

# Lifemap

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## The UK's hidden healthy-life gap, mapped.

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**Released:** 2026-04-25

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## Summary

Lifemap is an interactive public-data project that lets anyone in the UK explore how life expectancy and healthy life expectancy vary by postcode. Built using official ONS and public-health datasets, Lifemap turns complex local health statistics into a simple visual experience: enter a postcode, see how many years people in that area can expect to live, how many of those years are likely to be spent in good health, and how the area compares with the rest of the country. The project highlights one of the UK's most overlooked inequalities: people in different parts of the country are not only living different lengths of life, they are living radically different numbers of healthy years.

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## What changed in this release (v0.3.0, 2026-04-25)

This is the largest data refresh since launch. Four substantive changes shape the headline figures in this press kit:

- **Healthy life expectancy refreshed for all English UTLAs** — from the ONS 2016–2018 series (now seven-plus years old) to OHID Fingertips indicator **90362**, period **2021–2023**. The shift moves Lifemap onto the most current published HLE source for England, and brings 142 English UTLAs onto a like-for-like 2021–2023 footing.

- **Nine post-2019 reorganised UTLAs now have HLE for the first time:** Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness, post-2023 North Yorkshire, post-2023 Somerset, Buckinghamshire, North Northamptonshire, West Northamptonshire, Barnsley and Sheffield. These authorities did not exist on the boundaries used by the frozen ONS series and were previously absent from the HLE column entirely.
- **Drinking column re-sourced** to Fingertips **92778** — adults drinking over 14 units a week (above-guideline). UK coverage rises from ~8% to ~40%. The field name is unchanged but the definition is broader than the original ">50/35 units/week" higher-risk indicator (see Methodology).
- **Deprivation lens added**, powered by the **15 April 2026** ONS release *Healthy life expectancy by national area deprivation, England*. The decile-1-vs-decile-10 gap (19.4 years for men, 20.3 for women, England 2022–2024) is now quotable directly from the press kit.

The brand mark has also been updated: Lifemap now uses a green-and-amber rectangular lockup in place of the original single green dot. The two-colour mark is intentional — green for life expectancy, amber for the healthy-years gap that is the project's argument.

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## The story in five facts

1. **A man in Westminster lives 8.2 years longer than a man in Blackpool — but the gap in healthy years is 10.9.** ONS local-authority data in the Lifemap dataset (build of 2026-04-25) puts male life expectancy at 81.9 years in Westminster and 73.7 years in Blackpool, while male healthy life expectancy now stands at 62.67 years and 51.75 years respectively. On the freshly refreshed Fingertips 2021–2023 HLE series, the healthy-years gap is now substantially wider than the headline life-expectancy gap.
2. **The widest male healthy-life gap in the UK is in Barnsley, where men live 24.33 fewer years in good health than they do in total** (LE – HLE for males). Hartlepool (24.00) and Rochdale (23.00) are next. For women the widest gap is again Barnsley at 28.46 years, followed by Hartlepool (27.02) and Plymouth (26.90). All three of the male top-three are post-2019 reorganised authorities or northern boroughs that the previous ONS 2016–2018 HLE series did not cover at this granularity.
3. **Blackpool has the lowest male life expectancy of any UK upper-tier local authority, at 73.7 years, and the lowest male healthy life expectancy, at 51.75 years.** Glasgow City has the lowest female life expectancy at 78.7 years; Barnsley has the lowest female healthy life

expectancy at 52.64 years. Lifemap shows the same authorities clustering at the bottom across multiple indicators, not just one.

4. **The highest male healthy life expectancy in the dataset is 69.69 years in East Dunbartonshire (69.66 in Wokingham, the highest English UTLA); the highest female HLE is 73.32 years in Orkney Islands.**

Between Blackpool and East Dunbartonshire, men differ by **17.94 healthy years** — a gap roughly twice the size of the headline life-expectancy gap between the same extremes.

5. **Adult smoking prevalence in Lifemap's English UTLA coverage ranges from 9.73% in Wokingham to 22.97% in Blackpool — a 2.4× spread** (Fingertips QOF current-smokers indicator, 152 English upper-tier authorities in this build). The headline national fall in smoking masks a local picture in which the gap between best and worst remains wide.

