

Moving Forward to Improve Health: NGO Forum and Department of Health

An Agreement for Working Together

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Introduction

The Government's public health white paper *Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier* included commitments to support and develop the voluntary and community sectors. In particular, it recognised the contribution of the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) Forum to health improvement and stated that the NGO Forum would be strengthened.

The NGO Forum and the Department of Health (DH) have developed this agreement to establish principles for working together. This document sets out a process to ensure the relationship continues to be constructive. All members of the NGO Forum were consulted during the period October to December 2006, and have signed up to support the agreement.

The principles in this agreement are based on the national level Compact between the Government and the voluntary and community sector made in November 1998, which aims to improve the relationship between the two sectors for mutual advantage (see Annex A).

The NGO Forum

The NGO Forum is a membership organisation, funded by the DH, which facilitates dialogue between national policy makers and NGOs on ways to reduce health inequalities and improve health. It aims to examine and highlight effective NGO contributions to improving health and reducing health inequalities. As a champion of effective engagement with NGOs at all levels, the Forum has a significant role to play in helping with the delivery of the public health agenda.

As at March 2007, there are 92 member organisations from a wide range of not-for-profit organisations involved with public health working at the national level. The NGO Forum meets with senior policy makers from Government departments while they are developing policy or undertaking consultations. The Royal Society of Health manages the NGO Forum. Membership of the NGO Forum is open to any national non-profit organisation whose role has the potential to impact on public health.

The Royal Society of Health

In Spring 2006, the NGO Forum transferred from the National Institute of Health and Clinical Excellence to the Royal Society of Health following a successful tender to become the new host organisation.

The Royal Society of Health (RSH) is the largest and one of the longest-established public health organisations in the UK. It was founded in 1876 to promote joined up thinking between health professionals with the aim of promoting continuous improvement in human health world-wide. Society members are academics, health professionals and practitioners who share an interest in promoting health through their daily work and come together through Society membership to provide cross-cutting, multidisciplinary perspectives on current health questions. The Royal Society of Health's work falls into the following categories – capacity building, policy development, communication, liaison and networking, and advocacy.

The RSH supports the NGO Forum so it can act as the vehicle for producing a national NGO Plan for Health, in which each member would commit itself to a specific action or actions. These would be co-ordinated through the Forum to ensure that the 'whole was greater than the sum of the parts', and would be a complement to recent white papers. The mechanism for so doing should be in place by Autumn 2007.

As the host organisation the RSH undertakes to provide not just physical space for the NGO Forum, but to promote the Forum to its networks, increase its membership and actively support the Forum's policy development role.

A commitment to work together

This agreement is about a beginning of a process that will develop over time. The DH and the NGO Forum will continue to work together on a variety of issues in different ways, but all future work will be informed by the commitments made in this agreement.

The terms of engagement for this agreement are laid out in the following sections. Each side of the agreement must make commitments to ensure that this agreement has practical applications and is useful to both sides. We want to work together to achieve the same goals to improve health and ensure that health inequalities are reduced. Each party will bring different skills and knowledge to bear on searching for solutions and ways of working in the public health arena.

Responsibilities of each party

Responsibilities of the Department of Health

- To ensure that it works with the NGO Forum members to develop and formulate policy
- To give early notification of those consultations related to public health issues. There will be involvement of the NGO Forum from the earliest opportunity
- As a part this process, there will be access to the originators of policy throughout the development of policy
- Where necessary, to consider the need for financial support for the consultation process
- To ensure that the outcome or product is clearly defined from the earliest stage
- To ensure that consultation and policy development are part of this agreement and that the NGO Forum will be involved from inception to feedback
- To make policy statements or working papers readily accessible to all members of the NGO Forum
- To follow due process, consider all responses and provide more than just statistical analysis of results
- To ensure senior policy makers attend meetings and listen to the views of NGO Forum members. To give feedback to NGO Forum members about actions being taken in response to issues and problems raised during meetings
- To promote the NGO Forum at all appropriate cross-departmental meetings and events

