



Fast Start for Better Health

CIEH response to 'Fast Start for Better Health' consultation.

26th January 2024

About the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH)

CIEH is the professional voice for environmental health representing over 7,500 members working in the public, private and third sectors, in 52 countries around the world. It ensures the highest standards of professional competence in its members, in the belief that through environmental health action people's health can be improved.

Environmental health has an important and unique contribution to make to improving public health and reducing health inequalities. CIEH campaigns to ensure that government policy addresses the needs of communities and business in achieving and maintaining improvements to health and health protection.

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Key points:

- CIEH advocate for urgent action to be taken for air quality improvement in the first 100 days of a new government.
- This should be underpinned by ambitious emission reduction targets (specifically in respect of PM_{2.5}, NO₂).
- CIEH advocate for the need to raise public awareness of the environmental and public health impacts of wood burning.
- CIEH support protecting children's health with school-focused projects.
- It is essential to address health inequalities, with targeted campaigns necessary to reach certain social demographics.
- CIEH promote the important role of Environmental Health Practitioners as crucial for early detection and intervention.
- CIEH advocate for the need for ringfenced funding for local authority Environmental Health teams.
- It is essential that there is collaboration across all areas of society, whether that is public, private or the voluntary third sector.
- CIEH recommend the development of targeted communication strategies that cater to different demographics and communities.
- CIEH believe that investments in environmental health improvements not only enhance public health but also contribute to economic growth. CIEH is calling for more integrated decision making across nature, people, society and the economy. A healthy, more equal society is the cornerstone of a thriving economy.

Reducing Key Risk Factors (Q1 & Q2):

CIEH strongly advocates for urgent action to improve air quality. We recommend setting more ambitious environmental quality targets, particularly concerning PM_{2.5} and NO₂ emissions. In addition to these targets, we propose initiating awareness campaigns that focus on raising public awareness of the environmental and public health impacts of domestic wood burning. These campaigns will serve as the first step toward behaviour change and can pave the way for future legislation. By engaging the public and promoting responsible wood burning practices, we can significantly reduce the health risks associated with poor environmental quality while building a foundation for long-term regulatory measures.

Children's Health (Q3):

The well-being of children and their exposure to clean air is a top priority for CIEH. To safeguard children's health and broader environmental health, we recommend the implementation of air quality improvement projects near schools and residential areas. These initiatives should include public awareness campaigns focused on the adverse effects of domestic wood burning on children's health. By raising awareness among parents and caregivers, we aim to encourage responsible wood burning practices and protect the health of our youngest citizens. Environmental Health Professionals (EHPs), as part of the public health workforce, play a vital role in implementing these initiatives and ensuring healthier living environments for children.

Health Inequalities (Q4):

Addressing health inequalities is at the core of CIEH's approach to environmental health. For example, we recognise that in the face of rising energy bills, many individuals may be turning to domestic burning as a source of heat, which can impact broader environmental health. This may lead to inappropriate domestic burning practices, contributing to environmental quality challenges. To tackle air pollution and its disproportionate impact on disadvantaged communities, we recommend practical and non-discriminatory legislation in the longer term. However, in the short term, we propose the launch of targeted awareness campaigns in areas with high levels of domestic wood burning. These campaigns should be tailored to the specific needs of disadvantaged communities, aiming to educate residents about the health risks and alternatives to wood burning. This approach ensures that all segments of society benefit from clean air initiatives. EHPs, with their expertise in various environmental health areas, can play a vital role in addressing multiple determinants of health in disadvantaged communities. Local authorities play a vital role in representing the needs of their communities. That is why it is vital that they are adequately resourced to carry out the essential front-line services that they do so that they may support and serve the most vulnerable in our society.

Healthy Life Expectancy (Q5):

EHPs, who are part of the broader environmental health workforce, play a pivotal role in enhancing healthy life expectancy. CIEH recognises their expertise in early detection and intervention across various environmental health domains but would point to concerning trends such a rise in allergen cases and cases of asthma to as indications that underinvestment in this workforce has real-life public health consequences. To address wood burning-related health issues and promote broader

environmental health, we recommend that EHPs working within their local authority environmental health teams to launch public awareness campaigns. These campaigns should emphasise the importance of using clean-burning alternatives and proper wood burning practices. By leveraging the expertise of EHPs, we can educate communities and extend healthy life expectancy. Additionally, EHPs can address other environmental health concerns such as housing conditions, food safety, infectious disease control, noise pollution, and occupational health & safety to further enhance public health outcomes.

Early Detection and Intervention (Q6):

Leveraging the expertise of EHPs is crucial in early detection and intervention strategies in broader environmental health. CIEH recommends that EHPs work in collaboration with local healthcare providers to identify health risks related to domestic wood burning. Public awareness campaigns should be a central component of this approach, ensuring that residents are informed about the health consequences of wood burning and the benefits of responsible practices. By combining early detection with awareness initiatives, we can protect vulnerable populations from the adverse health effects of air pollution and address broader environmental health concerns. EHPs' comprehensive knowledge of various environmental health issues positions them as valuable assets in promoting public health.