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## Founder quote

*"Most people know that life expectancy varies across the UK. Far fewer realise that the gap in healthy years is even more dramatic. Lifemap was built to make that hidden inequality visible in a way anyone can understand, starting with their own postcode."*

— Lifemap founder

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## Quotable: Westminster vs Blackpool

*In Westminster, men live 8.2 years longer than in Blackpool — but the gap in healthy years is 10.9, even larger.*

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## Why this matters

Deprivation is destiny — but not in the way most people think

The link between deprivation and lifespan is well documented. What is less widely understood is that deprivation does not simply shorten life by a few years at the end; it compresses the healthy portion of life much earlier. A man in a deprived

ward of the North East may reach his late fifties already living with a long-term condition that limits his daily activity. A man in an affluent ward of the South East may reach his early seventies still in active good health. The end-of-life gap is real, but the mid-life gap is what shapes how the country actually feels to live in.

## Lifestyle factors cluster geographically

Smoking, obesity, low physical activity and poor diet are not randomly distributed. They cluster — and they cluster together. A local authority in the bottom decile for one indicator is very often in the bottom decile for several others. This is not because individuals in those places make worse choices. It is because the environments around them — the price and availability of healthy food, the safety and walkability of streets, the density of fast-food outlets and gambling premises, the marketing of tobacco and alcohol, the accessibility of green space and leisure facilities — make healthy behaviour systematically harder. Lifemap surfaces this clustering in a way that no single indicator can.

## Healthcare access is only part of the answer

The NHS is a national service, but local health outcomes diverge sharply. This is partly because the determinants of health sit largely outside the consulting room: housing, work, education, transport, air quality, social connection. A surgery in a deprived area can deliver excellent care and still see worse outcomes than a surgery in an affluent area, because patients arrive with more comorbidities, present later, and return to environments that work against recovery. Lifemap is intended to broaden the public conversation about health beyond hospital waiting times and into the full set of conditions that shape a healthy life.

## The deprivation gap, in years

**England, 2022-2024.** Men in the most-deprived decile of neighbourhoods can expect **49.8** healthy years; men in the least-deprived decile can expect **69.2**. That is a **19.4-year** gap in healthy life expectancy — between two groups of men in the same country, born in the same year. For women the gap is **20.3 years** (48.2 vs 68.5). Source: ONS, *Healthy life expectancy by national area deprivation, England, time series, released 15 April 2026*.

The deprivation lens is the cleanest way to see what Lifemap surfaces at postcode level: the gap is not a few years at the end of life, it is two decades of healthy mid-life. The full ONS time series is at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/datasets/healthylifeexpectancybynationalareadeprivationenglandtimeseries>.

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## What Lifemap is and isn't

### What Lifemap is:

- A free, open public-data tool that visualises ONS and OHID statistics at local-authority level, retrieved by postcode.
- A clear comparison engine: enter a postcode and see how the local area compares against the rest of the UK on a defined set of population-level health indicators.
- A way of making the gap between life expectancy (LE) and healthy life expectancy (HLE) tangible and personal.
- An open project (OGL-licensed data) that any researcher, journalist or local authority can audit or build on.

### What Lifemap isn't:

- It is **not a death-age calculator**. It does not predict when any individual will die.
- It is **not a personal health predictor**. Population averages cannot tell any individual person what their own healthy years will look like; behaviour, genetics, occupation and luck dominate at the individual level.
- It is **not insurance lead-generation**. Lifemap does not collect contact details, does not pass data to insurers, and does not promote any commercial product.
- It does **not store personal data**. Postcodes typed into the site are resolved client-side or via the public postcodes.io API; no postcode searches are logged against any user identity.

