



 a blueprint for  
better business

 The  
Health  
Foundation

# How Can Businesses Contribute To People's Health?

A guide for leaders





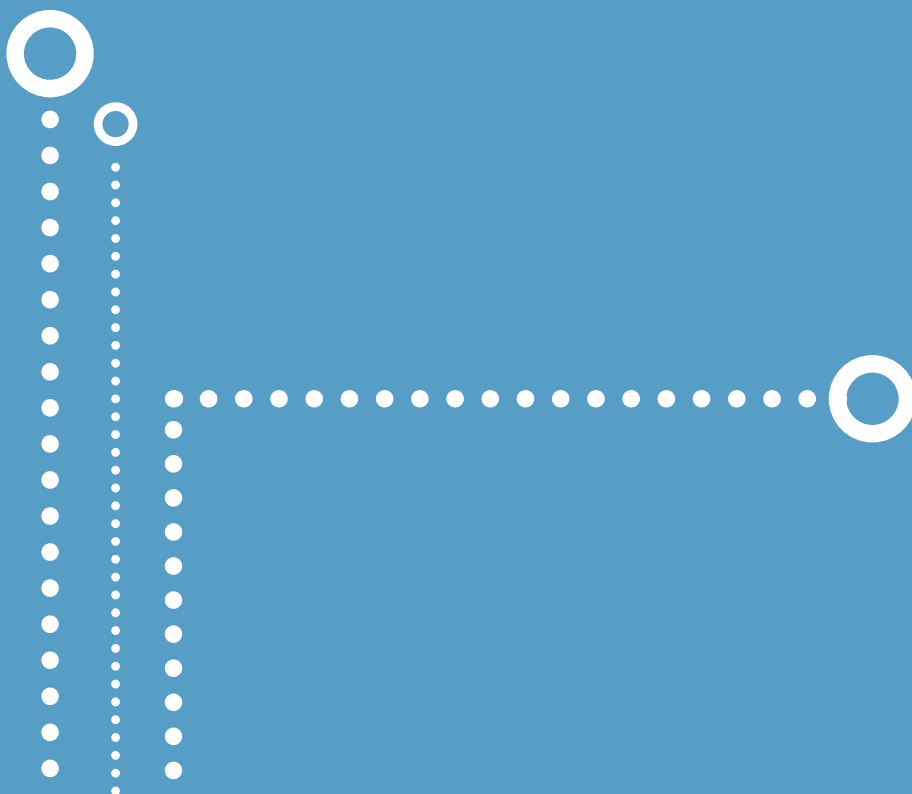
**a blueprint for  
better business**



This guide has been produced by A Blueprint For Better Business in association with the Health Foundation. It highlights some of the ways that any business can be a force for good by having a positive impact on the health of society. It has been written for business leaders, and in particular leads for sustainability, wellbeing, procurement and HR.

Infographics were kindly provided by the Health Foundation, and it retains the copyright for all included images.

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# Introduction

*“Business simply can’t be a bystander in a system that gives it life in the first place”<sup>1</sup>*

- Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever

There is an increasing realisation within companies, and in society, that the profit maximisation model of the last 40 years has often been at the expense of the long-term health of individuals, communities and the environment.<sup>2</sup> It has also put the wealth of shareholders ahead of the health of the company – and as part of that, the health of its customers and employees.<sup>3</sup>

A growing number of business leaders think differently and see profit not as the purpose of a company but as one outcome of pursuing a purpose that benefits society. They recognise that any business is a social organisation, which contributes to the quality of people’s lives by considering the impact it has on people – whether they are employees, customers, suppliers or members of the community.

A Blueprint for Better Business has developed Five Principles for a Purpose Driven Business (see page 12), which offers a picture of how a purpose driven business might look:

- Honest and fair with customers and suppliers
- A good citizen
- A responsible and responsive employer
- A guardian for future generations
- Has a purpose which delivers long-term sustainable performance

Evidence of the business benefits of a purpose-led approach is growing, as is an understanding that companies’ reputations for doing good helps them to attract and retain talent, particularly millennials who will account for three-quarters of the global workforce by 2025.<sup>4</sup>

This isn’t just about doing good. It’s also about doing good business.

## Putting health in the picture

A prosperous, flourishing society depends on having a healthy population. And businesses depend on healthy people – including employees, customers and suppliers – for their long-term success.

