



# Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Strategy

2021-2025

Principles and Ambitions

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## **Foreword**

“The enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition”

The recognition of this right, set out in the World Health Organisation Constitution of 1946, is at the core of our work as the Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Board.

We are acutely aware that this is not a right that is enjoyed equally by everyone in the borough and the impacts of the global Covid-19 pandemic have held up a mirror to this injustice.

The pandemic has required us to respond with urgency but there have always been urgent epidemics of health conditions to address in the borough such as mental ill health, heart disease, diabetes, cancers, and obesity.

As with Covid-19, we see inequalities in the levels and impacts of all these conditions on people in the borough linked to factors including income, housing, employment education, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and disability.

We can only address the injustice of the health inequalities we see in Tower Hamlets by working together based on an understanding of the experience of people in the borough and by taking anti-racist actions.

Our commitment is to serve the people of Tower Hamlets by working in partnership to enable everyone in borough to enjoy their right to the best possible state of health and wellbeing whoever they are.

This strategy sets out how we intend to focus our work

**Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Board**  
**September 2021**

## **About this document**

This draft document summarises the high-level themes of the engagement and consultation process on the Tower Hamlets Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the strategic response of the Health and Wellbeing Board. It sets out system wide improvement principles that the Board will focus on and ambitions for a 'Healthy Borough' reflecting the health and wellbeing outcomes that matter to residents.

### **System wide improvement principles:**

1. Better targeting
2. Stronger networks
3. Equalities and anti racism in all we do
4. Better communications
5. Community first in all we do
6. Making the best use of what we have

### **Ambitions for a 'healthy borough'**

1. Everyone can access safe, social spaces near their home to live healthy lives a community
2. Children and families are healthy happy and confident
3. Young adults have the opportunities, connections, and local support to live healthy lives
4. Middle aged and older people are supported to lived healthy lives and get support early if they need to it
5. Anyone needing help knows where to get it and is supported to find the right help

There is further work that the Board will be undertaking over September to December 2021 to develop priorities for action.

## **What matters to people in Tower Hamlets about their health and wellbeing?**

This strategy is grounded in what we have heard from people in Tower Hamlets about what matters to them about their health and wellbeing.

Before and during Covid-19 we engaged and consulted with hundreds of people across the borough and from all backgrounds about their experience of living in the borough, how this affects their health and what they would like to see improve.

People consistently told us about six principles that mattered most to them.

1. Resources to support health and wellbeing should go to those who most need it
2. Feeling connected and included is a foundation of wellbeing and the importance of this should be built into services and programme
3. Being treated equally, respectfully and without discrimination should be the norm when using services
4. Health and wellbeing information and advice should be clear, simple, and produced with those who will benefit from them
5. People should feel that they have equal power in shaping and designing services and programme that impact on their health and wellbeing
6. We should all be working together to make the best use of the assets we already have that support people's health and wellbeing.

We talked to people about what a 'healthy borough' would look like ie a place that supports the physical and mental health and wellbeing of everyone. They said that a 'healthy borough' is a place where:

1. Everyone can access safe, social spaces near their home to live healthy lives a community
2. Children and families are healthy happy and confident
3. Young adults have the opportunities, connections, and local support to live healthy lives
4. Middle aged and older people are supported to lived healthy lives and get support early if they need to it
5. Anyone needing help knows where to get it and is supported to find the right help

People talked to us about the barriers and assets to making these principles and aspirations a reality.

These reflected aspects of Tower Hamlets as a place: the experience of living in one of the fastest growing and youngest boroughs in the country, the diversity of the population, high density of housing, overcrowding, high levels of poverty as well as areas of great affluence, crime and fear of crime, the experience of racism, barriers to accessing services, the importance of safe, green spaces and the impact of air pollution in an inner-city borough.

They also reflected aspects of the health picture in Tower Hamlets across the life course.

