



IPH Reflections on Insights documents prepared for a National Open Data Strategy

The remit of the Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) is to promote cooperation for public health across the island of Ireland in the areas of research and information, capacity building and policy advice. Our approach is to support the Departments of Health and their agencies in both jurisdictions, and maximise the benefits of all-island cooperation to achieve practical benefits for people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) is committed to working with its partners to promote open access to relevant health information across the island. It has published its Open Access statement and manages a large open access public health information website (www.thehealthwell.info).

IPH wholeheartedly supports the development of a National Open Data Strategy for Ireland. As an original signatory to the “National Principles for Open Access Policy Statement” and a member of the National Steering Committee on Open Access Policy, we support Insights aims to capture, understand and utilise data to promote better evidence-informed decision making.

Public health encompasses interdisciplinary approaches to health and wellbeing. It promotes healthy behaviours and supports communities and environments to improve health and reduce health inequalities. In public health, Open Access is particularly important for the development of effective public policy and practice, clinical practice and health and social services management: In particular;

- Access to the most up-to-date health information is a key determinant of health and wellbeing for individuals, families, communities and places. IPH believes that the current unequal access to information, particularly amongst community and voluntary sector organisations and others working with disadvantaged groups, contributes to existing social and health inequalities. Making information more widely available will make a significant contribution to tackling these inequalities.
- A vital element of Healthy Ireland, the states public health framework, is the role of cross sectoral/all-of-government/multidisciplinary cooperation. Equal access to information to all participants is essential if genuine collaboration and cooperation is to occur.

IPH would make three broad comments on Insights documents:

- It would like to see a higher profile for health related data in its broadest terms.
- There are a myriad of perspectives and to develop comprehensive systems wide public health interventions we need an integrated approach to date. As well as encouraging individual agencies to make their data freely available, the states' National Open Data Strategy should look at presenting these data in a way that allows users to explore links between data items.
- Thirdly, as well as promoting awareness and access of data, skills and tools are also necessary to use it. While equal access to information is essential any such initiative will have limited societal impact if we do not also develop these capacities when building Open Data Literacy.

As a website that reflects these comments The Health Well, listed on the National Open Data Portal (<http://data.gov.ie/dataset/health-well>), provides access to local, regional and national data and related materials in one interface. With tools such as the [Community Profiles Tool](#), [PHIS tables](#) and [PANI Tools](#) we aim to help make the identification and use of relevant data easier.