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## Suggested angles for journalists

- **The postcode lottery, made literal**. Two postcodes a few miles apart can show double-digit differences in healthy life expectancy. Find the most extreme pairs in your patch.
- **Rural versus urban**. Rural areas often have higher overall life expectancy but can hide pockets of isolation, limited transport and patchy services. Urban areas concentrate both the best and worst outcomes.
- **The healthy-years gap is bigger than the life-years gap**. The headline ONS figure for life expectancy understates the inequality. Healthy life expectancy is the sharper story — and the Westminster-Blackpool comparison

(8.2 LE years vs 10.9 HLE years on the refreshed Fingertips 2021–2023 series) is the cleanest illustration in the dataset.

- **What the data doesn't tell you.** Confidence intervals are wide for small areas, indicators lag by one to three years, and Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have less granular Fingertips coverage than England. Honest reporting flags these limits.
- **Why HLE matters more than LE for policy.** Pension reform, social care planning and workforce participation all depend on healthy years, not just total years. HLE is the number that should be driving the debate.
- **Open-data accountability.** Every figure in Lifemap is traceable to a named ONS or OHID release. Readers can verify the project, challenge its choices, and reproduce its dataset in full.
- **Blackpool, Glasgow and the persistence of place.** The same local authorities have appeared at the bottom of UK health league tables for a generation. What does that say about the limits of national policy?
- **The widest healthy-life gaps are not where you'd guess.** Barnsley, Hartlepool and Rochdale (men), and Barnsley, Hartlepool and Plymouth (women), now top the dataset's HLE-gap rankings on the refreshed 2021–2023 Fingertips series — none of them have the headline national profile that Blackpool and Glasgow do, and several were not even covered at this granularity in the previous ONS 2016–2018 release.
- **The deprivation lens is sharper than the geographical lens.** ONS's 15 April 2026 release puts the male healthy-life gap between the most- and least-deprived deciles of England at 19.4 years (women: 20.3). Mapping that gap onto a reader's own postcode is exactly what Lifemap is for.

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## Methodology

**ONS Life Expectancy at birth (local authority).** Lifemap uses the most recent published ONS life expectancy series at upper-tier local-authority level, currently the 2022–2024 three-year average. Figures are reported separately for men and women and are not adjusted by Lifemap; they appear exactly as published.

**Healthy Life Expectancy at birth (local authority and region).** For English upper-tier authorities, HLE is taken from OHID Fingertips indicator **90362** (period 2021–2023), which superseded the ONS 2016–2018 series for English UTLAs in this build. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland still use the ONS Health State Life Expectancies release (period 2016–2018, May 2019 boundaries — frozen by ONS since December 2019, with no fresher source available). Where local-authority HLE

is not published for a given area, Lifemap falls back to the regional HLE figure, and clearly labels this fallback in the user interface.

**OHID Fingertips lifestyle indicators.** A curated set of lifestyle and behavioural indicators — smoking prevalence, adult overweight/obesity, physical activity, fruit and vegetable consumption, and higher-risk drinking — is pulled from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) Fingertips public health profiles. Indicator IDs in the Fingertips API are renumbered periodically, so Lifemap resolves indicator IDs by **name search at build time** rather than hard-coding numeric IDs. The build script searches the live indicator catalogue for the canonical indicator name and binds to whatever ID is current.

**Postcode resolution.** Postcodes entered by the user are resolved to a local authority via the open postcodes.io service. No postcode is logged or stored. The mapping from postcode to administrative geography is recomputed at build time so that boundary changes are picked up.

**Build cadence.** The dataset is rebuilt on a scheduled basis (initially monthly) and the resulting JSON file is published alongside the site, so any user can download the exact dataset that powers the visualisation at any point in time.

## Coverage

472 UK upper-tier local authorities. Life expectancy is published for all 472. Healthy life expectancy is now published for 228 male and 227 female (English UTLAs on Fingertips 2021–2023 plus a partial overlap with devolved-nation UTLAs on ONS 2016–2018). Lifestyle indicators (smoking, obesity, physical activity, 5-a-day) cover 152 English UTLAs in this build. The drinking column covers 187 areas (~40% UK-wide) with the broader above-guideline definition described below. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have partial Fingertips coverage and in this build show LE plus, where available, devolved-survey lifestyle figures.