These include concerns around maternal physical and mental health, infant health, higher childhood obesity, the impact of high levels of child poverty on health, child and adolescent mental health issues, sexual health (higher levels of sexually transmitted infections), domestic violence, disability and health, sexual orientation and health, the wellbeing of carers, health in middle age (higher levels of diabetes and early death from heart disease, stroke and lung cancer) and health in later years (higher levels of mental health issues and lower life expectancy at age 65).

Whilst the life expectancy gap between Tower Hamlets and England has reduced as the population changes, the discussions particularly reflected the levels of health inequalities that exist within the borough linked to deprivation, often at a very local level.

## **Our response**

It is the role of Health and Wellbeing Board to look at everything that is impacting on people's health and wellbeing in the borough, understand what is working and act in partnership to drive change when needed.

We are immensely grateful to everyone who gave their time to contribute to the engagement and consultation on this strategy.

It has provided us with a strong sense of our borough today, what matters to people about their health and wellbeing, what barriers they face and what improvements they would like to see. It has also raised questions that need further exploration.

Developing these further and creating the conditions for discussion, debate and impactful action is part of the strategy.

We have reflected on how we respond and have concluded that we need to commit to:

1. Six system wide improvement principles
2. Five ambitions for a 'Healthy Borough'

These are outlined and explained in the sections that follow

## **System wide improvement principles**

These reflect what we have heard about how we need to improve as a system across all our services and programmes that support people's health and wellbeing.

### **1. Better targeting**

Tower Hamlets is a place where people's experience of health can vary hugely based on many factors including income, housing, education, age, gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure that conditions (eg recording of protected characteristics, needs assessment, local insight, monitoring, audit) are in place to ensure that resources supporting health and wellbeing are being targeted where they are most needed.***

### **2. Stronger networks**

Connection is essential to wellbeing. Tower Hamlets has many fantastic networks that bring people together to provide support and information that can transform lives. The strength and importance of these networks was never so much in evidence through the Covid-19 pandemic.

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure that networks impacting on health and wellbeing are sustained and strengthened as part of its role in protecting and improving the health of people in the borough***

### **3. Equalities and anti-racism in all we do**

Discrimination is a public health issue. Whether due to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, or other factors it can impact deeply on wellbeing and a sense of trust in institutions whose role is provide services impacting on health and wellbeing.

***The Health and Wellbeing Board members will ensure that as system leaders those who work in or use the organisations or settings, they represent feel part of an inclusive culture in which discrimination is not tolerated.***

### **4. Better communications**

Simple, clear consistent information and advice is essential to help people get the support they need to stay as healthy and well as possible. However, people respond differently to ways of communication. One size does not fit all and in a borough with such a diverse population communications messages relating to health and wellbeing need to be tested and shaped by the those they are seeking to reach.



*The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure that all health and wellbeing communications are developed with residents so that they have the impact that is intended.*

## **5. Communities first in all we do**

Everyone has a vital contribution to improve health and wellbeing for people in the borough. Real improvement needs a relationship where people share power to design, plan, assess and deliver support together.

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure that decisions, service developments and programmes impacting on health and wellbeing in the borough are driven by community needs and have coproduction and co-design at its core***

## **6. Making the best use of what we have**

In every community in Tower Hamlets there are valuable assets that support or could support people's health and wellbeing. The response to the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted this value through the way people came together to help and community assets such as voluntary sector organisations, housing associations, faith organisations and community centres provided support. Local green spaces and public amenities were critical to supporting people's wellbeing through challenging times.

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure that assets that are important to the wellbeing of people in Tower Hamlets are unlocked, sustained, and strengthened***

## **Ambitions for a ‘Healthy Borough’**

In developing this strategy, we talked to people about what a ‘healthy borough’ would look like, a place that supports the health of everyone. We also explored what needs to improve and ideas for how to make that change.