Responsibilities of the NGO Forum members

- To provide DH with a gateway to community involvement with a cross cutting approach to issues
- To act as advocates and campaign on health and well-being issues.
- To work with DH collaboratively on policy development; this will be prioritised within their own organisations.
- To assist with the drawing up of consultation questions when appropriate
- To raise issues and bring concerns proactively to DH
- To ensure the issues that are a priority to the voluntary and community sector are highlighted to the DH
- To respect the confidentiality of Government information, when given access to it on that basis
- To undertake sample audits of consultation exercises including constructive feedback to help improve the consultation process for the future
- To consider their role and examine how they can impact on and improve health and well-being.
- As employers, to undertake to ensure that they have a positive process and policies to ensure the health and well-being of their own staff.

Process and Principles

The NGO Forum and DH agree that the following are essential components to ensure that this agreement works:

- The full NGO Forum and DH policy officials will meet at least 3 times per year to consider policy development and consultation plans.
- The DH will have an active role in the NGO Forum including full membership of the Steering Group.
- Each meeting will set the ground rules, including confidentiality, what is up for change and the scope for developing new ideas.
- This will be a two-way process, initiated by either side.
- There will be transparency in all matters: ground rules for consultation will be clearly stated and the outcome of discussions and decisions will be open and recorded as appropriate.
- Both sides will engage in a spirit of openness and mutual respect and support.
- The NGO Forum steering group and DH to ensure these commitments are being met will review this agreement on an annual basis.
- The DH and NGO Forum will work together to develop a communication strategy for future work together.

Consultation

The NGO Forum and DH will work together, by building consultation into their planning cycles to ensure that consultation takes place at an early stage. NGO Forum members will be given time to respond. There will be clarity about the scope of the consultation and the role of the NGO Forum within the consultation. It will be the DH's responsibility to provide explanations of decisions made, particularly when NGO Forum views are not taken on board.

The NGO Forum and DH will seek opportunities to involve members in the development of policy as an important part of the public health sector.

Outcomes

It is the intention that this agreement will have tangible outcomes that can be measured and assessed. Initially, this will be a brief number of focused items that can be reviewed as part of the formal process. As the working arrangements and the partnership develop further, it is envisaged that more ambitious performance indicators will be developed.

Initial outcomes:

- An improvement in and further development of the working relationship between both sides e.g. a DH policy lead will be able to contact an NGO Forum member for information about a specific policy area.
- The profile of health and well-being raised across the NGO sector, including with organisations that are not fully aware of their impact on the health of the people in England.
- Greater engagement by the NGO Forum members in DH policy development.
- Improved health of the employees and / or client groups of NGO Forum members.
- Policy development and delivery informed by the contribution of NGO Forum members.

As part of the evaluation of the NGO Forum, an impact report will be produced that will include progress on the above outcomes and provide guidance on further development of more ambitious performance indicators for future working relations.

Annex A

The Compact

Initiated by the Home Office, ‘The Compact’ is an agreement between the Government and the voluntary and community sector made in November 1998, at the national level. It aims to improve the relationship between the two sectors for mutual advantage.

Since then various local authorities and statutory agencies have developed their own compacts to work in their own geographical area. The Department of Health has also developed ‘Making Partnership Work for Patients, Carers and Service Users – A strategic agreement between the Department of Health, the NHS and the voluntary and community sector.’

This document committed to the creation of the National Strategic Partnership Forum. The key focus for this document and the forum is the delivery of services, while the NGO Forum is focused on public health and inequalities.

“The Compact is the agreement between government and the voluntary and community sector in England to improve their relationship for mutual advantage. By building better relationships the Compact can help government and the voluntary and community sector work better together for the communities they serve.”

