

7 November 2019

Dear,

Manifesto pledge needed, to address inequalities in outcomes for children by reinvesting in the health visiting service

We all want every child to have the best start in life. Yet children in the UK have some of the worst outcomes when compared with the rest of Europe and similar countries in the world:

- Infant mortality rates have stalled
- Obesity rates are among the worst in Europe
- A&E attendance for under-fives has increased by 24% in 6 years
- More than 50% of children start school with speech, language and communication needs in areas of deprivation
- Breastfeeding rate is amongst the lowest in the world
- This year we lost our WHO measles elimination status
- 2.3 million children are living with risk because of a vulnerable family background
- More than 1/3 are “invisible” (i.e. not known to services)
- The highest rate of homicide for any age group is in babies under the age of 1
- The estimated total long-term cost of perinatal mental illness is £8.1bn for one year.

It doesn't have to be like this – inequalities are not inevitable. Everyone seems committed to talking about how “prevention is better than cure”, yet no-one seems committed to pay for it. Public health grants have been reduced by £700 million in real terms from 2015/16 to 2019/20. As a direct result, during the same time, we have seen a 31.8% reduction in health visitors in England's NHS and an increase in inequalities. This follows the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government's policy to increase the health visiting workforce by almost 4000 during 2012-15 – however, that increase in health visitors during that time has now been lost.

The cost of failing to intervene early with upstream public health interventions is enormous – we are just kicking the can down the road. Health visitors lead the delivery of the Healthy Child Programme and are a highly skilled workforce who are equipped to support families to prevent them reaching crisis point. The current approach of cutting services in one area leads to costs being incurred elsewhere in the healthcare system with increased costs for society in the long run.

These costs will be felt in human suffering and lost potential, as well as placing a burden on the Treasury to cover the increased costs of late intervention and associated issues like knife crime, substance misuse and worklessness.

We are calling on political parties to step up to their responsibilities and ensure that their manifesto includes a clear commitment to turn the rhetoric of “giving every child the best start in life” into a reality.

Now is the time for solutions:

A few weeks ago we published “[Health Visiting in England: A Vision for the future](#)” which sets out how a robust health visiting service provides an important part of the solution to a multitude of government priorities, with 18 recommendations.

Of these, our three most urgent requests are:

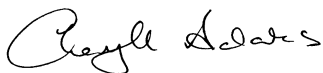
1. Local authorities need to receive urgent and ring-fenced public health investment to cancel planned cuts to the health visiting profession this year and next.
2. A review of 0-5 public health funding is needed with a new mechanism for sustainable funding in England. A shift in emphasis in language and policy is needed, from “releasing efficiencies”/ short-term return on investment in 0-5 public health, to a recognition by government that investment in prevention and early intervention in the early years is a sound investment in our children’s and society’s futures.
3. Urgent action is needed to rebuild the health visiting workforce, training 5000 health visitors is estimated to cost £137million. The public health grant would then need an uplift of £240million to cover these substantive posts. These costs are relatively insignificant against the cost of not intervening as set out in our Vision.

Please do contact us if you would like any further information.

Kind regards



Pamela Goldberg, Chair, Institute of Health Visiting



Dr Cheryl Adams CBE, Executive Director, Institute of Health Visiting

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References for statements can be found in the linked [Vision document](#)