

Health Equals' response to the consultation by the Labour National Policy Forum on 'A future where families come first' – March 2023

About Health Equals

Health Equals welcomes the opportunity to provide its views towards the Labour National Policy Forum consultation. Health Equals is a coalition of 29 organisations across the business, charity and thinktank sectors who are committed to the shared ambition of reducing health inequalities across the UK through rebuilding the foundations of what makes a society healthy – good jobs, safe homes, clean air and the best start to life in childhood. We are campaigning for a future where the systems and environments around us support our health and everyone has the best opportunity in life to be healthy, regardless of who they are or where they live.

Summary of recommendations

We recommend the National Policy Forum:

- Commits to a holistic, cross-departmental approach to ensuring children have the best and healthiest start in life.
- Commits to improving the quality of homes across the UK to ensure they are not detrimental to health.
- Commits to a holistic approach across the social, private rented and home ownership sectors to ensure affordable housing across the system.
- Commits to a social security system that truly provides a safety net to prevent people from falling into poverty and suffering from the health consequences that often follow.

What makes us healthy?

Up to 60% of our health is shaped by the systems and environments in which we live, work, play and grow, and not by our genes, our access to healthcare or the choices we make.¹ These building blocks of health are outside of our control and have material and significant impacts on our health. Three of these key building blocks are having a healthy childhood, living in a quality, affordable home, and having a social security system that acts as a genuine safety net for when we need it most. If we are to break down the barriers to opportunity, we need a sustained focus on ensuring these building blocks are in place.

Prioritising a holistic approach to childhood health

Our childhood and adolescent health and experiences are strong determinants of our future health, wellbeing and prosperity and are strongly influenced by the circumstances in which we live, grow and learn.^{2,3} Young people in the lowest income bracket are 4.5 times more likely to experience

¹ King's Fund *Broader determinants of health: Future trends* <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/time-think-differently/trends-broader-determinants-health>

² House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee (2019) *First 1000 days of life* <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmhealth/1496/1496.pdf>

³ Health Foundation (2018) *The social determinants of young people's health* <https://www.health.org.uk/sites/default/files/upload/publications/2019/Social%20determinants%20of%20young%20peoples%20health.pdf>

severe mental health problems than those in the highest.⁴ Being housed in temporary accommodation is a huge health risk factor for children, yet over 120,000 dependent children were living in temporary accommodation in June 2022.^{5,6} It is the duty of all government departments, at national and local level, to protect the health of children and ensure they have the best start to life. This requires a joined, up, committed approach across bodies with responsibility of housing, education, environment, work and health, all of whom have key roles to play in supporting health. **We therefore recommend that the health and wellbeing of children form the core of a cross-government approach to tackling health inequalities, to ensure that every child has the best opportunity in life.**

Warm, well-built homes for all

No one should have to live in a home that harms their health, yet hundreds of thousands of homes across the UK suffer from damp and mould. In 2022 the death of a child, two-year-old Awaab Ishak was attributed to the mould in his family home.⁷ This tragic example is unlikely to be an isolated incident. The UK also has some of the oldest housing stock in Europe, much of which is lacking essential insulation and other basics to ensure it is place of safety and not harm. Ensuring that every home is fit for purpose and supports our health is an essential priority for future UK governments. **We recommend that improving the quality of homes in the UK prevent them being detrimental to health be a priority for a Labour Government.**

A lack of affordable housing causing harm and homelessness

A lack of affordable housing, worsened by the cost-of-living crisis, is damaging people's health. In 2017, 1.2 million households were on the waiting list for social housing and this has not improved since.⁸ Providing more affordable social housing will improve health and reduce health inequalities.⁹ In the private sector, renters are twice as likely as homeowners to suffer with anxiety and distress, and high rents leave people having to take health harming decisions, such as whether to 'heat or eat'.¹⁰ Unaffordable housing is also a major cause of homelessness, which has a devastating impact on people's health and wellbeing.¹¹ The average age of death for people experiencing homelessness is 45 for men and 43 for women.¹² It is vital that the mixed blend of private rented, social rented and home ownership amongst the UK's housing market is meeting the health needs of the population – currently it is failing on all three counts. **We therefore recommend the need for a new holistic approach across the social, private rented and home ownership sectors to ensure affordable housing across the system.**

⁴ Centre for Mental Health (2018) *Children of the new century* <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-09/newcentury.pdf>

