



## Open letter: Change the law to close Britain's health gap

15 June 2026

Dear Minister Karin Smyth,

Depending on where you live in the UK, your life could be cut short by up to 16 years. This is not inevitable; it is the result of political choices. With the Health Bill before parliament, there is a clear opportunity to change course and put the country on a path towards longer, healthier lives for everyone.

Health Equals is a coalition of more than 120 organisations spanning charities, businesses and trade unions. Together, we work across the building blocks of health, from affordable homes and secure work, to clean air and strong communities. We are united in calling for a new legal framework to tackle health inequalities.

The UK is facing a health crisis. Improvements in life expectancy have stalled for more than 15 years, and in the most deprived areas have fallen. Today, there is a 16-year gap between different parts of the country, and a seven-year gap within constituencies. Healthy life expectancy has declined, leaving people spending more of their lives in poor health and placing growing pressure on families, public services and the economy.

Government has pledged to create a fairer Britain and to halve the gap in healthy life expectancy. Achieving this will require action beyond the NHS. Health is shaped by decisions across government, including housing, employment, the environment, access to nature and early years and must be treated as a shared national asset. All parts of government need to work together towards the government's health mission.

That is why we are calling for the Health Bill, currently going through parliament, to include a broad duty to improve health and reduce inequalities through action on the building blocks of health, mirroring the new duty for combined authorities. This should be backed by a strong statutory framework to improve health and tackle health inequalities that would require government to set long-term targets, develop a cross-government strategy, and report publicly on progress.

Public support for action is strong, with **72% of people** supporting a new law to secure a long-term government commitment to improve health and health inequalities. We have worked with experts to develop these proposals and stand ready to support parliamentarians and ministers to turn them into law.

We need to close the health gap. A country cannot thrive while large parts of its population are denied the chance of a long and healthy life.

Signed,

**Paul McDonald, Director - Health Equals**

Jennifer Dixon, Chief Executive – The Health Foundation



Greg Fell OBE, President - Association of Directors of Public Health

Dr Mike McKean, Vice President for Policy - Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

William Roberts, Chief Executive - Royal Society for Public Health

Seb Rees, Head of Health - IPPR

Sarah Woolnough, Chief Executive – King’s Fund

Natasha Feiner, Interim Head of Policy & Influencing - Impact on Urban Health

John Hume, Chief Executive – People’s Health Trust

Charles Kwaku-Odoi, Chief Executive – Caribbean and African Health Network

Jabeer Butt, Chief Executive - Race Equality Foundation

Will Snell, Chief Executive – Fairness Foundation

Jess McQuail, Director - Just Fair

Jack Cornish, Director of England - The Ramblers

Mike Childs, Head of Science, Policy and Research – Friends of the Earth

Dom Higgins, Head of Health and Education – The Wildlife Trusts

Jonathan Blades, Head of Policy and Public Affairs – Asthma and Lung UK

Larissa Lockwood, Director of Policy and Campaigns – Global Action Plan

Nathalie Pearson, Founder - Safe Air Schools UK

Ben Wealthy, Head of Policy and Public Affairs – World Wellbeing Movement

Alison Railton, Director of Policy and External Affairs - Kidney Research UK

Becky Hickman, Chief Executive - Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

Dr Brian Fisher MBE – Coalition for Personalised Care

Fiona Hazell, Chief Executive - Leukaemia UK

Dr Maeva May, Associate Director - Stroke Association

Paul Bristow, Chief Executive - Kidney Care UK

Dania Hanif, Interim Chief Executive - Association of Mental Health Providers