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Health inequality greater than previously thought, report finds

In the poorest areas women are getting their first long-term illness at just 47 and men at 49

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The report found that in ten years there could be 5.5 million people with type 2 diabetes while 70% of people aged 55+ will have at least one obesity-related disease. Photograph: RayArt Graphics/Alamy

Women are living nearly ten years longer in poor health than previous estimates, while men are living an extra seven years, according to a report based on [new NHS data](#) launched by the health secretary on Wednesday.

The new analysis means that men on average are being diagnosed with their first significant long-term condition at 56 and women at 55. In the poorest areas, women are getting their first significant long-term illness at just 47 and men at 49 years old.

The report, *The Health of the Nation: A Strategy for Healthier Longer Lives*, has been written by the [All-Party Parliamentary Group \(APPG\) for Longevity](#). It found that women in the UK are living for 29 years in poor health and men for 23 years: an increase of 50% for women and 42% for men on previous estimates based on self-reported data.

“A key reason for low productivity in the north is that health is worse and reducing this gap would therefore generate substantial gross value added, estimated at an additional £13.2bn,” it concluded.

[Lord Geoffrey Filkin](#), joint APPG lead and co-author of the report, said the report contained important messages for the new prime minister's [promise to 'level up' the country](#).

“[Boris Johnson's](#) majority at the election was built on seats in areas with low healthy life expectancies,” he said. “But high levels of chronic illness in the north contribute to its lower levels of employment. Poor health [causes people to drop out of work](#): men aged 55 to 65 are less likely to be in employment now than in the 1970s.”

[Tina Woods](#), joint APPG lead and co-author of the report, said: “If the number of working age people with limiting long-term health conditions were reduced by 10%, it would increase the economic activity rate by 3% in the ‘northern powerhouse’.

“Good jobs for local people contribute to better health. Improvements in health and health inequalities are necessary to unleash the potential of the whole country.”

The APPG for Longevity has spent nine months working with a range of cross-party politicians, the government's [Behavioural Insight Team](#) and [Public Health England](#), as well as experts including the [King's Fund](#) and the [Health Foundation](#) on how to improve the nation's health.

Their report found that the number of major illnesses suffered by older people will increase by 85% between 2015 and 2035. It also found older people in the [poorest areas have 35% more spent](#) on them by the NHS than older people in the richest areas.

But the report also found that up to 75% of new cases of heart disease, stroke and type 2 diabetes, 40% of cancer incidence and dementia risks could be reduced if we cut smoking, unhealthy diet, harmful consumption of alcohol and insufficient physical activity.

“This report describes both a shocking current picture – and an optimistic future one,” said Damian Green, MP and chair of the APPG for Longevity. “What is shocking is that far too many citizens get prematurely ill with illnesses that could have been avoided. Premature avoidable ill-health is rampant, and it is bad for individuals, our society and our economy.

“The optimistic point is that we can change this,” he added. “But it will require action by charities, local authorities, business, academia, central government and by citizens themselves.”

The report found that as our population ages there will be very large increases in the number of cases of ill-health over the next 15 years. In 2035 there will be around 16 million cases of dementia, arthritis, type 2 diabetes and cancers in people aged 65 and over – twice as many as in 2015. In ten years, there will be 5.5 million people with type 2 diabetes while 70% of people aged 55+ will have at least one obesity-related disease.