

PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES IN INNER AND OUTER LONDON

Summary

London has many public health issues which need to be addressed. The city has a higher rate of early deaths from circulatory disease than the rest of the country, the highest number of people with diabetes, and the highest level of childhood obesity.

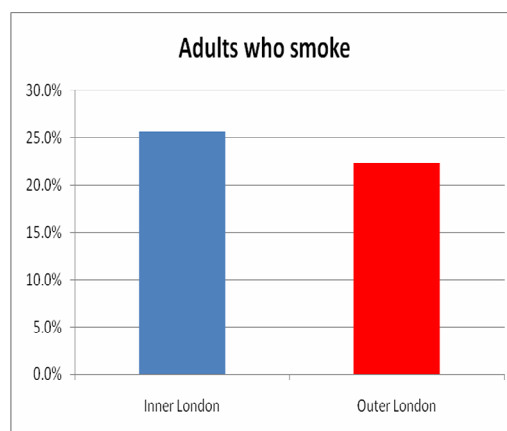
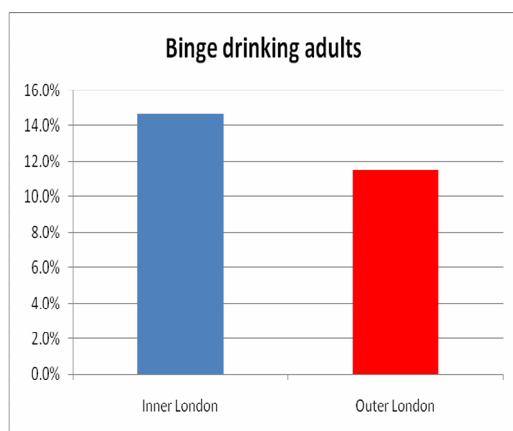
Within London, however, public health challenges differ between areas; in particular between inner London and outer London. Distinctive patterns can be discerned in the lifestyle factors that contribute to health outcomes, including:

- Inner London has higher levels of adults who smoke and binge drink but its population tends to eat more healthily and is more physically active.
- Smoking and binge drinking is lower in outer London but people are less likely to be physically active and eat healthily.
- Obesity is a bigger problem in outer London, although inner London has higher rates of early death from heart disease and cancer.

These findings suggest that NHS London and its partners may need to utilise differing approaches to improve public health, based on the characteristics of the communities being served.

Findings

On various measures of public health, inner London and outer London perform significantly differently. Inner London has bigger problems with regard to 'vice' indicators.



Smoking

The inner London average for the number of adults who smoke is 25.7 per cent, compared to 22.4 per cent in outer London; this gap has narrowed recently, with reduced numbers of adult smokers across London.

There are several outer London boroughs with numbers of smokers as high as the worst inner London boroughs. But of the best 12 performing boroughs, 11 are in outer London.

Binge drinking

The worst 12 boroughs in relation to the number of binge drinking adults are all in inner London. Nineteen of the best performing boroughs therefore are in outer London.

The overall difference between inner and outer London is significantly larger than it is with smoking; indeed, the gap between inner and outer London averages has grown since the last reporting period. There is a huge range within the city, with Lambeth having almost twice the number of binge drinkers (16.8 per cent) as Harrow (9.7 per cent).

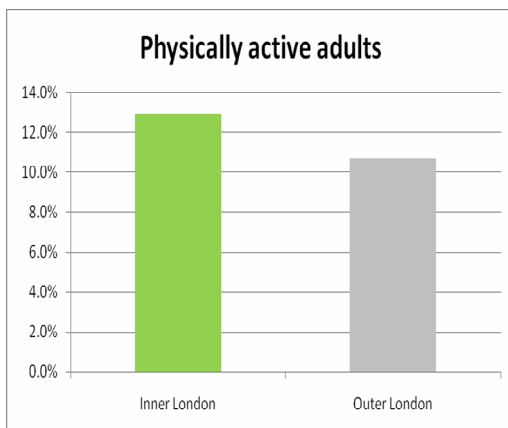
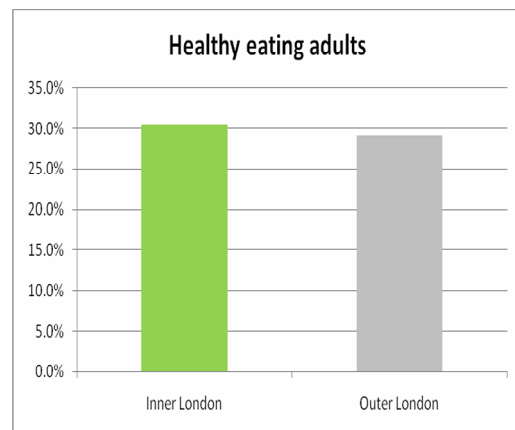
Conversely, on the 'healthy living' indicators relating to diet and physical activity, inner London boroughs perform better than outer London.

Healthy eating

Three of the top five boroughs in terms of healthy eating are in inner London.

Meanwhile, three of the worst five boroughs for healthy eating are in outer London.

The figures range from 45.8 per cent of adults eating healthily in Westminster to 20 per cent doing so in Barking & Dagenham.



Physical activity

Levels of physical activity also differ. Seven out of the top eight boroughs for physical activity are in inner London.

