

Employment and Health

Why is Employment a Public Health issue?

Employment or more importantly the lack of well-paid employment has a strong link with health. It is a fact that the more money an individual or household has, the better their health and the longer they live. Being out of work is bad for both mind and body - progressively damaging health and decreasing life expectancy.

Physical health

- Being unemployed is associated with many adverse health indicators including increased mortality
- Unemployment is also linked to many adverse health effects such as increased susceptibility to illness and disease (morbidity)
- Those in employment suffer from less episodes of illness and recover more quickly
- Living on reduced or no earned income, and being dependent on benefits can lead to a risk of falling into poverty, which in turn impacts on health
- A good, nutritious and healthy diet, including plenty of fresh vegetables, meat and fish are key to maintaining good health. However, when money is tight, healthy food choices are often replaced with less healthy, cheaper alternatives
- Housing choices are limited for those without employment, which often leads to health issues resulting from poor quality and unsuitable housing
- Families living on benefits often need to choose between eating and heating, resulting in poor health associated with fuel poverty.

Mental health and wellbeing

- Employment is a key source of social status, as it provides purpose, income, social contact, structure to life and a means of participating in society
- Unemployment often provokes inappropriate coping mechanisms such as increased tobacco or alcohol use, leading to addictions, resulting in a deterioration in health
- Sleep disorders are more prevalent in the unemployed
- Unemployment can lead to psychological problems such as anxiety, depression and other mental health problems through loss of self-esteem, social isolation and family disruption amongst other factors
- Unemployment, particularly as a result of redundancy, can lead to an increase in suicide rates

- Reduced household income results in cutting back on entertainment, days out, school trips, which all have a negative impact on wellbeing.

What can the County Council do about it?

The County Council can and already does much to help create and support employment opportunities.

Business development

- Supporting the development of new and existing business to create new employment opportunities and safeguard existing employment
- Targeted Recruitment and Training work which uses regeneration activity and NCC procurement to build added value and secure employment and training opportunities
- Promote and develop enterprising communities enabling individuals to realise their full potential and help enterprise ideas to develop and new and existing social enterprises to be supported
- Face to face enterprise coaching through the Arch Development Company to help drive entrepreneurial ambition towards starting new businesses

Employability and Skills Services

- Provision of an employability support service within Children's Services helping people into employment, self-employment and training through delivery of government welfare to work contracts and grant funded programmes:
- Delivering the DWP work programme (with Avanta) to support long term unemployed people into sustainable jobs. Using employment coaches tailor support to the individuals needs and develop an action plan with each customer to help them into sustained jobs.
- Delivery of the Family Wise (with Wise Group) programme helping individuals and families to achieve progress towards employment.
- Delivery of support for workless people in the former coalfield area with support from the Coalfields Regeneration Trust.
- Support for an increase in apprenticeships offered by Northumberland employers which are accessible to our residents
- Volunteering can provide an effective pathway back into employment through the acquisition of relevant skills and experience.

How will it make a difference?

- The evidence shows that the negative health impacts of unemployment are completely reversible. When people return to work, their health improves by as much as unemployment damages it.

- Work is the most effective way to improve the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals, their families and their communities.
- Work can be therapeutic and can reverse the adverse health effects of unemployment.
- The beneficial effects of work outweigh the risks of work, and are greater than the harmful effects of long-term unemployment or prolonged sickness absence.
- In summary, work is generally good for health and well-being.