

Child health matters: A vision for 2017

“Effective, efficient, equitable”: invest now in the health and wellbeing of UK infants, children and young people, to reap long-term gain

Foreword from Professor Neena Modi

President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

Child health and wellbeing indices in the UK are worrying. One third of 11-year-olds are overweight or obese, breastfeeding rates are among the lowest in the world, and immunisation coverage has fallen below World Health Organisation targets. These stark facts and widening inequalities, with children from the most deprived backgrounds experiencing much worse health compared with the most affluent, are a harbinger of poorer economic productivity in adult life, chronic ill-health and frailty in old age, and greater ultimate burden upon health services.

Achieving good child health and wellbeing has to be a priority at the highest level for the next Government as this is the cardinal determinant of the health of the adult population, and a healthy old-age. Improving child health makes moral, scientific, and economic sense and would be the best of investments for the nation, with the greatest long-term return.

It is infants, children and young people who are most disadvantaged by inefficient health services. The National Health Service is evidenced to be the most effective, efficient and equitable model ever conceived, but is in need of modernising. Whatever the outcome on 8th June, RCPCH calls on all parties to pledge to fund UK health services and the healthcare workforce adequately, and commit to sustaining a publicly funded, delivered, and managed, free at the point-of-use National Health Service.

The new Government can promote our vision to improve child health and wellbeing by...

- *Recognising that policies that improve child health and wellbeing represent the investment that will result in the greatest economic return for the nation*
- *Recognising the wider determinants of health and wellbeing*
- *Enacting policies that ensure all infants, children and young people have the best start in life*
- *Protecting and modernising health services to meet the needs of infants, children, young people and their families*

Recognising that policies that improve child health and wellbeing represent the investment that will result in the greatest economic return for the nation

Our vision: a cross-departmental child health and wellbeing strategy

Child health and wellbeing must be at the top of the political agenda. Healthy children are more likely to grow into healthy adults, increasing economic productivity and reducing the burden on health services in old age. To ensure the health of infants, children and young people in the UK is the best in the world, co-ordinated Government action across all departments is required. This is why we recommend the establishment of a dedicated Cabinet Sub-Committee to develop and implement a clear strategy focused on getting health right from the very early years, chaired by a representative from Her Majesty's Treasury in recognition of the importance of child health as the best economic investment for the nation.

Recognising the wider determinants of health and wellbeing

Our vision: adoption of a "child health in all policies" approach

Levelling policies are required to ensure that all children have the best start in life. This means recognising the wider determinants of health and wellbeing, including good housing, air quality, diet and nutrition, opportunities to be physically active, and to be brought up in a secure, nurturing environment. A "child health in all policies" approach is needed to ensure that all national policy, including economic policy, passes the test of no negative impact on child health and wellbeing.

Enacting policies that ensure all infants, children and young people have the best start in life

Our vision: a commitment to well-resourced universal public health services

Children deserve equal opportunities from pre-conception. This includes access to antenatal services, health visiting, and school nursing, illness and accident prevention, and healthy living. Local authorities need adequate funding to deliver effective public health.

Our vision: preventing avoidable child deaths

Over 4,000 infants, children and young people in the UK died in 2014. Children are most likely to die in the first year and during adolescence. Many of these deaths are avoidable, arising from road traffic and other accidents. These could be reduced by home safety schemes and graduated licences for novice drivers.

Our vision: promoting breastfeeding

Breastmilk provides babies with all the nutrients they need at the start of life, and protects against infection, but the UK breastfeeding rate is among the lowest in the world. Robust data are needed to identify particular areas of need for targeted support, hence we call for the reinstatement of the UK Infant Feeding Survey. The next Government must take a more active role in ensuring national policies and services support women to breastfeed.

Our vision: increasing immunisation uptake

Immunisation is safe and effective, protecting infants, children, and young people against serious and potentially fatal diseases. The UK falls below the WHO target for the MMR (measles, mumps and rubella) vaccine, with take-up in England at just 88.2%. Without a sustained high rate of population cover, these diseases will return, as happened with the measles outbreaks in Wales and most recently, southern Europe. The UK needs a public campaign to raise awareness of the importance of vaccination and address vaccine hesitancy.

Our vision: preventing childhood obesity

One in five 5 year olds and one in three 10 year olds in the UK are overweight or obese. If this growing crisis is not tackled, half of all UK children will be obese or overweight by 2020. Obesity kills and cripples, fuelling the rise in the population prevalence of chronic non-communicable diseases and placing an enormous burden on the economy and health services. Efforts to date have not been successful in halting the growing obesity epidemic. We repeat our calls for a ban on advertising foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt in all broadcast media before 9pm, the full implementation of the soft drinks industry levy, and continued development of a comprehensive reformulation programme to make food and drink healthier, with a clear plan for evaluation and a timetable for implementation.

Our vision: improving child mental health and wellbeing

Young people tell us mental health and wellbeing is a huge priority and that the key is education. This is why we call for the effective implementation of statutory personal, social and health education for children and young people and encourage open discussion about building mental resilience.

Protecting and modernising health services to meet the needs of infants, children, young people and their families

Our vision: securing an adequate child health workforce

There is a serious shortfall in the paediatric workforce. Numbers have failed to keep pace with the rise in patients, leading to dangerous pressure on an already stretched service. There are substantial consultant and trainee vacancies, and a falling proportion of academic consultants; non-UK qualified doctors make up two fifths of the career grade paediatric workforce. There is wide regional variation in applications

to paediatric training, incomplete fill-rates, and growing attrition, This is why we call for identification of a responsible body for coordinated workforce planning and delivery, funding for an increase in the number of paediatric trainees, provision of immediate reassurance to EU nationals working in the NHS that terms and conditions of employment will be maintained, and immigration rules that allow entry to the UK of healthcare professionals whose clinical skills will benefit the NHS.

Our vision: delivering care built around the needs of infants, children, and young people

New models of care show lack of focus on the needs of infants, children and young people and strong likelihood that their success will be seriously compromised by inadequate planning and consultation, substantial workforce shortages, and funding constraints. We want to see children's services which are adequately funded and staffed, with fewer, larger, more specialised hospitals providing highly expert, consultant led and delivered care, supported by networked services deliver more care closer to home, and better provision in primary care. Children, young people and families should be engaged in the development and implementation of their services.

Our vision: a cross-party commitment to a publicly funded, provided, and managed National Health Service, free at the point-of-use

The UK has a health system which has been the envy of the world. Universal healthcare, publicly funded, provided, and managed, free at the point-of-use, is cost-effective, efficient, and increasingly justified by evidence. The 2014 Commonwealth Fund report on 11 wealthy countries shows that the UK spends least but ranks first in healthcare performance. This ranking is only sustainable through a pledge from every party contesting this election to come together and make a commitment to sustaining an effective, efficient, equitable NHS.

About the RCPCH

The RCPCH advocates on behalf of infants, children and young people, to improve their health and wellbeing through knowledge, research and expertise. We have over 17,000 members in the UK and internationally, and set standards for professional and postgraduate education.

"Child health matters: A Vision for 2017" has been informed by the evidence contained in "The State of Child Health" and other RCPCH reports.

For further resources with key findings and recommendations, visit:

www.rcpch.ac.uk/state-of-child-health | www.rcpch.ac.uk/workforce