

NHS Health Checks Pilot – Dudley LOC and Dudley Public Health

Background & Intervention

- Hypertension is the third biggest risk factor for premature death behind smoking and poor diet. It is one of the main risk factors for stroke, heart attack, heart failure, chronic kidney disease and dementia. Detection is important as risk can be modified by lifestyle and pharmacological interventions which reduce high blood pressure.
- Dudley LOC and public health developed a pilot in 2015, offering NHS Health Checks in eight community optical practices.
- Targeted patients aged 40–74 who hadn't had a health check in five years and had no known cardiovascular issues.
- Checks included blood sugar, cholesterol, blood pressure, height, weight, and lifestyle questions to assess cardiovascular risk (Q Risk). High-risk patients were referred to GPs.

Objectives

- Increase uptake of NHS Health Checks in Dudley (previously 43.2% vs. 45.1% England average; target is 75%).
- Upskill optical staff and raise awareness of lifestyle impacts on health.
- Reach patients not seen by GPs or pharmacists, especially those who consider themselves healthy.
- Detect cardiovascular disease earlier and improve patient experience by offering checks during eye appointments.

Impact & Outcomes

- 247 health checks completed during the pilot (Jan 2016–Feb 2017); 664 by end of 2019.
- Many patients screened were smokers (13%) or overweight/obese (75%).
- 91% reported being active or moderately active.
- Optical practices reached patients who might not access other healthcare, especially those aged 40+.
- Optometrists and trained staff identified early signs of cardiovascular disease and referred patients appropriately.
- Improved communication between optical practices and GPs.
- Feedback showed patients appreciated the service and some discovered previously undiagnosed conditions.
- Optometrists possess a unique advantage in identifying indications of cardiovascular disease through examination of the eye's posterior segment. Given that patients already allocate time for eye examinations, integrating NHS Health checks within optical practices is likely to be embraced by patients, sparing them an additional visit to a pharmacy or a GP. This approach minimises the risk of patient attrition.
- Optical practices can help the agenda of prevention rather than focusing on treatment.
- Better health outcomes for the population especially in areas of deprivation. Premature mortality from cardiovascular disease is very high in the four Black Country local authorities covered by the pilot.

Key Learnings

- Optical practices are an untapped resource for preventive health.
- Integrating health checks into eye appointments increases accessibility and reduces missed opportunities for prevention.

Optical practice feedback: Had a few patients that did not realise they had high cholesterol levels and hypertension, so referred them to their GP."

"After completing many Health Checks, I have referred many people to their GP for blood pressure checks and cholesterol in particular. They have been given monitors to wear for 24 hours, and in many cases these people would not have visited the GP."

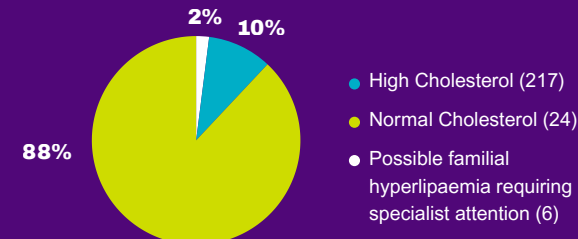
Risks & Limitations

- Ongoing engagement, funding, standardized training, and IT systems are needed.
- Collaboration between organizations (LOC, Public Health, Neighbourhood Health teams) is essential.

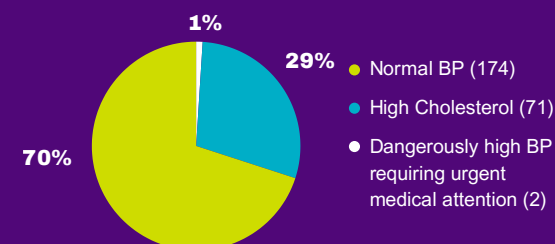
Conclusion

- Hypertension detection is one of the 5 clinical areas prioritised in the Core20PLUS5 approach to tackling health inequalities.
- The NHS 10-year plan (2025) aims to shift focus from treating illness to preventing it.
- Providing NHS Health Checks in optical practices can help detect cardiovascular issues earlier, especially in deprived areas with high premature mortality.
- This approach supports prevention and better health outcomes, particularly in hard-to-reach populations.

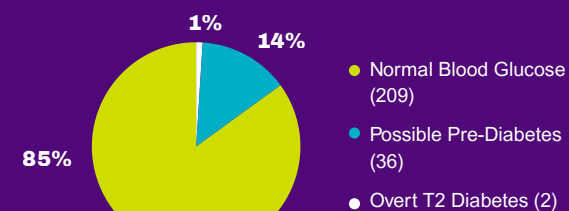
Cholesterol Results from Pilot



Blood Pressure Results from Pilot



Type 2 Diabetes Screening from Pilot



QRISK2 Score (CVD Risk) from Pilot

