



Health Equals' response to the consultation by the Labour National Policy Forum on 'better jobs and better work' – 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 ensuring that work pays sufficient to cover a person's basic needs, including a good home, quality food and other life essentials through a real living wage.
- Works with employers to create a new deal for workers that ensures that work supports instead of detracts from health, is flexible and accommodates reasonable adjustments to support people to work if they want to, even if they suffer from ill health.
- Commits to targeted support for disabled people and people who suffer from ill health to enable them to work.

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. Having a quality job that accommodates our circumstances and provides adequate pay is an essential building block for good health.

Unemployment, underemployment and poor-quality work harm both health and the economy. 10% of the UK population is currently on an NHS waiting list for ill health,² and ill health in working age people costs the UK economy £150bn per year.³ An additional 10% of employment is associated with around a further 5.1 years of healthy life expectancy in this simple relationship for men and 3.7 years for women.⁴

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

² British Medical Association (2022) *NHS backlog data analysis* <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/nhs-backlog-data-analysis>

³ Times Health Commission (2023) *Rising levels of ill health costing economy £150bn a year* <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rising-levels-of-ill-health-costing-economy-150bn-a-year-x5dkcn5jg>

⁴ Health Foundation (2022) *Relationship between employment and health* <https://www.health.org.uk/evidence-hub/work/employment-and-underemployment/relationship-between-employment-and-health>

For too long, a sticking-plaster approach to the building blocks of good health has resulted in outcomes that undermine our economy's long-term productivity and output growth potential, while also placing every greater pressure upon our NHS. We are stuck in a spiral of poor wages and working conditions resulting in ill health; and ill health contributing to poor economic outcomes that result in poor wages and working conditions.

If we are to sustainably increase the long-term growth potential of our economy, ensure our NHS is fit for the future, and break down the barriers to opportunity – we need a sustained focus on the building blocks of health.

Ensuring pay covers our basic needs

14.5 million adults in the UK are in poverty.⁵ Of these, around two-thirds (68%) live in a household where at least one adult is in work;⁶ this figure has never been higher. Men and women in the poorest fifth of the population are twice as likely to be at risk of developing mental health problems as those on an average income.⁷ Since 2010, earnings have not grown in real terms,⁸ and for many people, especially those in the public sector, they have decreased. This means that the money we are taking home from work doesn't go as far towards our rent, food and bills and we have less to spend on activities that boost our health such as being able to travel to meet up with friends and family. By ensuring that pay covers our basic needs we protect the health of the public, enabling them to heat their homes, buy quality food and care for their loved ones. **We therefore recommend that a Labour Government ensures that our jobs pay enough to cover our basic needs.**

Ensuring work supports health

Our jobs can also impact our health directly, with knock on effects for the economy. If our work is insecure, requires shift work, is a long or expensive commute from where we live, or lacks the flexibility to allow us to meet our other life commitments, such as caring for loved ones, it can have knock on impacts on health. Employers therefore have a key role in supporting the health of their employees, not just in terms of paying them a fair wage, but in ensuring that their jobs do not negatively impact their health or their mental wellbeing. Having a good and stable income also allows us to do things like heat our homes – and when we don't have the money to do this our health suffers. **We therefore recommend that a Labour Government work with employers to ensure that work supports good health.**

Supporting people to work regardless of their circumstances

While unemployment is near a record low, economic inactivity is at a record high - 500,000 more people are now economically inactive due to poor health than in 2019.⁹ Poor mental health and musculoskeletal health problems are the biggest health reasons for people being out of work, but

⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation *Overall UK Poverty rates* <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/overall-uk-poverty-rates>

⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation *Working age poverty: Working households and individuals* <https://www.jrf.org.uk/data/working-age-poverty-working-households-and-individuals>

⁷ Public Health England (2019) *Mental health: environmental factors* <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-mental-health-jsna-toolkit/2-understanding-place>

⁸ Full Fact (2019) *Employment: What's happened to wages since 2010* <https://fullfact.org/economy/employment-since-2010-wages/>

⁹ Office for National Statistics (2022) *Half a million more people are out of the labour force because of long-term sickness* <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peoplenotinwork/economicinactivity/articles/halfamillionmorepeopleareoutofthelabourforcebecauseoflongtermsickness/2022-11-10>

there is also a 30 percent employment gap between disabled people and non-disabled people.¹⁰ The system must support people who want to work. **We therefore recommend that disabled people and people with long-term health conditions who want to work are given all the support they need to be able to work.**

¹⁰ Department for Work and Pensions (2023) *Employment of disabled people 2022* <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/the-employment-of-disabled-people-2022/employment-of-disabled-people-2022>

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