This guide highlights a number of ways in which any business can be a force for good by having a positive impact on the health of society. Drawing on expertise from the Health Foundation, it explores the first four Blueprint principles in the context of health.

There are many excellent examples of businesses that are already doing this work, some of which you can read about in this guide. However, there is much more that can be done. The power of businesses to improve health goes well beyond workplace wellbeing programmes (though these are, of course, important too). It includes businesses’ role in supporting communities and protecting the environment, the way they treat their customers and suppliers, and their ability to influence public debates.

Some changes are directly within a business’s control, such as paying staff a living wage and treating suppliers fairly. Others need governments or other public sector bodies to act, such as tackling obesity or poor housing. Here businesses can use their powerful voice to advocate for change and shape government policy.

We hope the broader perspective that this guide offers prompts both discussion and action around creating better businesses and a better society.

# A Good Citizen

## Green Space

### Health impact

Access to and use of green spaces is associated with a wide range of positive health outcomes, including improved mental health, length of life, lower BMI scores and greater physical activity levels.<sup>6</sup> A study in Australia found a 13% reduced risk for type 2 diabetes for people who live in neighbourhoods with 41-60% green space, compared to those who live in areas with 0-20% green space.<sup>7</sup>

### Businesses can...

- Make green spaces they own available for local communities to use.
- Invest in new green spaces for local people, as Timberland has in the US (see case study).



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**Children in deprived areas are nine times less likely to have access to green space and places to play<sup>5</sup>**

## Loneliness And Isolation

### Health impact

Social isolation and loneliness are linked to a 30% increased risk of heart disease and stroke.<sup>8</sup> If people are feeling lonely or depressed, they are also less likely to feel fulfilled by or attend work.

### Businesses can...

- Provide or create spaces where community groups can meet and where local events can take place. Customer-facing businesses such as retailers already play a large role in enabling social interaction, but all businesses can consider how they can contribute.
- Help to de-stigmatise loneliness in the workplace. It remains a taboo subject: while 1 in 5 people feel lonely, two-thirds feel uncomfortable admitting it.<sup>9</sup> Employers have a valuable role to play in putting appropriate support in place and enabling an open culture which values time spent with people and kindness in human interactions.



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**1 in 5 people in the UK often or always feel lonely**

## Transport

### Health impact

Our current transport system is the biggest single source of air pollution in the UK. Air pollution has both short-term and long-term effects on our health. In the UK, around 40,000 deaths each year result from exposure to outdoor air pollution.<sup>11</sup> Walking instead of driving reduces air pollution. Physical activity also improves people's health and effectiveness – a brisk 15-minute walk per day is half the daily activity target for an adult.

### Businesses can...

- Provide incentives for staff to walk or cycle to work, reducing air pollution and the volume of traffic, while improving their health.
- Reduce air pollution and emissions from their transport fleets, for example by reducing the numbers of journeys or switching to cleaner vehicles.



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**Our current transport system is the biggest single source of air pollution in the UK. Air and noise pollution from transport are the biggest environmental health risk factors in Western Europe<sup>10</sup>**

# Case Study:

## Timberland – reconnecting cities with nature<sup>12</sup>

The global outdoor lifestyle brand has a longstanding commitment to protecting and restoring the outdoors. Its stated mission is 'to equip people to improve their world by creating outstanding products and making a difference in the communities where we live'. Since 2001, Timberland has planted over 9 million trees worldwide. They also recognise that a growing number of young people in urban areas are feeling disconnected from nature.

In Europe, Timberland has launched My PlayGreen, which supports urban greening projects for children and teenagers across the five largest cities. Grants of up to €5,000 are provided to the projects to support the creation, maintenance or improvement of the green spaces in London, Milan, Berlin, Paris and Barcelona over five years.

So far, they have connected over 20,000 young people to nature in their city. In 2016, My PlayGreen funded 14 innovative projects across London followed by 16 projects in Milan in 2017.

Timberland believes green spaces are the heartbeat of a community. More than providing a place to play and explore, they foster physical activity leading to direct health benefits and positive effects on memory and attention. Overall, they create a sense of belonging and community.