Utilising Existing Resources (Q7):

To maximise the effectiveness of environmental health and air quality management, CIEH suggests optimising current local government structures and resources. While we advocate for long-term regulatory measures, we also recognise the immediate value of simply raising public awareness on a range of environmental health issues. These campaigns can be launched efficiently by repurposing existing resources within local government departments. However, to ensure that Environmental Health teams are fully equipped to deliver on their statutory duties and provide robust public health protection across various environmental health domains, we strongly advocate for ringfenced funding. This dedicated funding will enable Environmental Health teams to focus on their vital role in safeguarding public health, not only in air quality management but also in addressing a wide range of environmental health challenges such as housing conditions, food safety, infectious disease control, noise pollution, and occupational health & safety. What makes Environmental Health truly unique, is our capacity to link all of these factors within a diverse, knowledgeable profession. Ringfenced funding provides the necessary financial stability to Environmental Health teams, allowing them to operate effectively and meet the diverse needs of the communities they serve.

Engaging Public, Private, and Voluntary Sectors (Q8):

Cross-sector collaboration remains crucial in CIEH's approach to broader environmental health and air quality improvement. While our long-term vision includes legislation, we emphasise the importance of involving the public, private, and voluntary sectors in awareness campaigns. Collaborative efforts with industry stakeholders can facilitate the dissemination of information and support for responsible wood burning practices. By fostering multi-sector partnerships, we can ensure a unified approach to raising awareness and driving behaviour change in the context of broader environmental health. EHPs, with their comprehensive understanding of environmental

health issues, can act as liaisons between different sectors to address a wide range of public health challenges.

Effective Communication and Information (Q9):

CIEH underscores the importance of public awareness campaigns regarding the environmental and health impacts of domestic wood burning and broader environmental health. We recommend the development of targeted communication strategies that cater to different demographics and communities. These strategies should utilise diverse communication channels, including social media, community events, and educational programmes. By effectively communicating the risks associated with wood burning, to take but one example, and promoting responsible practices, we empower individuals and communities to make informed choices and take proactive measures to reduce exposure. EHPs can play a central role in conveying complex health information to the public in an accessible and comprehensible manner within the context of broader environmental health.

NHS's Role (Q10):

CIEH advocates for the NHS to prioritise preventative measures related to environmental health and broader air quality. While long-term legislation remains a goal, we encourage the NHS to actively support awareness campaigns in the short term. Routine environmental quality assessments as part of healthcare check-ups can help identify individuals at risk due to the environments in which they live and work. Collaboration between local healthcare providers and environmental health professionals is crucial in this effort. By integrating environmental quality monitoring and health assessments, we can identify health risks early and provide targeted interventions, ultimately reducing the burden on healthcare resources. EHPs, as part of the wider public health workforce, can contribute their expertise to these efforts in the context of broader environmental health. However, it is vital that local authority environmental health teams are properly resourced to fulfil this role to the best of their ability. Investing in the environmental health workforce isn't a choice between health or wealth; it's recognising that they are inseparable. Environmental Health professionals are the preventative arm of the public health workforce, proactively addressing the root causes of several public health issues, such as air quality, housing conditions, food safety, infectious disease control, noise pollution, and occupational health & safety. Investing in environmental health doesn't just improve public health; it creates a ripple effect of economic benefits, from reduced healthcare costs to a more productive workforce.

Local Leadership (Q11):

CIEH recognises the pivotal role of local leadership in environmental health and air quality management. We support the empowerment of local authorities to take action in their communities. While we advocate for long-term legislation, local leaders can take immediate steps by endorsing and supporting awareness campaigns. We recommend the establishment of Air Quality Improvement Boards at the local level, comprising representatives from local government, public health agencies, and community organisations. These boards should oversee awareness initiatives and community engagement efforts, ensuring that the public is well-informed about the environmental and health impacts of domestic wood burning and other environmental health challenges. EHPs can serve as valuable advisors to these boards, offering their expertise in a wide

range of environmental health issues to drive community-level improvements within the context of broader environmental health.

Costs, Funding, and Economic Growth (Q12):

CIEH emphasises that addressing environmental health challenges, should dispense with the 'health vs wealth dichotomy.' We believe that investments in environmental health improvements not only enhance public health but also contribute to economic growth. It's essential to recognise that cleaner environments lead to reduced healthcare costs, increased economic productivity, and a higher quality of life for residents. We recommend conducting comprehensive cost-benefit analyses to quantify the financial advantages of environmental health initiatives. These analyses should consider healthcare cost savings, increased worker productivity, and the positive impact on local businesses. By presenting a compelling economic case, we can secure the necessary funding for environmental health projects and demonstrate the long-term economic growth potential of preventative environmental health initiatives, such as improving local air quality. Additionally, promoting the environmental health profession as a cost-effective solution to improving public health outcomes aligns with CIEH's broader goal of recognising the EH workforce's role in safeguarding public health across various domains, including housing conditions, food safety, infectious disease control, noise pollution, and occupational health & safety.