



Public Health
England

Dementia and Risk Reduction: A successful pilot to extend messaging to 40-64 year olds through the NHS Health Check.

Background

- **30% of dementia is potentially avoidable** through modifiable lifestyle factors, with current evidence suggesting mid-life changes can have most impact on reducing risk (Lancet Commission, 2017)
- **Public understanding is low: only 25%** of British adults thought it was possible to reduce their risk of developing dementia (YouGov poll for ARUK, 2016)
- The NHS Health Check is an ideal opportunity to highlight dementia risk reduction messaging, given the overlap with cardiovascular risk factors. Currently the dementia component is only for 65-74 year olds
- We ran a **pilot project in 4 areas** to test the feasibility of extending risk reduction messaging to 40-64 year olds.

Outcomes

The key findings from the evaluation showed that:

- The public, and health care practitioners think that dementia risk reduction messaging in the mid-life NHS Health Check is **useful information** and relevant.
- **'What's good for your heart is good for your brain' is a simple message** that service users like and find easy to understand, and providers find easy to deliver. Dementia risk reduction messages connect with cardiovascular disease messages, as they are based on similar lifestyle risk factors, such as smoking and physical activity.
- Adding the risk reduction messages to a standard NHS Health Check conversation for people in 'mid-life' **doesn't create any extra burden** for health care practitioners
- The intervention had a **significant impact on increasing public awareness** of how to reduce dementia risk, and also on increasing public motivation to change lifestyle behaviour.

Reflections

- The dementia component of the NHS Health Check should be offered to 40-64 year olds, with a particular emphasis on risk reduction messaging.
- Health Check Practitioner **skills and knowledge are crucial** to both the likelihood of dementia being mentioned within the Health Check and the quality of the information shared.
- **Training for practitioners should be a priority** (see research by Leeds Beckett University, *What Works*, 2017) and can build on the recently revised dementia training resources.
- **Further research** is needed to understand whether and how risk reduction messaging can result in behaviour change.