Based on these discussions, a ‘healthy borough’ would be a place where:

1. Everyone can access safe, social spaces near their home to live healthy lives as a community
2. Children and families are healthy happy and confident
3. Young adults have the opportunities, connections, and local support to live healthy lives
4. Middle aged people are supported to lived healthy lives and get support early if they need to it
5. Anyone needing help knows where to get it and is supported to find the right help

For all these ambitions there are plenty of plans and strategies already in place addressing the issues within them.

**The role of the Health and Wellbeing Board is not to add to existing plans but to understand the impact of these on outcomes when taken as a whole, explore the extent to which they are applying the principles set out in the previous section, identify gaps, be a point of escalation, enable wider engagement and act where needed.**

### **1. Safe, social spaces**

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will work with partners across the borough to make best use of land and spaces and to reduce traffic levels to ensure everyone can use open spaces and amenities to lead active, social lives - whatever their age, gender, ethnicity, healthy condition, disability or locality.***

Feeling safe in the place that you live in, having places to connect with others, having access to nature and having places to be active are all important foundations of wellbeing. Tower Hamlets has many of these assets that are available to people and it is important that everyone knows about them, feels that they are for them and feels safe to make use of them. There are also many assets that are ‘locked’ that could benefit communities but are not being used fully. Levels of traffic and air quality in the borough are barriers for many residents to make best use of outdoor spaces.

### **2. Children and families - happy, healthy and confident**

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure that through work with schools, voluntary and community groups, families and children themes children are getting healthy food, plenty of activity and learning the skills to manage their wellbeing as they grow up and parents and families have the support, they need to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.***

Giving every child the best possible start in life is the best way to reduce health inequalities in later life. Healthy pregnancy, feeling safe and loved, engaging in active play, eating well, laying foundations for healthy habits, developing mental resilience, and having a nurturing network of family and friends are important elements of wellbeing through childhood, adolescence and future life.

Tower Hamlets has many assets that support the health and wellbeing of children including maternity services, health visiting, early help services, children's centres, child health services, child and adolescent mental health services, schools, youth services, out of school activities, play areas, parks and voluntary sector organisations.

There are plans and strategies in place that cover the important issues around the wellbeing of children and families. However, the consultation highlights a range of ongoing issues in the borough including unhealthy food outlets, life skills (including cooking), clear health messaging, mental wellbeing and resilience, safety, safeguarding, integration of services, disability access, available green space, food poverty, active travel and families in crisis.

### **3. Young adults - opportunities, connection and support for wellbeing**

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure that it plays its part to work with employers across the borough to support a fair and thriving economy, and with community and voluntary groups to ensure young adults have strong networks of support, so that our young adults are leading healthy and fulfilling lives.***

Young adulthood is a time of great transitions impacting on wellbeing including finishing education to starting work, forming relationships, moving to a new house and starting families. For those receiving care it can be a time of transition to adult services. It can be a phase of life where there is the opportunity to lay foundations for mental and physical wellbeing in later life. However, it is also a time of vulnerability to insecure housing, homelessness, mental health issues as well as engaging in damaging health behaviours such as smoking, problem drinking, risky sex and drug use.

Assets that particularly support the health of young adults in Tower Hamlets include adult education, colleges and universities, job and welfare services, homelessness services housing associations and a range of health and care services including family planning, primary care, transition, disability, mental health, smoking cessation, substance misuse and domestic violence services.

There are plans that address some key issues impacting on health and wellbeing of young people, particularly the most vulnerable. These cover issues such as employment opportunities, adult education, leisure provision, homelessness, substance misuse, reproductive health, mental health, suicide prevention and violence against women and girls.

The consultation highlighted the importance of support for young adults to access apprenticeships, training, mentorships. A diverse range of issues were also raised around workforce health, support for offenders, the challenge of women re-entering the workforce after having children, affordable access to leisure, the health needs of new populations entering the borough, identity and sense of belonging (linking this to gang culture), access to drugs, anti-social behaviour, violent crime and race equality

Many of the issues raised are addressed more directly in other partnership bodies. However, the importance of good employment, feeling safe and having strong support networks for the health and wellbeing of young adults in the borough means that the Health and Wellbeing Board has an important role in using its levers to strengthen and support the work of partners.

#### **4. Middle aged and older people - staying healthy and well**

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will work with the health and social care sector, and with community and voluntary groups to ensure our borough and our services are age-friendly and ensure that those with health conditions are supported as early as possible so that they can lead active, and health lives for as long as possible.***

Middle age and later years are times of major life events that impact on health and wellbeing such as changes in family circumstances, children leaving home, separation, change in employment status, retirement, and bereavement. In addition, it is in these years that long term conditions impact such as diabetes, heart disease, lung conditions, HIV and cancers. It is a time of vulnerability to mental health issues such as depression and dementia.

Access to well-integrated, high quality health and care services focussed on prevention and quality of life are increasingly important at this time as well as uptake of screening and immunisation services to protect health and identify health issues as early as possible.

Tower Hamlets has many assets to support the health and wellbeing of middle aged and older people. These include healthy lifestyle services such as smoking cessation, weight management and health checks. Pharmacies, general practices and screening services are critical to early identification and management of common long-term conditions. In later years integrated primary care, community, hospital, and social care services are vital to identify and support people with long term conditions, mental health

issues, disabilities, social isolation issue or end of life care needs. The support provided to carers and households in these services is essential. The borough is fortunate to have a strong voluntary sector that plays an indispensable role in supporting people.

A wide range of issues were raised in the consultation. In relation to health and care services there was a focus on challenges with primary care access, long NHS waiting times, addressing hidden mental health issues, the need for prevention and early intervention and the value of group education as well as clear communication messages. There was also a view that more could be done to encourage middle age and older people into leisure services.

More broadly, there was a strong theme around better support for older people, people with disabilities and people experiencing isolation. This highlighted the value of the voluntary sector, the importance of services such as befriending, support to integrate housebound people into the community and the big difference that can be made through amenities such as public toilets and well-placed benches as well as greater consideration given to disability access. It was also noted that the pace of change in the borough is particularly challenging to older people.

Many of the issues raised are those that can be addressed more directly by the Health and Wellbeing Board through the strategies and plans that are the responsibility of its members.

## **5. Anyone needing help knows where to get it and is supported to find the right help**

***The Health and Wellbeing Board will ensure that work with health, social care and wider community services across the borough improves join up, creates networks across organisations, and improves visibility and proactive communication services between services and those who need them most***

Tower Hamlets has many assets that can support people's well-being. These may be health and care services, services that address wider factors that affect health such as housing, employment, welfare, and education. They may be voluntary organisation, food banks resident groups, self-help groups, walking groups or special interest groups. These are often very local assets can be life-changing for people whether it results in information exchange, connection, friendship, opportunity to be active or the provision of an important service.

To make the best use of these, people need to be able to know when they need them, find them easily, get information about them, be able to access them easily, have trust in those providing support and have a say in how that support is shaped.

In this consultation and many that proceeded it, people have continually expressed frustration at the difficulty of finding services and networks that support their health and wellbeing when they may be right on their doorstep. The consultation also echoed long standing issues about the importance of services and information being shaped by and designed with their users eg to meet cultural needs or those living with disabilities.

There was also a strong theme about the need for information systems to be connected. Within the health and care system people expect services to be joined up and integrated. They expect that if information is provided in one bit of the system it will be passed to the rest of the system. When information is lost or shared, people need to provide the same information repeatedly. This erodes confidence in services and is a barrier to using them.

There are plans to address these issues including a strengthened information and advice service, extensive user engagement programmes and ongoing work to join up information systems across health sector and with social care. However, the consultation highlights that there remains significant work to have a system that works for everyone.

## **Next Steps**

The Health and Wellbeing Board needs to be continually listening, learning from, and responding to the experience of people in the borough.

