INTRODUCTION - WHAT IS INTERSECTORAL ACTION ON HEALTH (ISA)?

Working together across sectors to improve health and influence its determinants is often referred to as intersectoral action on health (ISA). Many approaches to implementing ISA exist. The most appropriate scale and method for action can be determined according to context and environment. For instance, one general strategy is to integrate a systematic consideration of health concerns into all other sectors’ routine policy processes (e.g. “Health in All Policies” approach). Another approach is a narrower and more issue-centred strategy in which the goal is to integrate a specific health concern into other relevant sectors’ policies.\(^1\)

Despite a wealth of literature on intersectoral action, from the 1978 Alma-Ata Declaration to the 2010 Adelaide Declaration, successful initiatives in this area remain a challenge for cities and countries around the world. In order to identify evidence and mechanisms to promote ISA, WHO has documented experiences of cities taking this approach. The experience of the Liverpool Active City (LAC) programme is an example of an issue-centred strategy to promote ISA. The study was conducted by Jon Dawson Associates.

BACKGROUND

Liverpool - a city of 435,000 - has amongst the highest mortality rates and one of the lowest levels of life expectancy in England. Most people in the UK are not physically active enough to benefit their health. In Liverpool, fewer people are active than the national average. Within its disadvantaged areas, activity levels and broader health indicators are particularly poor.\(^2\)

The Liverpool Active City (LAC) programme was developed in line with the then Labour Government’s Choosing Health White Paper. The programme was launched in 2005 to boost levels of physical activity amongst the city’s residents. Our case study reviews the LAC programme from 2005 until the end of 2010.

Intersectoral agenda to “make more people, more active, more often”

OVERVIEW

- Liverpool Active City (LAC) is a coalition of physical activity projects and programmes that promote increased activity
- Led by Liverpool City Council’s Sport and Recreation Services and the Public Health Department of Liverpool Primary Care Trust
- The creation of the Liverpool Sports and Physical Activity Alliance (SPAA) in 2006 put in place a wider partnership structure, including public, private and civil society sectors
- The programme was integrated strategically with other policy agendas in the city and developed intersectoral working to achieve common goals in fields such as parks and recreation, transport, and education.

RESULTS

- LAC has become an integral component of the city’s obesity agenda and;
- LAC is part of the city’s parks and recreation agenda - examples include - Green Gyms, cycle routes and walking opportunities;
- Transport policy takes account of health and environmental priorities, for instance, cycling and walking was built into the new local transport plan;
- LAC has become integrated with the practice of engaging employers and employees from the public, private and voluntary sectors to improve health-related behaviour;
- The two Premiership football clubs in the city, Everton FC and Liverpool FC, have supported the LAC agenda.
- Evidence shows that LAC has succeeded in boosting levels of activity:
  - there has been an increase of 2.3% between 2005/06 and 2009/10 in the proportion of the population active for 30 minutes, 3 times per week;\(^5\)
  - the proportion of young people who are physically active has risen;\(^6\)
  - In 2010 55,000 people were using Lifestyle Centres within the city – a 43% increase since 2005.\(^7\)

Overall, LAC has benefited the goals of the programme (specific physical activity goals) as well as common aims of the various sectors.

LESSONS LEARNT

- Engaging partners in policy development and design at the outset helped to foster a widespread sense of ownership;
- The creation of robust partnership structures (such as SPAA) was essential to steer project development;
- Political leadership: this has ensured that resources were made available for the LAC;
- Coordinated communication actions have benefited all partners, and reinforced the value of coherent campaigns to raise awareness;
- Research and evaluation support has complemented and strengthened the programme approach. Liverpool John Moores University has supported LAC with an extensive research and evaluation agenda;
- The LAC experience is instructive for other cities wishing to progress physical activity agendas (or other specific agendas) and wider intersectoral approaches to improve urban health. In Liverpool, embodying partnership working across public, private, academic and civil society sectors and building physical activity into other policy and economic sectors such as transport, education, obesity and mental well-being fields has promoted an integrated and comprehensive approach to achieving both common goals and specific physical activity objectives.

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