# A Guardian For Future Generations

## The Food We Eat

### Health impact

Poor diet is now the biggest risk factor for preventable ill health. In 2016, 26% of adults were classified as obese in England.<sup>14</sup> By 2030 this figure is expected to rise to 39%, one of the highest rates in the world.<sup>15</sup> Every year, 300,000 people stop work and become reliant on health-related benefits.<sup>34</sup>

### Businesses can...

- Make it as easy as possible for customers to eat healthily. Companies, especially retailers and food manufacturers, can enable customers to make informed choices through their marketing and labelling.
- Participate in public debates (e.g. Sugar Tax, National Obesity Plan) to influence and shape the national agenda on health issues that affect the health of employees, customers and suppliers.

## Life Skills For Young People

### Health impact

There are currently 354,000 16-24 year olds in the UK who are not in full-time education or employment.<sup>17</sup> Being NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) has been shown to have negative impacts on mental and physical health.<sup>18</sup> It can also drive young people to unhealthy behaviours, for example 11% of 16-25 years who had been unemployed said they had turned to drugs or alcohol as a result of their unemployment.<sup>19</sup>

### Businesses can...

- Offer young people paid work experience and internships to help them to improve their social skills and understanding of the workplace.
- Invest in education in their local communities to give young people the social skills they need to be successful in securing work and becoming good citizens in society, as Barclays has done (see case study).

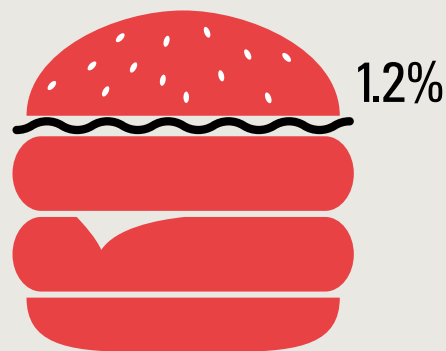
## Decent Housing

### Health impact

Where we live is more than just a roof over our heads. The links between housing and health are substantial for both our physical and mental health. Poor housing is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases, respiratory diseases and depression and anxiety.<sup>21</sup>

### Businesses can...

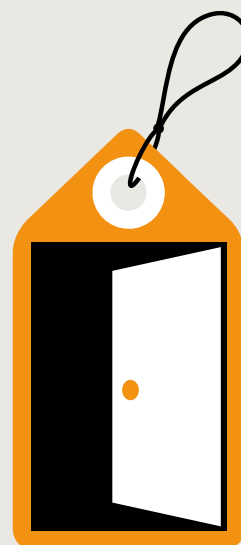
- Act as developers or landlords and build/maintain high-quality affordable housing, particularly for young people and those on low incomes.
- Lobby local and/or national governments and house-builders to provide high-quality housing that is affordable for all (including low-paid workers), given the health benefits this would bring for their staff, customers and suppliers.
- As employers, seek to understand the financial stressors, often related to housing, their staff may be experiencing, and explore ways they can help, such as by offering access to financial advice or interest free loans.



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1.2% of food advertising spend each year goes on vegetables, yet 22% is spent on confectionery, cakes, biscuits and ice cream<sup>13</sup>



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Just 31% of young people felt they had the relationships and networking opportunities to help them enter and progress through the working environment<sup>16</sup>



.....○  
In 2016, 1 in 5 dwellings didn't meet decent standards in England<sup>20</sup>

# Case Study:

## Barclays – inspiring young people<sup>22</sup>

Barclays is a transatlantic consumer and wholesale bank operating in over 40 countries, employing around 80,000 people. As an organisation its mission is ‘working together to help people rise – customers, clients, colleagues and society.’

The LifeSkills programme was created to inspire millions of young people and equip them with key skills necessary for the workplace. LifeSkills brings together educators, businesses, young people and parents, as increasingly young people need to leave education not only with appropriate academic results but with skills that we know businesses need now and in the future, as technology reshapes our working world.

Educators, including schools, universities and youth groups, are provided with more than 60 hours of free curriculum-linked employability resources, through videos, interactive tools and full lesson plans, as well as dozens of interactive tools for young people to learn in their own time or with their parents through its dedicated parents’ section.

The programme focuses on three core modules: work skills, people skills and money skills. Participants develop abilities such as CV writing, interview skills, networking, problem solving and resilience. LifeSkills also provides free support to UK businesses to help improve access to work experience opportunities – giving young people the key skills and experience they need.

