



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UK Public Health leaders call on Government to take urgent action to tackle child food insecurity

The UK's public health leaders [have written to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak](#) outlining three key actions to tackle child food poverty and help support a healthy population and productive economy.

The letter, headed by the Faculty of Public Health, the Association of Directors of Public Health, the Royal Society for Public Health, and the School and Public Health Nurses Association, has received widespread support from Parliamentarians and third-sector organisations.

Over 30 MPs and 20 members of the House of Lords have signed the letter, which calls on the Prime Minister to support the health and development of our children by expanding access to Free School Meals, the National School Breakfast Programme, and the Healthy Start scheme.

In September of 2022, over a quarter of households with children experienced food insecurity, and the current cost-of-living crisis will increase this number. Childhood food insecurity contributes to increased anxiety, poor mental health, poor social and emotional development, and a reduced level of achievement in school.

This is a serious public health issue that requires a co-ordinated and sustainable response. The 100+ signatories of the letter make three key asks of Government to tackle this crisis and help provide children and families with the safety net they desperately need;

1. Expand access to Free School Meals for all children in households receiving Universal Credit, removing the £7,400 income cap.
2. Increase funding to the National School Breakfast Programme to expand delivery initially from 2,500 schools to 5,000, with a long-term plan to provide coverage to a higher percentage of disadvantaged pupils.
3. Promote access to the Healthy Start scheme, and expand access to all families with young children who receive Universal Credit.

To deliver on these asks, signatories recommend the creation of new targeted levies on unhealthy food and drink, such as an expansion of the proven and effective Sugar Drinks Industry Levy, or for government to adopt the National Food Strategy recommendation of a new salt and sugar levy.

These new levies would be paid directly by manufacturers of unhealthy food, and would bolster the health of families across the UK through reformulation leading to reduced sugar and salt intake, saving the NHS billions of pounds and supporting a healthy workforce. This is a solution that would generate revenue and improve children's diets and physical health now and into the future.

Professor Kevin Fenton CBE, President of the Faculty of Public Health said “As the cost-of-living crisis bites, many families across the UK are currently struggling with the reality of food poverty, unable to meet even their most basic needs.

Initiatives such as Free School Meals, the National School Breakfast Programme, and the Healthy Start scheme are a vital lifeline, but with too many children and families unable to access these services Government is missing an opportunity to firmly address the reality and impacts of child food poverty, which impairs the lives and life chances of disadvantaged children and young people across the UK.

To protect and improve the health of disadvantaged communities across the UK, and support a healthy, productive population, we call upon Government to fully implement our recommendations to expand access to these vital services for those who need them most.”

Sharon White OBE, Chief Executive Officer of the School and Public Health Nurses Association said “School nurses are witnessing and being asked to support a worrying number of families who cannot feed their children adequately due to the cost-of-living crisis; children are turning up to school cold, tired, hungry, worried, sad and, as a result, unable to learn.

Free school meal provision would go a long way to addressing this rising public health emergency; this a basic right and urgent need.”

Professor Jim McManus, President of the Association of Directors of Public Health and Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire said “Poverty is the most important determinant of children’s health in the UK and, as local leaders for the nation’s health, Directors of Public Health see first-hand the impact healthy food has for a healthy, thriving population.

It is vitally important therefore that the Government acts on the evidence and expands access to Free School Meals and Healthy Start. Only then can we start to address the inequity in outcomes we are seeing in children’s health.”

William Roberts, Chief Executive of the Royal Society for Public Health said “School meals were originally brought in to help support children to learn, in the belief of creating a healthy and productive nation.

Sadly, we’re in a situation where many children are going hungry, we’re facing a tough economic future and record numbers of people are out of work because of ill health.

Now is the time to ensure we invest in the future of the country by ensuring that our children don’t go hungry, and schools can provide meals free of charge so that every child can have the freedom to flourish.”

ENDS

You can read a full copy of the letter, including signatories [here](#).

Contact

David Parkinson, Communications Manager, Faculty of Public Health

davidparkinson@fph.org.uk

020 3696 1468

The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) is the professional membership organisation for 4,000 public health professionals across the UK and around the world.

Our role is to set standards in public health practice and work with our members to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities and national populations.

The Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) is the representative body for Directors of Public Health (DsPH) in the UK. It represents the professional views of all DsPH as the local leaders for the nation's health.

The Association has a heritage dating back over 160 years and is a collaborative organisation, working in partnership with others to strengthen the voice for public health. It seeks to improve and protect the health of the population through collating and presenting the views of DsPH; advising on public health policy and legislation at a local, regional, national and international level; facilitating a support network for DsPH; and providing opportunities for DsPH to develop professional practice.

It is a registered charity, and a company limited by guarantee, and is led by its Board of Directors who are all serving Directors of Public Health. The President acts as chair.

The Royal Society for Public Health (RSPH) is an independent health education and campaigning charity, committed to improving and protecting the public's health and wellbeing. We are the world's longest-established public health body with over 5000 members who are committed to supporting the public's health. Our activities include providing public health qualifications and programmes, and we campaign on a wide range of issues to support better health and wellbeing for the public.

The School and Public Health Nurses Association (SAPHNA) is a professional organisation dedicated to the promotion of excellence in practice, taking forward the public health agenda by working in partnerships for the benefit of children and young people and the communities where they live and learn.

SAPHNA's vision is to achieve equality and excellence in School Nursing practice leading to improved health outcomes for all children, families and communities.