

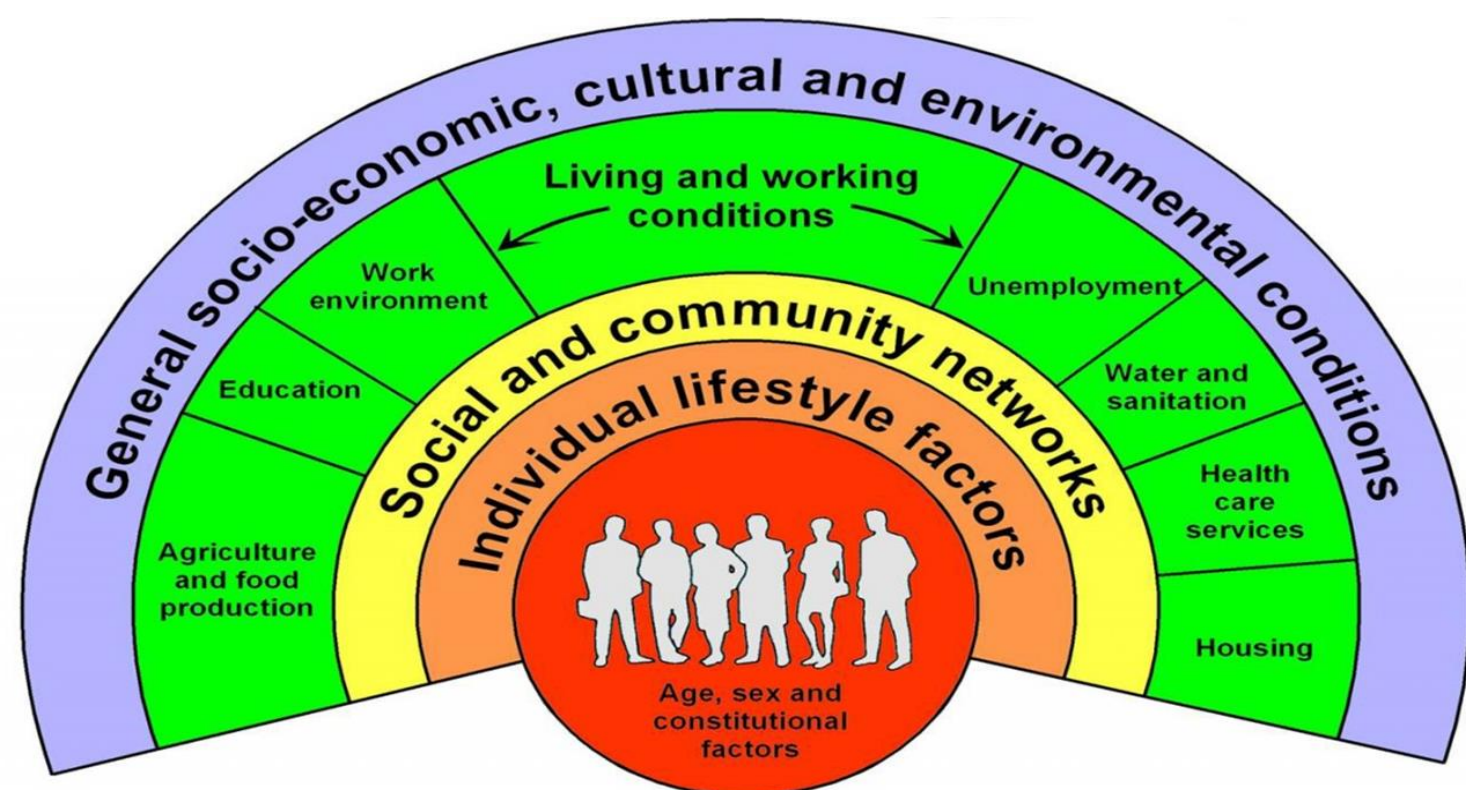
Population health in context: public health through the ages

Dr Victoria Turner, Public Health Consultant, North Yorkshire Council

KEY POINTS

The importance of maintaining the health of local populations has been recognised for thousands of years

- The key social determinants of health have been consistent since humans began living in settled communities