More than 6 million young people have already participated in the programme. The positive impacts are far-reaching, with more young people able to find fulfilling, secure and fairly paid work.

In their 2017 impact report, following taking part in the LifeSkills programme, 88% of young people agreed that they felt more positive about the future, while 86% felt more motivated to do better in academic and vocational studies.<sup>23</sup> LifeSkills is independently evaluated every year by the Work Foundation to assess the impact the programme is having.



# A Responsible And Responsive Employer

## Living Wage

### Health impact

Poverty damages health and poor health increases the risk of poverty. A low income can cause poor health because it is more difficult to avoid stress, feel in control and feel supported by a financial safety net. The gap in life expectancy between the most and least deprived areas of England is nine years for men and seven years for women. When looking at healthy life expectancy (how many years lived with good health), this gap widens to 19 years for both men and women.<sup>25</sup>

### Businesses can...

- Pay all staff fairly. Provide the living wage as a minimum and consider going beyond this so staff do not risk poverty and associated health impacts that mean they cannot work or perform effectively.
- Support the living wage publicly, advocating for all businesses across the UK to do the same.

## Pay And Support Sick Leave

### Health impact

140 million working days are lost to sickness each year, costing the UK economy £15bn.<sup>34</sup> If staff do not feel able to take time off when they are ill, often referred to as presenteeism, they take longer to recover, and this can lead to longer-term health conditions. Staff continuing to work when ill is harmful to both the individual, their work colleagues and the business.

### Businesses can...

- Offer paid sick leave to all staff, regardless of what type of contract they are on.
- Create a culture where all staff feel secure enough to take sick leave when they need it and encourage teams to look out for their colleagues and spot signs if someone is ill or struggling at work.
- Introduce flexible working and special leave arrangements for staff who have caring responsibilities for family or friends outside of work.

## Education And Skills For Employees

### Health impact

By the age of 30 those with the highest levels of education are expected to live four years longer than those with the lowest in the UK.<sup>28</sup>

### Businesses can...

- Invest in the skills and training of all staff because it's good for your business and for society. By doing so you are investing in the health of the local community and wider society, and improving the health of your future customers, suppliers and employees.
- Play a part in advocating and increasing access to skills development within the organisation, for example through training or apprenticeships. Create a supportive learning culture to encourage progression and personal development.



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**In 2017, an estimated 6.2 million employees were paid less than the real 'Living Wage'<sup>24</sup>**



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**61% of workers in insecure employment have worked when unwell for fear of losing the job or pay<sup>26</sup>**



.....○  
**The TUC reports that in-work training and further education makes people happier and more effective at work<sup>27</sup>**



# Case Study:

## ZPG – supporting employees<sup>29</sup>

ZPG works across the property sector through brands such as Zoopla, PrimeLocation and Money, employing around 600 staff.

In 2017, the company adopted a new holistic strategy and decided to focus on retaining a higher number of employees, leading to a more engaged and motivated workforce.

ZPG designed a benefits package tailored to individual needs, which offered financial stability. It implemented an interest-free payroll loan, allowing staff to borrow

up to £5,000, giving them the flexibility to use it for big milestones, such as buying a house or getting married. The package also includes The Personal Development Benefit, which means that employees receive £100 per calendar year to take part in any activity that develops their skill set. It doesn't have to be work related and can be anything from learning a new language to golf lessons.

This means that employees can feel more supported by a financial safety net and avoid some of the stress that comes with managing finances, while also being able to enjoy well-earned time off doing things they enjoy.



# Honest And Fair With Customers And Suppliers

## Treating Suppliers Fairly

### Health impact

Stress and anxiety can cause mental health problems, and make existing problems worse. They are also linked to a range of physical conditions, including muscular problems, increased blood pressure and migraines. In the long term, chronic stress can lead to an increased risk of serious health events including heart attack and stroke.<sup>31</sup>

### Businesses can...

- Pay suppliers fairly and promptly, focusing on building long-term healthy relationships rather than driving costs down for short-term gain, as Richer Sounds has done (see case study).
- Ensure their upstream suppliers are also committed to the same practice of fair and prompt pay. The influence a business has goes well beyond its immediate suppliers.