⁵ Shelter (2006) *Chance of a lifetime The impact of bad housing on children's lives* https://assets.ctfassets.net/6sxvmndn0s/4LTXp3mya7ligRmNG8x9KK/6922b5a4c6ea756ea94da71ebdc001a5/Chance_of_a_Lifetime.pdf

⁶ House of Commons Library (2023) *Households in temporary accommodation (England)* <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn02110/>

⁷ Manchester Evening News (2022) *Death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak 'defining moment' for social housing in Bury as review of properties continues* <https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/death-two-year-old-awaab-25740113>

⁸ Tunstall RK, et al. (2018) *Social Housing Evidence Review* http://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/136236/1/MHCLG_Green_Paper_Review.pdf

⁹ <https://www.sfha.co.uk/mediaLibrary/other/english/66628.pdf>

¹⁰ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2022). *Anxiety nation? Economic insecurity and mental distress in 2020s Britain* <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/anxiety-nation-economic-insecurity-and-mental-distress-2020s-britain>

¹¹ Homeless Link. (2022) *Unhealthy State of Homelessness 2022: Findings from the Homeless Health Needs Audit*

<https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/unhealthy-state-of-homelessness-2022-findings-from-the-homeless-health-needs-audit>

¹² Office for National Statistics (2022) *Deaths of homeless people in England and Wales: 2021 registrations.*

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsofhomelesspeopleinenglandandwales/2021registrations>

A social security system that meets basic needs

More than one in five of us are trapped in poverty – that's 14.5 million people in the UK.¹³

Our social security system should help free us from the grip of poverty. It should help us heat our homes, access healthy food, and reduce chronic stress, when we need it most. But more than half of individuals in families in receipt of Universal Credit (and its predecessor legacy benefits) are trapped in poverty, reflecting a system that isn't providing the safety net it should.¹⁴ While some benefits have been rising with inflation in the short term, others, such as Local Housing Allowance, have not kept up with rising rents, leaving people worse off. Reform of the social security system to ensure it meets the basic needs of the population is essential to protect health and wellbeing.¹⁵

We recommend that a Labour Government commits to a social security system that truly provides a safety net to prevent people from falling into poverty and suffering from the health consequences that often follow.

¹³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation *Overall UK Poverty rates* <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/overall-uk-poverty-rates>

¹⁴ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2022) *UK Poverty 2022: The essential guide to understanding poverty in the UK* <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2022>

¹⁵ Trussell Trust (2022) *Tackling the true cost of living by strengthening our social security system* <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/09/Cost-of-Living-campaign-policy-briefing-Sep-2022.pdf>

Appendix

About Health Equals

Health Equals is the UK's campaign for improving health opportunities. Funded by the Health Foundation for £12m over 5 years, we are a new coalition bringing together the UK's leading voices from across the business, non-profit, think tank and health sectors. Our 29 strong membership has come together in recognition that the varied work they do is fundamentally linked to health.

We're committed to shaping a society that values everyone's health, where each of us has our best chance of a healthy life. For that everyone should have access to the basic building blocks of good health: a warm home, a good job, and neighbourhoods with clean air and green space. We welcome further opportunities to support Labour's policy development through the broad expertise and experience of our members.

Our campaign

We will be launching a major public awareness-raising campaign focused on drawing attention to the stark health inequalities in the UK from March 2023.

At the same time, we have commissioned research from three of our partners – Crisis, the Learning and Work Institute, and Global Action Plan – focused on developing specific policy recommendations to address health inequalities in three initial priority areas: housing; work and income; and air quality. This research will be ready in the latter half of this year. Further research pieces focused on additional building blocks will be commissioned next year.

Throughout the five-year campaign, we will be seeking to engage with national, devolved and local political stakeholders to highlight the issue of health inequalities and champion policies that promote good health.

If you have any questions regarding our campaign, please do not hesitate to contact:

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Our membership

- British Red Cross
- Centre for Mental Health
- Citizens Advice
- Confederation of British Industry
- Crisis
- Fairness Foundation
- Food Foundation
- Global Action Plan
- Institute for Public Policy Research
- Institute for Employment Studies
- Institute of Health Equity
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation
- Learning and Work Institute
- Legal & General
- Lloyds Bank Foundation
- Local Government Association
- Mind
- New Philanthropy Capital
- People's Health Trust
- Race Equality Foundation
- Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
- Royal National Institute of Blind People
- Royal Society for Public Health
- ShareAction
- Shelter
- The Health Foundation
- The Wildlife Trusts
- Trades Union Congress
- What Works Centre for Wellbeing