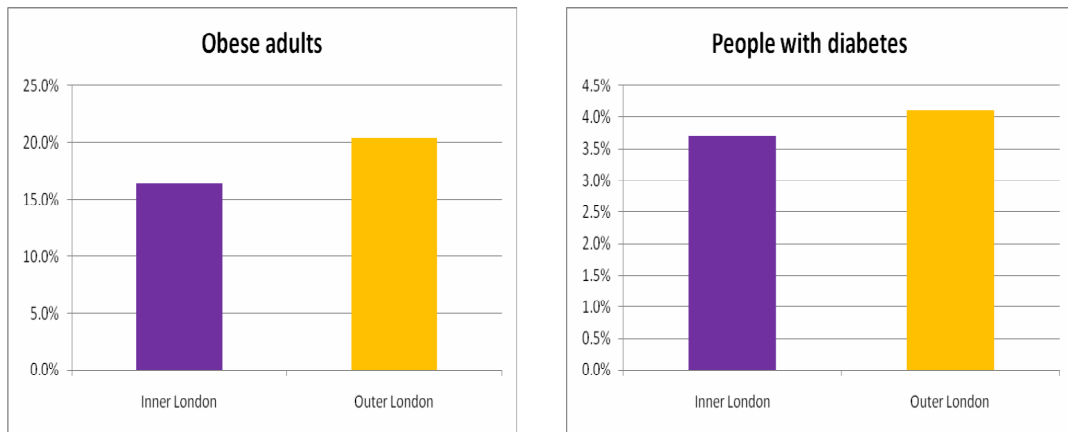
Conversely seven of the eight boroughs with the lowest levels of physical activity are in outer London.

The figures range from 8.4 per cent active in Barking & Dagenham to double that in Westminster, at 16.9 per cent.

Effects – obesity and diabetes

There is some evidence of the potential effects of these lifestyle patterns. Specifically, the number of obese people is higher in outer London than it is in inner London, at 20.4 per cent compared to 16.4 per cent. This gap has widened recently; since the last reporting period inner London has improved its performance but outer London has more obese adults than previously.

Seven out of the worst eight boroughs for obesity are in outer London, while seven out of the best performing eight are in inner London, with figures ranging from 23.9 per cent in Barking & Dagenham to 11.9 per cent in Tower Hamlets.



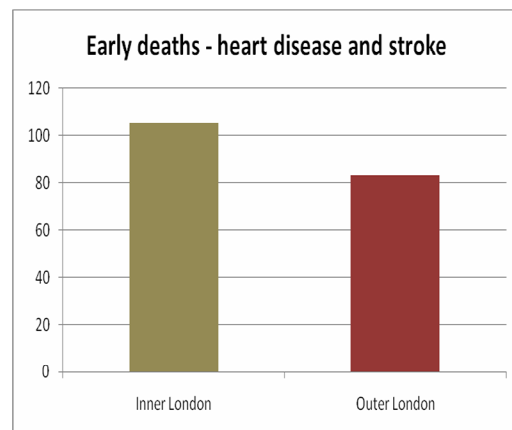
Related to this, the proportion of the population with diabetes is also higher in outer London, at 4.1 per cent compared to 3.7 per cent in inner London.

Four of the five boroughs with the lowest level of diabetes are in inner London, while four of the highest five are in outer London, with figures ranging from 2.1 per cent in Kensington & Chelsea to 5.9 per cent in Brent.

Outcomes – heart disease and stroke

At the same time, early deaths from heart disease and stroke are significantly higher in inner London. An inner London borough can expect 105 early deaths each year, while in outer London the figure is 83 (per 100,000 population under 75).

The six boroughs with the highest rate of early death are all in inner London, while five out of the six best performers are in outer London; the gap between inner and outer London has narrowed, however.



There is also huge variation from the best to the worst. Newham has 136 and Tower Hamlets 132 early deaths, while at the other end of the scale Bromley has 58 and Kensington & Chelsea 57 (per 100,000 population under 75).

Discussion

It probably remains the case that the bigger challenges for public health in London are found toward the centre of the city, as demonstrated by the rate of early deaths from heart disease and stroke, as well as lower life expectancy overall. Nevertheless, outer London has its own distinctive health challenges that the health service and its partners need to address.

Inner London has the bigger problems with regards to smoking and alcohol abuse and this certainly contributes to the high rates of early deaths from heart disease and stroke. Recent policy measures such as the ban on smoking in enclosed public spaces may help to reduce smoking overall across the city, but more will probably be required, possibly including greater engagement between the NHS and local schools.

On binge drinking, inner London has the bigger problems, with notable exceptions like Newham and Tower Hamlets for ethnic reasons. Outer London boroughs do, however, have significant binge drinking problems of their own, with Richmond, Kingston and Sutton being among the worst performers in London.

Among the more intriguing facts to arise out of the data are that outer London performs worse in relation to physical activity and healthy eating. These factors are reflected in broadly higher levels of obesity and diabetes in outer London, which presage a range of other health concerns.

Levels of physical activity are where the difference is most pronounced, with 12.9 per cent of people active in inner London compared to 10.7 per cent in outer London. Although these figures suggest physical activity is fairly low across the whole city, they indicate that other factors may be at work than the availability of open space. For example, public transport is relatively under-developed across the outer boroughs, with fewer chances for people to get around without reliance on cars. These are issues which should be explored by the NHS and London Boroughs alongside Transport for London.