

Sir Michael Marmot - introduction to Citizens Advice Health and Poverty report template

Inequalities in health arise because of inequalities in society, in the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age. In England inequalities in mortality and morbidity are substantial, people living in the poorest areas will, on average, die seven years earlier and have 17 years fewer of disability-free life expectancy compared with people living in the richest areas. Individuals living in poorer areas not only die sooner, but they will also spend more of their shorter lives with a disability.

These serious health inequalities are caused by social and economic inequalities in society. For example, inequalities in education, employment and working conditions, housing and neighbourhood conditions, standards of living, and, more generally, the freedom to participate equally in the benefits of society. If these inequalities are to be addressed then action is required across all these social determinants of health.

Advice and information services are a way in which local government working with voluntary sector providers can take practical action to help tackle the social inequalities in society that lead to the health inequalities we all experience. Advice and information services can lead to improvements in housing conditions, or employment and working conditions as individuals are able to enforce their statutory rights. Advice services, including financial and debt relief services, housing advice and benefits advice are cost-effective ways to increase incomes in low-income households which can lead to increased standards of living. Of course, given the effect of the economic downturn and the changes to the welfare system there is also a key role for advice agencies to ensure that affected households are fully informed about the changes, so people know how they will be affected, and are helped to understand their best options.

As advice and information services are accessible and used by so many individuals, they have a wealth of data about the social determinants of health that can be used when planning services. Data from advice and information providers may not come badged in the headings policy makers and service planners would like. However, as this reports shows, with a little knowledge and interpretation, it can act as a valid indicator about the determinants of health that people in communities and neighbourhoods across England are facing.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Marmot', written in a cursive style.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot