



# THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

Department of Health

NHS  
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NHS Management Executive  
St. Andrew's House  
Edinburgh EH1 3DG  
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Telephone 0131-244-2603  
Fax 0131-244-2157

SCOTTISH HEALTH SURVEY	
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Dear Colleague

## THE SCOTTISH HEALTH SURVEY

### Summary

1. This letter notifies Health Boards and NHS Trusts of the publication on 28 July of The Scottish Health Survey 1995. It is the first in a series of major health surveys of the population of Scotland.

2. The Survey provides, for the first time, robust baseline data covering key areas of Scotland's health and the conditions and lifestyle behaviours which contribute to it. The survey data also illustrate the inequalities in health which persist. Background information is at Annex A.

3. A copy of the Survey is enclosed. Health Boards will also be provided with detailed survey data for their respective areas, to supplement local data already available, to assist them in targeting action where health need is greatest.

### Action

4. Board General Managers and Trust Chief Executives are invited to make copies available to those with a responsibility for public health and health promotion.

Yours sincerely

**Sir David Carter**  
Chief Medical Officer

**Kevin J Woods**  
Director of  
Purchasing

### Addressees

#### For action

General Managers, Health Boards

Chief Executives, NHS Trusts

#### For information

General Manager, Common Services Agency

General Manager, State Hospitals Board for Scotland

Chief Executive, Health Education Board for Scotland

Executive Director, SCPMDE

#### Enquiries to:

Miss A Corbett  
PHPU1-2  
Room 405  
St Andrew's House  
EDINBURGH  
EH1 3DG  
Tel: 0131 244 2603  
Fax: 0131 244 2157

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\* NUMBER FROM MISS CORBETT

## Background

1. The health of the Scottish population, as measured by standardised mortality rates, is consistently worse than that in England and in many other western developed countries. To date, there has been little systematic information available on health and health-related behaviour which could help researchers understand the reasons for these differences in mortality. While there are data on the number and causes of death, and other statistics (such as hospital admissions) derived from people's contacts with the Scottish Health Service, these tend to be concerned with limited aspects of health, albeit at the more serious end of the spectrum of disease. Up until now, therefore, there has been no comprehensive picture of the health of the population, its biological characteristics or health-related behaviour available at national level, nor how these characteristics may be changing over time.

2. To remedy this situation it was decided that a series of health surveys, The Scottish Health Survey, should be undertaken at three yearly intervals. The aims of the Survey are fivefold:

- to estimate the prevalence of particular health conditions in Scotland
- to estimate the prevalence of certain risk factors associated with these health conditions and to document the pattern of related health behaviours
- to look at differences between regions and between subgroups of the population with regard to these particular health conditions and risk factors and to make comparisons with other national statistics for Scotland and England
- to monitor trends in the population's health over time
- to make a major contribution to monitor progress towards the Scottish health and dietary targets.

3. The survey was based on a nationally representative sample of over 7,900 adults in the 16-64 age group living in private households in Scotland. Because of the high prevalence of cardiovascular disease (CVD) in Scotland and its toll in terms of premature death and disabling illness, the principal emphasis of this first survey is on CVD and related conditions and their associated risk factors. Future surveys will have the flexibility to take account of changing circumstances and priorities.

4. The Report provides us now with authoritative and robust baseline data covering key areas of Scotland's health and the conditions and lifestyle behaviours which influence it. They provide further and detailed evidence of the extent to which the Scottish population's generally poorer lifestyle behaviours contribute to its high rate of cardiovascular disease and to the development of other serious conditions such as cancer and respiratory illnesses. In addition, the data highlight the inequalities in health which persist in Scotland.

5. The Survey will be used to inform the review which the Government propose to undertake, over the summer, of current public health strategy in order to determine the further action which is required to set Scotland on the path to better health. Addressing health inequalities will be a key feature of the Review.

6. Given the substantial nature of the Report, a summary document containing the main findings of the survey has been produced, for ease of reference, and a supply of these was issued on 4 August. Further copies of the summary document are available, free of charge, from The Stationery Office. Additional copies of the main Report, price £70, can also be purchased from The Stationery Office. The main Report will also be made available on the Internet.