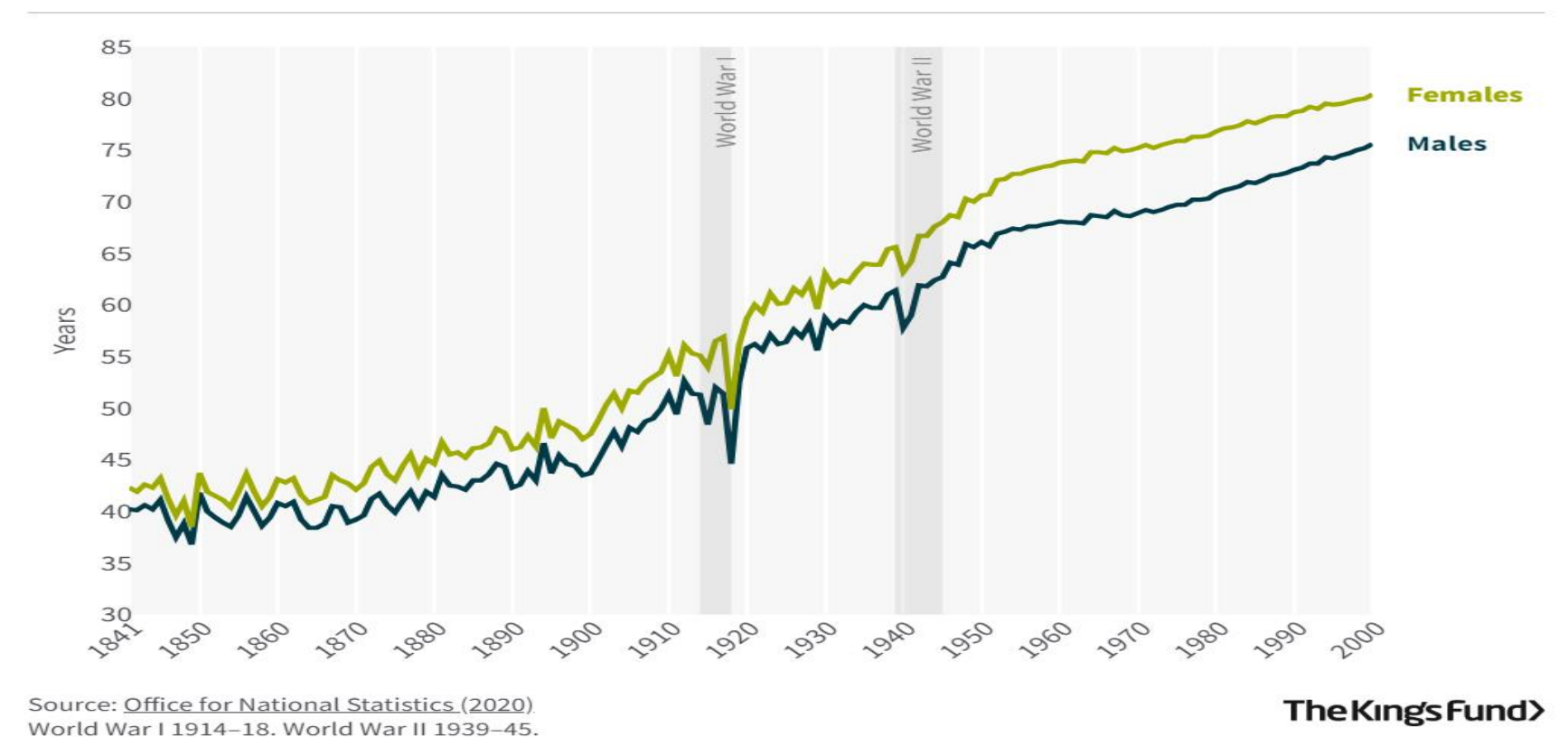


Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead, 1991

- Efforts to tackle factors posing a risk to communal health, such as sanitation and infectious disease control, have been a significant concern for national and local civic authorities for centuries

- Advice given to individuals to help prevent ill health has also followed similar lines for centuries, with the importance of diet, exercise, sleep, and mental wellbeing all well-recognised

Figure 1 Life expectancy at birth
England and Wales, 1841–2000



Source: Office for National Statistics (2020)
World War I 1914–18. World War II 1939–45.

TheKingsFund

- However; despite these similarities, improvements in life expectancy over the last few hundred years demonstrate the impact of rapid evolution in science, technology and communication

EXAMPLES

Early Public Health

Early texts provide written evidence for public health measures e.g. Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (c.1770BC) - regulated price and strength of beer

Hippocratic Corpus (C5-4th BC) - argued for a rational approach to disease based on observation rather than superstition, discussed the relationship between health and disease and environment (e.g. water and air quality)

Enlightenment

Empiricism - knowledge had to be verified by experiment, experience or first-hand observation (no longer just rely on ancient texts)

Discovery of bacteria – 1683 by Antoni van Leeuwenhoek, a Dutch draper

Increasing attempts to categorise things e.g. John Graunt (1662) 'Nature and political observations upon the bills of mortality'

C20th Evolution of Local Public Health

Early C20th developing welfare state - free school meals, school-based medical inspections

Increased medicalisation - health visitors, screening, community care (social care, community health services)

Increasing prevalence of chronic conditions, financial pressures and impact of 'lifestyle' on health – public health joins NHS in 1974



Vaccination is free for all children between 1 and 15, who have not had measles or been previously immunised against it. Ask your doctor or health clinic now.
Image: <https://peopleshistorynhs.org/encyclopedia/childhood-vaccination-and-the-nhs/>

Medieval Public Health

'Black Death' (1347-8) and subsequent plague waves demonstrated you needed to be concerned about everyone's health, not just your own, in order to stay well

Responding to Black Death and other epidemics - increase in legislation, increase in public information/communications, particular focus on environmental health

The king ... wishing to provide for the protection of the health of the inhabitants and of those coming to the present parliament, orders [the mayor and bailiffs of York] to cause all the streets and lanes of the city to be cleansed from such filth ..."

Lyte, Maxwell H. C. (Ed.). (1898). Calendar of Close Rolls, Edward III (vol. 2). London.

Industrial Revolution & Victorian Reforms

Key reports highlight impacts of rapid urbanisation on population health

- Edwin Chadwick – 'Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain' (1842)
- William Farr – 'Annual Reports to the Registrar General'
- John Snow – 'On the mode of communication of cholera' (1849)

1848 Public Health Act (and subsequent PH Acts) led to set up of Local Boards of Health, with appointed Medical Officers for Health and Inspectors of Nuisances (producing yearly MOH Annual Reports)

C21st Public Health

Further reorganisation as part of Health and Social Care Act 2012 - public health returns to local authorities, Public Health England established

Legislation to tackle health behaviours e.g. 2006 Health Act (ban on smoking in enclosed public places), 2012 Alcohol Minimum Pricing Scotland Act, 2018 Soft Drinks Industry Levy

COVID-19 pandemic – further reorganisation (2021 PHE → UKHSA, OHID, NHS England), focus again on communicable diseases