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**Surveys have shown in 2018, that late payments to small-medium enterprises has caused depression, anxiety, increased stress or other mental health-related illnesses in up to 52% of owners<sup>30</sup>**

## Being Honest And Fair With Customers

### Health impact

A company which recognises that having healthy customers is in its long-term interest will proactively improve its products and seek to raise legal standards, rather than simply comply with the minimum legal requirements.

### Businesses can...

- Be honest and transparent about the health impacts of their products and services so that customers can make informed choices.
- Work collaboratively with governments and regulators to raise minimum standards and improve regulations, levelling the playing field for all.



.....○  
**Despite 76% of people surveyed saying they understand the traffic light food labelling system, the majority of those surveyed answered four out of five questions on the labelling system incorrectly<sup>32</sup>**

# Case Study:

## Richer Sounds - supporting suppliers<sup>33</sup>

Richer Sounds is a hi-fi, home cinema and TV equipment retailer, with 53 stores across the UK.

Julian Richer, founder and managing director, is committed to giving customers the best service and value for money possible. He recognises that to do this, there must be a positive relationship with suppliers. Therefore, Richer Sounds pay their bills on time (or even early) to help their suppliers avoid cash flow problems. Their average payment time is 17 days – over twice as fast as the national norm.

Employee welfare is paramount, which extends to service and outsourced staff. Richer Sounds ensures that on their premises, all employees earn the living wage. Julian Richer also visits the Chinese factories and workers' dormitories, for example, to check they are safe and not overcrowded.

This fair treatment of suppliers and staff, however, has not come at the expense of his customers. In 2018, Richer Sounds again won the Which? Retailer of the year award owing to its great customer service and trust in the brand. Chairman David Robinson said: "It's about being an ethical employer and business... we want our customers to get a good deal but not at the expense of our people."





## Conclusion

A wide range of factors affect people's ability to lead healthy and flourishing lives. Businesses have a clear impact on the health of the people they reach and the ability to affect this in a positive way.

For leaders, the health of present and future staff, customers, and suppliers is fundamental to a company's long-term, sustainable success. It is time for all businesses to broaden their view of what makes people healthy and harness their power to make positive changes.

This is not to suggest that improving people's health is easy, but a company that puts purpose and people at its heart – as many seek to do – cannot ignore its wide-ranging role in people's health. A genuinely purpose-led business sees healthy people as being key to its core business and welcomes public scrutiny of its activities to help achieve this.

This is not something that can be done by one person or one department alone. It cuts across the whole business and must be led from the top. Individuals or teams that are

given responsibility to deliver this must be empowered by the senior leadership to lead a company-wide effort.

If you want to do more but do not know where to start, here are three ideas:

- Use this guide to spark a senior leadership team or Board discussion about how the company impacts people's health and to identify where there is the greatest scope to make a positive difference.
- Next time you are making a key decision, pause to consider how that decision will impact people's health and whether it will increase or decrease societal inequalities.
- Review and express a view on the next Government proposal that will have an impact on the health of your current and future employees, customers and suppliers.

As a business leader, you have enormous potential to have a positive impact on people's health. We hope that this guide has inspired you to do more, for the benefit of both business and society.

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# Blueprint's Five Principles

The Five Principles offer a picture of how a business might look if it is genuinely led by a purpose that benefits society. The Principles were rigorously developed through a year-long collaboration with a wide range of businesses, NGOs, investors, academics, different faiths and others in 2013.



Two core beliefs underpin these principles. First, is how far a company's purpose is authentic and genuinely guides decision making. Second, is that putting purpose into practice depends on whether the people affected by what the organisation does are genuinely respected and cared for. This is shown in the quality of a company's relationships internally and externally, and the true motivation guiding decisions and how people in the business behave.



# About Us

## About A Blueprint for Better Business

A Blueprint for Better Business is an independent charity which works as a catalyst to help businesses be guided and inspired by a purpose that benefits society. We are funded by charitable foundations and individuals and do not accept funding from business. Our work is about stimulating and energising a different way of thinking and behaving in business, rather than about compliance, kite-marks or regulation.

If you would like any more information about Blueprint or the Five Principles please contact [enquiries@blueprintforbusiness.org](mailto:enquiries@blueprintforbusiness.org).

You can also follow us on Twitter at [@Blueprint4biz](https://twitter.com/Blueprint4biz).