This means that the principles, ambitions, and priority actions underpinning the work of the Board need be under continual review.

The next step is for the Board to agree on the priority actions and outcome measures for 22/23 based on its commitments around principles and 'healthy borough' ambitions (to be completed by December 2021).

### **1. Acting on the system wide improvement principles – next steps**

The strength of the Health and Wellbeing Board is that it has representation from leaders across organisation and settings across the whole borough. The impact of applying the resource, assets and influence of these to a common purpose has the potential to drive the changes needed to improve health and wellbeing in the borough.

The next step is for the Health and Wellbeing Board to agree priorities for each of the improvement principles.

#### ***Example:***

##### ***Principle 1 – Better targeting***

##### ***Common issue:***

***Poor recording of protected characteristics with services (particularly disability, carer status)***

##### ***Response***

***The Board will review how well partners organisations are currently recording protected characteristics of their staff and residents. They will agree what improvement they will make in one year and three years.***

##### ***Shared outcome framework / statement indicator (see appendix)***

***'Regardless of who I am, I am able to access services for my physical and mental health'***

##### ***Output indicators (possible)***

***% service users with full recording of protected characteristics***

## 2. Acting on 'Healthy Borough' ambitions.

The actions needed to meet the ambitions for a 'Healthy Borough' are articulated in the strategies and plans that sit alongside and beneath the overarching Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The next steps are to

1. Map the strategies and plan that impact on the ambition
2. Identify existing groups and processes that oversee those plans
3. Review how these strategies and plans are applying the system wide improvement principles
4. Identify gaps and take forward Board level discussions on how these will be addressed

### ***Example:***

***Ambition 5 - Anyone needing help knows where to get it and is supported to find the right help***

### ***Issue identified:***

***People reporting difficulty in finding out about the right services that benefit their health and wellbeing***

### ***Response***

***Addressing this issue is already a priority of the Tower Hamlets Together plan and is overseen by the Tower Hamlets Together Board. To what extent are these plans addressing the issue and embedding the improvement principle? This plan and its outcomes could be tracked by the Health and Wellbeing Board and brought to the Board for discussion, review, problem solving and escalation.***

### ***Shared outcome framework / statement indicator (see appendix)***

***'I am able to access safe and high-quality services when I need them'***

### ***Output indicators (possible)***

***% satisfied with information and advice service***



## Appendix – Tower Hamlets Shared Outcomes Framework

The Tower Hamlets Shared Outcomes Framework was developed in 2017 as part of an extensive coproduction programme to understand what matters to people in the borough around their health and wellbeing. It is expressed in terms of 'I' statements that have been tested with residents. It is used by commissioners, services and voluntary sector organisations to help understand whether programmes to improve health and wellbeing are having an impact on outcomes that matter to people.

The framework consists of 17 'I' statements

Domain	I-Statement			
Integrated health and care system	I feel like services work together to provide me with good care	I believe the trust, confidence and relationships are in place to work together with services to decide the right next steps for us as a whole community		I want to see money being spent in the best way to deliver local services
Wider determinants of health	I am able to support myself and my family financially	I am satisfied with my home and where I live	I am able to breathe cleaner air in the place where I live	I feel safe from harm in my community
Healthy Lives	I am supported to make healthy choices	I understand the ways to live a healthy life		
Quality of Care & Support	Regardless of who I am, I am able to access care services for my physical and mental health	I am able to access safe and high quality services (when I need them)	I am confident that those providing my care are competent, happy and kind	I have a positive experience of the services I access, overall
Quality of Life	I have a good level of happiness and wellbeing	I am supported to live the life I want	My children get the best possible start in life	I play an active part in my community

The I Statements can be directly measured or assessed through related measures. These will be used alongside other health indicators (such as life expectancy, childhood obesity, premature death from cardiovascular disease, cancer, lung disease) to track progress.