

## Health Economics Network for Scotland

### Workplan 2015/16

#### Introduction

Policy makers and health practitioners are interested in what health economics can offer public health and healthcare policy and practice in Scotland. Current policy aims to increase prevention and shift the balance of health and social care but public spending is tight and demand on health services is increasing. This makes it difficult to invest more in prevention. It also makes it difficult to develop further the quantity and quality of social care and ease demand on health services.

Health economics has evidence and tools that can help manage these pressures and inform decisions about where to invest available resources. However, the full potential of health economics to influence policy and practice has not yet been realised. This is due in part to the need for stronger links between the producers and users of health economics evidence and analysis. The Health Economics Network for Scotland (HENS) was established to address this situation.

This plan describes:

1. The situation that HENS is trying to address
2. Progress so far
3. Aims and activities for 2015/16.

#### Current situation

There is substantial health economics capacity in Scotland in academic departments, Scottish Government (SG) and NHS Boards. However, policy makers and practitioners often cannot or do not access this capacity when they need it. To understand more fully the scale and cause of this problem, HENS carried out a survey of members. A brief report on the results of the survey is available on the HENS website (see below).

In summary, health economics suppliers indicated that they would like to work more with decision makers to influence policy, but identified time, challenges in translating knowledge into practice and difficulties in engaging with decision makers as barriers to doing so.

A large majority of users of health economics evidence indicated they would like to develop further their understanding of health economics but identified the following barriers to doing so:

- lack of readily available support
- lack of knowledge of where to get support
- lack of readily available evidence
- difficulties transferring knowledge into practice (particularly at the local level)
- skills and knowledge required to interpret available evidence
- differences in the priorities of academic, public health and health service organizations in relation to health economics.

HENS has been established to address these issues. It is a network for bringing users and producers of evidence together. With resources from the Quality and Efficiency Support Team (QuEST) at SG, it also funds activities that will address evidence and skills gaps. Both users and suppliers of evidence have been actively involved with HENS activities to date.

## Progress

The network now comprises over 80 members from Scottish Government, NHS area and special health boards, universities and local government. The level of representation from local government remains very limited, however, and there are no members from the third sector. Widening representation and engaging with a wider group of stakeholders with interest in health economics will be a priority in the year ahead.

So far HENS has undertaken the following activities:

- carried out the capacity survey summarised above
- created a [forum on a dedicated HENS webpage](#) on the Scottish Public Health Network (ScotPHN) website for sharing knowledge and skills amongst HENS members
- funding training and development opportunities delivered by academic partners with health economics expertise to increase capability for using health economics concepts, evidence and tools in the health and health care sectors in Scotland
- tested how HENS could work in two areas, the economics of prevention and programme budgeting
- organised events to bring together producers and users of health economics evidence to discuss ways of promoting the translation of health economics evidence into practice. The first of these was held in December – key themes from the event and presentations are available under 'Events' on the HENS webpage (address above). The second was held in March, organised jointly with What Works Scotland (WWS), attended by an invited list of delegates from community planning partnerships, HENS, Scottish Government, WWS and NHS Health Scotland. Presentations are [available here](#).

These activities have raised the profile of health economics and its potential to help with current resource allocation challenges. Network members, including academic partners have recognized the value of the network, engaging actively in planning and delivery of outputs to date.

The emphases on networking and training are both aimed at sustainability. Health economics expertise is scarce. It is important that the results of health economics analyses are used as widely as possible to maximize their reach and impact. Better networking will help optimise the use of available health economics expertise by better matching demand and supply. Training opportunities will increase capacity to access, understand and use economics evidence.

## Lessons learned

Producers and users of economic evidence want the same thing – the efficient use of limited resources in health and social care – but they use different language to frame and answer questions about resource use and prioritization. They also have different expectations regarding the use of economics evidence and tools. A key lesson from the HENS work so far is the importance of dialogue to narrow some of these differences, so that producers of evidence better understand what users want, and users of evidence better understand what producers are able to provide and what they are incentivised to do. A second lesson is that this takes time. The workplan for 2015/16 builds on these lessons, incorporating capacity building and engagement as core activities in the year ahead.