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## About the Health Foundation

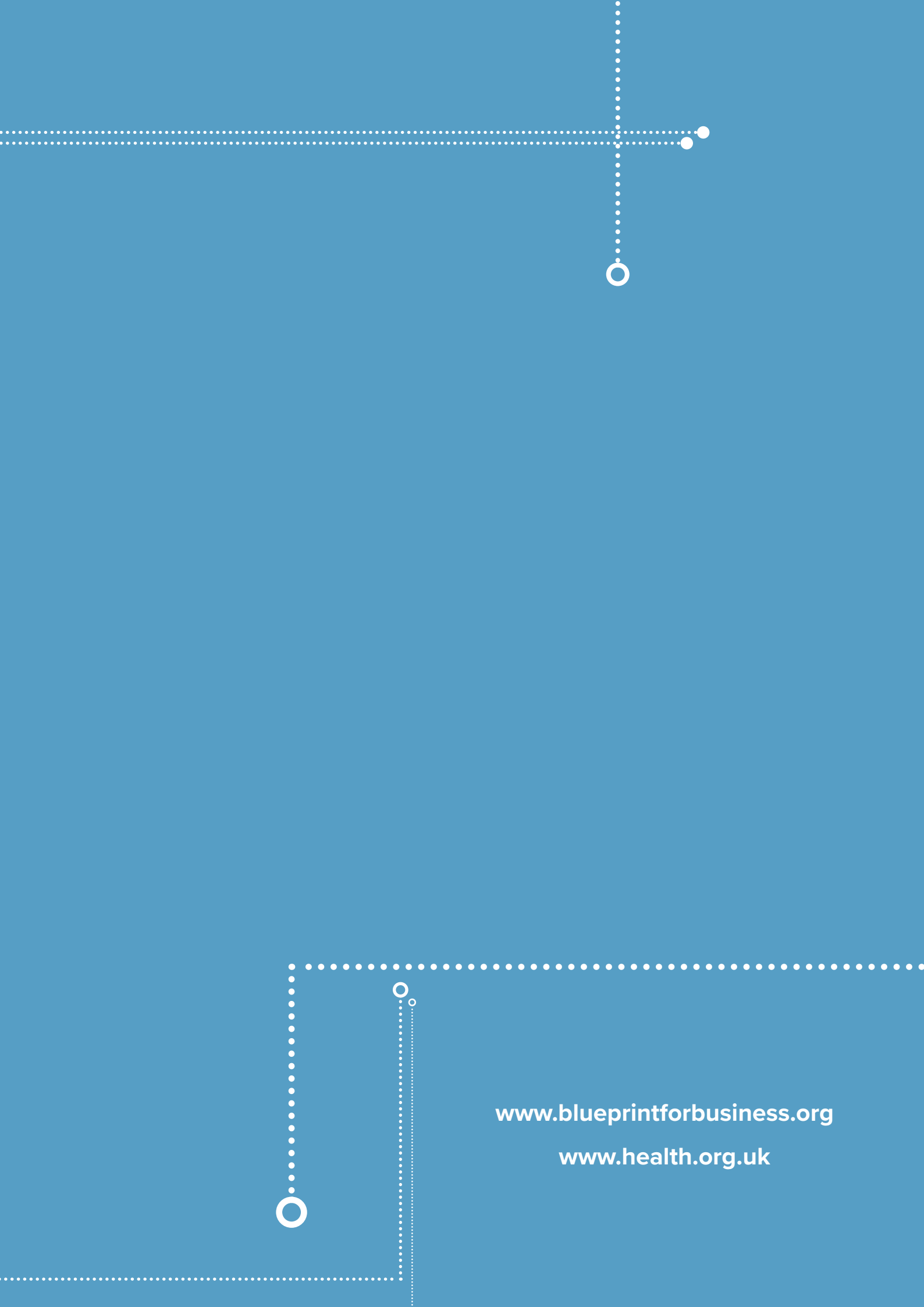
The Health Foundation is an independent charity committed to bringing about better health and health care for people in the UK.

Our aim is a healthier population, supported by high quality health care that can be equitably accessed. We believe good health and health care are key to a flourishing society. Through sharing what we learn, collaborating with others and building people's skills and knowledge, we aim to make a difference and contribute to a healthier population.

We are collaborating on this project because we believe that business has a key role to play in influencing people's health and reducing health inequality across society.

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[health.org.uk](http://health.org.uk)





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