

# Northgate calls for focus on health inequalities

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Local government and local communities should be at the heart of a new approach to public health, says Northgate Public Services.

In a response to the Department of Health's white paper Healthy Lives, Healthy People, Northgate warmly welcomes an extended role for local government in public health. However, with local authorities under severe pressure, the company argues that it is essential that councils are given certainty over the level of resources to be allocated to them for public health. Without this, the response says, there is a danger that public health and reducing health inequalities will not be given the priority the government says it deserves.

GP commissioning may exacerbate inequalities rather than narrow them, according to Northgate. GP practices will have flexibility to form consortia in ways that will not necessarily be aligned with local authorities, leading to increased complexity in commissioning.

Northgate's response also calls for:

- action to address the digital divide, including in the short to medium term, developing multiple channels of information to enable active citizens to take more responsibility for their wellbeing;
- a clear recognition of the importance of tier 2 authorities in developing co-ordinated public health services that reach out to the most disadvantaged;
- representation for community organisations on health and wellbeing boards.

Sue Holloway, Director of Local Government for Northgate Public Services, said today: "The change the government plans is welcome. It is essential that local authorities are put at the heart of public health if we are to reach out to those most disadvantaged and address persistent inequalities."

"Our concern is that public health should not become the Cinderella of public services. It is essential that local authorities are given the resources to do the job. This must involve and include local people not only in the design and delivery of services, but also in their assessment."

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Notes to editors:

1. Northgate Public Services is an innovative provider of transformation and improvement services to the public sector. It is committed to high quality public services that place individuals and their communities at their heart. Its knowledge and understanding of people's needs are core to its business, as too, is its depth and breadth across public services.

2. Northgate's task is to enhance public value through the intelligent use of people and technology; to understand why and what change is necessary; to provide new thinking leading to improved performance; and to link company rewards with positive outcomes for the communities for whom it works. It supports transformation through sustainable performance partnerships.

3. In the UK, Northgate works with ninety five per cent of local authorities, every police force, and a large number of health organisations, housing associations, utilities and transport companies. Founded in 1969, the company has more than 12,000 employees.

4. A copy of the consultation response can be found at <http://www.northgate-ispublisherservices.com/uploads/File/PublicHealth0311.pdf>