## Aims

Longer term, the aim of HENS is to contribute to the financial sustainability of the health and social care system by identifying more efficient approaches to prevention and by encouraging the use of health economics tools to inform shifts in resources into a more preventative health and social care system. By encouraging more consistent use of health economics evidence and tools, the aim is that efficient solutions will be identified and adopted more widely and consistently.

To achieve this, in the shorter term, HENS aims to facilitate collaboration between the academic health economics, policy and practice communities, across health and social care, with a focus on:

- the shift to prevention and changes in the balance of health and social care
- improving quality, sustainability and effectiveness in healthcare services.

The ways HENS will seek to do this are described below.

## Activities 2015-16

1. Completion of the two test projects: Economics of Prevention and Programme Budgeting and Marginal Analysis (PBMA). The evidence and learning from these projects will be shared with the network and the broader health economics community. Specifically:

### *Economics of Prevention*

The March workshop focused on translating knowledge on the economics of prevention into practice in a community planning context. The discussion focused on the implications of the available evidence for CPPs. It also gathered CPP views on the evidence required and the support they need accessing, interpreting and translating evidence into practice. Early in 2015/16, the conclusions from the event will be pulled together into a programme of work for HENS to take forward in the remainder of the year.

### *PBMA*

The results of the case studies and the follow up work on the challenges encountered in adopting a PBMA approach will be published.

2. Delivery of the Health Economics Research Unit (HERU) course providing an introduction to the identification, appraisal and application of economic evaluation for policy-making in population health. The course is scheduled for 10 June 2015. Based on the feedback received from the evaluation of the course, we will explore with HERU the possibility of further training events.
3. Completion of the Action Learning Set (ALS) training provided by the Health Economics and Health Technology Assessment (HEHTA) team at the University of Glasgow. The ALSs will run from 30 March until 12 May. The sessions will help participants identify and use suitable health economics tools for the translation of economic evidence into practice. Again, based on the feedback received from the evaluation of the course, we will explore with HEHTA the possibility of further training events, in particular a further ALS cohort in the north of Scotland.
4. Further development of the HENS website.

5. Actions to grow HENS network membership, with the aim of expanding the number and range (by profession and work base) of people joining the network, in particular local authority and third sector professionals.
6. Develop a program of HENS workshops and/or conferences based on themes of interest to HENS members (we will also propose that economics of prevention will be a theme for the annual Scottish Faculty of Public Health Conference in autumn 2015).
7. Develop further HENS' relationships with stakeholder networks and partners. These include:
  - Community Planning Partnerships
  - NHS Health and Social Care Partnerships
  - NHS board Directors of Planning
  - Directors of Public Health group within ScotPHN
  - NHS Healthcare Improvement Scotland
  - What Works Scotland
  - Scottish Government 3rd Sector Prevention Roundtable
  - NHS Health Scotland Inequalities Action Group

This list is not exhaustive and other partners and stakeholders with a potential interest in HENS will be identified during 2015-16. The aim will be to widen the pool of potential contributors to HENS-related work, widen the network of people identifying priorities for HENS work, and to facilitate dissemination of both HENS products and economics evidence more generally.

## **Governance and role of HENS**

The network is led by a Steering Group, chaired by NHS Health Scotland and comprising members from the Scottish Public Health Network (ScotPHN), Scottish Government, NHS boards (change and innovation and public health), Glasgow Centre for Population Health and academia (Glasgow Caledonian University).

In 2015-16, the work programme will be managed by a HENS Co-ordinator based in Healthcare Improvement Scotland. This will provide an opportunity to increase the pace of the work and expand the range of the network and the activities it undertakes.

However, it is also important to be clear about the limits of what HENS can offer to achieve these aims. HENS receives funding from Scottish Government to support a co-ordinator post and a range of capacity building and networking activities as described above. Apart from the co-ordinator post, it does not have dedicated analytical staff who can offer substantial capacity to HENS members to undertake economic analysis on their behalf. Rather, it has a 'broker' role, promoting the use of health economics by:

- providing opportunities for debate to raise awareness of the potential of health economics to address current health policy and practice issues
- helping potential users of economics evidence access sources of evidence, advice and expertise
- using the network to share evidence, experiences and insights into the ways health economics can and does help inform policy and practice.