would be important, and in particular, to disease-specific and carer organisations.

Impact on decision-making

These recommendations were used to guide actions in the months that followed, as the Health Precinct came into action. Conwy County Borough Council described the work of the HIA group as 'invaluable in providing guidance to the areas we needed to address in the early days of the HP.' Actions taken since the HIA have included the following:

- A discount scheme for GP exercise referral patients has been developed and implemented.
- A major reorganisation of the Council saw the launch of a Community Development Service, housing both the Leisure services and the Community Transport portfolio, providing the Council with greater access to and support in transport issues, and better enabling them to address the range transport-related issues identified by the HIA.
- Welsh Assembly Government protocols have since made the referral process clearer, and ensured ongoing full risk assessment for the more complex medical conditions at the individual and service levels. The issue of providing a Directory of Services offered on the scheme has been partly addressed in the Terms of Reference of the GP referral scheme.
- One step taken to raise public awareness of the Health Precinct was the holding of an open day, which coincided with the formal opening of the Health Precinct.
- Finally, the Council have worked with the Conwy Intermediate Care service and GP surgeries to pilot an outreach programme aiming to develop confidence of individuals not comfortable in taking part in public activities

A link to the full HIA report can be accessed at: www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/docopen.cfm?orgId=522&id=98583
and other relevant case studies can be found at: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/page.cfm?orgid=522&pid=10108>

