

Key Messages



Voluntary Health Scotland AGM and Annual Lecture

December 2022

Following the formal proceedings of the Voluntary Health Scotland Annual General Meeting, VHS held our annual lecture. We heard from Susan Brown and Susan Murray about health inequalities from their professional perspectives. Susan Brown spoke about the recent committee inquiry into health inequalities and Susan Murray challenged the third sector to think differently about how we are framing our arguments around inequality.

Susan Brown, Assistant Clerk to the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee.

Susan Brown highlighted the recently published committee report on [tackling health inequalities in Scotland](#) and the government response published on the same day as our annual lecture. She took us through some of the key findings, recommendations and next steps for the committee. We heard there would be a parliamentary debate on the report in mid-December.

Susan explained the limitations of what the committee can achieve, what the Scottish Government and local government can achieve, and what's reserved to the UK Government. She clarified that there is no overarching strategy to tackle health inequalities in Scotland, but the Scottish Government's Care & Wellbeing Portfolio is based on the Marmot framework. This was a prominent feature in the government's response to the committee. It was clear from Susan's presentation that tackling health inequalities would require cross portfolio and cross governmental discussions. She was optimistic that health inequalities was often a policy area where people endeavoured to work outwith the usual silos. This would be vital going forward as the underlying determinants of health inequalities are born through people's housing, education, transport and communities, not just on their healthcare. The committee has written to multiple committees and the UK Government with its recommendations.

Susan Murray, Director of The David Hume Institute.

Susan Murray spoke about the role of the David Hume Institute in creating a greater diversity of thought and reframing ideas. She discussed the implications of the UK's ageing population, especially with regards to pensions. She raised concerns about the transfer of risk from the state to individuals in recent years which reduces our resilience in communities. On reframing issues, she underlined the importance of framing things in a way that other people will understand, not just those already convinced by our arguments. We don't need more evidence about poverty and health inequalities, we need to start arguing why tackling these issues is good for everyone. She warned we should avoid preaching to the converted. Poor health matters to the economy and we need to start using language like "productivity" when having these conversations. She recommended a number of resources throughout her presentation including:

- Good Economics for Hard Times, Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo.
- [Sign up](#) to the David Hume mailing list
- The [Great Risk Transfer](#) - what it is and why you need to know about it
- David Hume Institute's latest [Understanding Scotland economy](#) quarterly insights
- [Community insights briefing](#) and SIMD data
- Interview with [Esther Duflo](#)
- Institute of Fiscal Studies [Deaton Review](#) of inequalities
- Resolution Foundation [Stagnation Nation?](#) Tackling The UK's Toxic Combination Of Low Growth And High Inequality
- Food for thought on gift aid - [Merryn Somerset Webb](#) and [differential impact](#) on school PTAs

Questions:

Breaking down silos: During questions Susan Brown spoke about the importance of communications and relationships when we try to break down silos. She also spoke about how the committee had engaged with the Health Foundation Review of health inequalities at the beginning of its inquiry. Susan Murray questioned what we were going to learn from this latest review and encouraged us to seek action now.

Tax and economics: Susan Murray explained the unequal nature of council tax and noted the opportunity to discuss these issues as Wales was reforming its system. She also highlighted that council tax was something within the remit of the Scottish Government to tackle. She acknowledged we had to have tough conversations about what we are willing to pay for in communities, as tax cuts lead to cuts in services. We heard the fiscal framework was due to be reformed and Susan Murray made the case for it being less complicated. She explained the complexity of the tax system often stopped people from demanding change, as it's challenging to know what to ask for. Susan Brown added that SPICe provides a valuable breakdown of the Scottish Budget after it's announced. Susan Murray felt the Scottish Budget was better to try influence than the Programme for Government.

Inclusive communications: Derek Todd raised concerns that disabilities were often put to the side when we have conversations about health inequalities. He highlighted barriers in communication which mean information often isn't getting to a quarter of the population. Susan Brown spoke about how the parliamentary committees were trying to improve their communication practices and engagement with people, but she felt there was a long way to go. She was taking sign language classes through the parliament. Susan Murray recommended LEAD Scotland training for organisations to audit their communication materials and outputs.

For more information please contact our Policy and Engagement Lead, Kimberley Somerside: kimberley.somerside@vhscotland.org.uk



18 York Place, Edinburgh, EH1 3EP
0131 474 6189 mail@vhscotland.org.uk www.vhscotland.org.uk @VHSComms

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