Key Principles of the National Compact

- A healthy voluntary and community sector is part of a democratic society
- Working in partnership with the voluntary and community sector can result in better policy and services and better outcomes for the community
- Partnership requires strong relationships (e.g. integrity and openness)
- Government can play a role as funder of the voluntary and community sector
- The independence of the voluntary and community sector should be respected

The above principles were used as a guide to develop the specific model to be used by the Department of Health (DH) and the NGO Forum as to their future working relationship. In addition, the NGO Forum held a workshop about developing this agreement with the DH and some general principles are stated below:

- Public health is central to health and well being
- People are not always patients; the policy being developed must be person-centred.

Annex B

NGO Forum

NGO Forum Members

Organisations

1. Action for Blind People
2. Age Concern England
3. AHPN (African HIV Policy Network)
4. Alcohol Concern
5. Amicus the union
6. ASH (Action on Smoking and Health)
7. Association of Directors of Social Services
8. Asthma UK
9. Barnardo's
10. Black Health Agency
11. BMA – British Medical Association
12. British Dental Association
13. British Dental Health Foundation
14. British Dietetic Association
15. British Ethnic Health Awareness Foundation
16. British Fluoridation Society
17. British Heart Foundation
18. British Medical Association
19. Brook Centres
20. Cancer UK
21. CASH (Consensus Action on Salt and Health)
22. Child Poverty Action Group
23. CIEH – Chartered Institute of Environmental Health
24. Commission for Racial Equality
25. Community Action Network
26. Community Development Exchange
27. Community Education Development Centre
28. Community Practitioners & Health Visitors Association
29. Consensus Action on Salt and Health (CASH)
30. Consumers Association
31. Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations (CEMSO)
32. CSV
33. Diabetes UK

34. Drug Scope
35. Equalities National Council
36. Faculty of Public Health
37. Food Commission
38. Forum for the Future
39. FPA
40. Help the Aged
41. Homeless Link
42. Institute of Rural Health
43. JCWI – Joint Council for Welfare of Immigrants
44. Kings Fund
45. Local Government Association
46. Medical Foundation for AIDS & Sexual Health
47. Meningitis Trust
48. Men’s Health Forum
49. Mental Health Providers Forum
50. MIND
51. Muslim Council of Great Britain
52. NAT – National Aids Trust
53. National Children’s Bureau
54. National Healthy Living Alliance
55. National Heart Forum
56. NCOPF – One Parent Families
57. NEA (National Energy Action)
58. NHS Confederation
59. No Smoking Day
60. NSPCC – National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children
61. Nuffield Trust
62. Patient information Forum (PiF)
63. Patients’ Association
64. Pharmacy HealthLink
65. RCGP – Royal College of General Practitioners
66. RCM – Royal College of Midwives
67. RCN – Royal College of Nursing
68. RCP – Royal College Physicians
69. Refugee Council
70. Royal Institute of Public Health
71. RNID
72. RoSPA – Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
73. Royal Society for the Promotion of Health
74. Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain

75. Scarman Trust
76. SCFUK – Save the Children Fund UK
77. SHEPS – Society for Health Education & Promotion Specialists
78. SOLACE – Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers
79. South Asian Health Foundation
80. Stroke Association
81. Students in Mind
82. SUSTAIN (alliance for better food & farming)
83. SUSTRANS
84. The Day Care Trust
85. The Kids' Cookery School
86. THT – Terrence Higgins Trust
87. TOAST (The Obesity Awareness & Solutions Trust)
88. TSI – Trading Standards Institute
89. UKPHA
90. WCRF – World Cancer Research Fund
91. Womens' Institute
92. YMCA England

References

Choosing Health

Making healthy choices easier
(TSO, November 2004)

*Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and
Community Sector in England*

(The Home Office, November 1998)

Making Partnership Work for Patients, Carers and Service Users

A Strategic Agreement between the Department of Health,
the NHS and the Voluntary and Community Sector
(Dept. of Health, 2004)



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Produced by Department of Health

280377 1P 0.5k Mar 07

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