

Key messages

1. Healthy life expectancy is an important headline measure of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Strategic Plan of the Council
2. It provides an insight into how people's life circumstances and the place they live in are impacting on their health and perception of their health

Healthy Life Expectancy in Tower Hamlets

3. Tower Hamlets has amongst the lowest healthy life expectancy in the country (although this improved significantly for men in the most recent data release 2014-16)
4. Healthy life expectancy varies significantly across the borough and this is linked to deprivation
5. Female healthy life expectancy is lower than male healthy life expectancy - this is unusual
6. Life expectancy has been improving rapidly over the past decade in Tower Hamlets which means that it is self-perceptions of health that are lowering the healthy life expectancy figure in the borough
7. There has been a significant improvement in male healthy life expectancy in 2014-16 - this is not easy to explain in the context of previous trends and further time series data will be needed to understand this further

What contributes to explaining why healthy life expectancy is lower than elsewhere?

Deprivation?

8. Compared to ten years ago, a lower proportion of neighbourhoods are in the most deprived wards nationally. However, Tower Hamlets has the third highest proportion of the population living in the most deprived areas - this suggests that the impacts of deprivation could be becoming increasingly concentrated in the borough

Levels of early death and long term health issues?

9. Tower Hamlets is no longer the extreme outlier for early deaths from the major killers (cancer, cardiovascular disease and respiratory disease, liver disease) that it was a decade ago
10. Because Tower Hamlets has such a young population it is not straightforward to estimate the level of long term conditions in the population compared to elsewhere
11. However, Tower Hamlets has higher levels of diabetes compared to elsewhere and this may help explain relatively lower self-perceptions of health in the population
12. Tower Hamlets has a higher level of common mental health conditions compared to elsewhere and this is likely to be an important contributor to poorer self-rated health

Health behaviours?

13. Higher levels of low birth weight in Tower Hamlets are a marker for poorer maternal health
14. Higher levels of childhood obesity and poor oral health are a marker for wider issues in the Tower Hamlets population as a whole around physical activity, diet and mental health
15. Evidence suggests that the diet of the adult population in Tower Hamlets is significantly less healthy than elsewhere
16. Despite improvement, Tower Hamlets still stands out as having amongst the highest levels of smoking in the country
17. Tower Hamlets stands out as having amongst the highest level of sexually transmitted infections as well as HIV in the country and this contributes to poor self-rated health in the population
18. The high levels of substance misuse in the Tower Hamlets population is a marker of the underlying issues impacting on individuals and household's lives that impact on healthy life expectancy
19. The lower uptake of screening services in Tower Hamlets is a marker for the extent to which prevention and early diagnosis services are taken up by the population

The physical environment?

20. The physical environment in Tower Hamlet supports people's health and wellbeing significantly less than elsewhere and is likely to be contributing to poorer self-rated health in the population
21. High levels of crime in Tower Hamlets compared to elsewhere are likely to impact adversely on people's sense of safety and therefore self-rated health

Social and economic factors?

22. Lower levels of employment in Tower Hamlets compared to elsewhere are likely to be significant contributors to lower self-perceived health in the population and the specific gender differentials in employment may contribute to the lower healthy life expectancy of women in Tower Hamlets compared to men
23. The levels of income deprivation in Tower Hamlets compared to elsewhere will impact profoundly on lower self-perceptions of health in the borough and particularly on health and wellbeing at both ends of the life course (children/families and older people)
24. The excellent educational outcomes of children in Tower Hamlets will mitigate the impacts of deprivation in children and affect future life expectancy.
25. However, although the data is from 2011, the higher levels of poor English language skills (particularly in women) is likely to be a contributor to poorer health in the Tower Hamlets population through impacts on core needs for wellbeing
26. The impacts of higher levels of insecure housing and overcrowding on core needs for wellbeing is likely to be a significant contributor to poorer self-rated health in the Tower Hamlets population
27. Healthy life expectancy in older people in Tower Hamlets is a significant outlier and this is likely to be due to deprivation and its consequences including social isolation