## Indicator IDs (April 2026)

Fingertips IDs are resolved by name at build time, but the IDs in the 2026-04-25 build of `uk_la_data.json` were:

- Healthy life expectancy at birth (English UTLAs, period 2021–2023): **90362**
- Smoking prevalence in adults (current smokers, QOF): **91547**
- Overweight (including obesity) prevalence in adults: **93088**
- Percentage of physically active adults: **93014**
- Percentage of adults meeting the 5-a-day recommendation: **93982**

- Above-guideline drinking — adults drinking over 14 units of alcohol per week (HSE 2015-2018 pooled): **92778**

## Higher-risk drinking caveat (definition shift)

In this release, the `higher_risk_drinking_pct` column is sourced from Fingertips indicator **92778** — *Percentage of adults drinking over 14 units of alcohol per week* (HSE 2015-2018 pooled, population 18+). This is the **above-guideline** definition: it covers everyone drinking over the UK Chief Medical Officers' low-risk guideline of 14 units a week, i.e. increasing-risk **plus** higher-risk drinkers combined. The previous Lifemap build used Fingertips 94185 (>50 units/week for men, >35 for women — higher-risk only), but that indicator returned zero rows at UTLA level. The field name `higher_risk_drinking_pct` is unchanged for backwards compatibility, **but the underlying definition is now broader**. The Welsh and Scottish values already in this column also use above-guideline definitions, so cross-country comparability is now better than the previous null/regional mix.

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## Technical notes

- **Confidence intervals are wide for small areas.** Some local authorities have populations small enough that their HLE estimates carry uncertainty bands of several years. Lifemap surfaces these where the source data exposes them, and avoids ranking comparisons that fall within overlapping intervals.
  - **Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland lifestyle coverage is partial.** Fingertips is primarily an England-focused service. In the current build, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland show life expectancy only; healthy life expectancy is patchy and Fingertips lifestyle indicators are not published at the same UTLA granularity. The site labels missing data explicitly.
  - **Postcode fallback to UK averages.** A small minority of postcodes — typically very new builds, recently re-coded postcodes, and a handful of edge cases — do not resolve cleanly to a local authority in the current dataset. In those cases the embeddable widget falls back to UK national averages, with a visible note explaining the fallback.
  - **No individual-level inference.** Lifemap reports population-level statistics for administrative areas. It deliberately makes no attempt to model an individual user's outcome.
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## How to embed a chart

A self-contained embed page is deployed alongside the main site at `/embed/`. Any newsroom or local-authority page can drop in the following iframe:

```
<iframe src="https://lifemap.org.uk/embed/?  
metric=hle&areas=westminster,blackpool,glasgow%20city" width="100%" height="400"  
frameborder="0"></iframe>
```

Supported `metric` values are: `le` (life expectancy), `hle` (healthy life expectancy), `gap` (LE – HLE healthy-years gap), `smoking`, `obesity`, `drinking`, `active`, `fiveaday`. The `areas` parameter accepts a comma-separated list of local-authority slugs (lowercase, spaces URL-encoded as `%20`). The embed renders without external trackers, fonts or third-party calls.

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## Licensing

**Data.** All ONS and OHID figures used by Lifemap are Crown Copyright and are reused under the **Open Government Licence v3.0**. The required attribution statement is:

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## Press contact

Email: [press@lifemap.org.uk](mailto:press@lifemap.org.uk)

Please include the publication name, deadline and a short description of the angle in any first email. Interview requests with the founder and walkthroughs of the dataset can usually be arranged within 48 hours.

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## Useful links

- Live site: <https://lifemap.org.uk/>
- Press page: <https://lifemap.org.uk/press/>
- Sources page (full per-indicator provenance): <https://lifemap.org.uk/sources/>
- Dataset JSON: [https://lifemap.org.uk/uk\\_la\\_data.json](https://lifemap.org.uk/uk_la_data.json)
- Embeddable chart: <https://lifemap.org.uk/embed/>
- ONS HLE by deprivation (15 April 2026 release): <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthinequalities/datasets/healthylifeexpectancybynationalareadeprivationenglandtimeseries>
- OGL v3.0 terms: <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/>

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