



Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Cc Maggie Throup MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Vaccines and Public Health
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

8th July 2022

Subject: Addressing the food and nutrition needs and vulnerabilities of infants and young children

Dear Secretary of State,

We would like to congratulate you on your recent appointment as Minister for Health and Social Care at a time when our nation's health remains one of its biggest challenges and warrants the highest priority in national policy. We are writing to you as professionals working in the field of food/nutrition, and with a concern about the early years, with respect to the forthcoming Health Disparities White Paper. In particular, we respectfully ask for your support to ensure that greater attention is given to the needs of babies and children to ensure that they are supported to build solid nutritional foundations for future health and wellbeing.

As you are aware, the Government Food Strategy published on the 13th of June was a big disappointment for many of us. The strategy lacks the ambition and detail needed to meet its objectives, which include halving childhood obesity by 2030. In particular, it overlooks the food and nutrition needs and vulnerabilities of infants, and pays little attention to those of young children. This is despite the current context in which more than 1 in 4 children in England are already living with overweight or obesity by their first year at school (and among those in the most deprived households, more than 1 in 3)[1], and in which 99% of children aged 4-5 years are consuming more sugar than recommended by the Department of Health and Social Care[2]. It is well established that what happens in a child's first 1,000 days (from pregnancy to their second birthday) sets the trajectory for their future health, and that once established, obesity is hard to reverse[3].

For these reasons, we urge you to ensure that the DHSC's forthcoming Health Disparities White Paper includes meaningful commitments to address the factors driving the poor prevailing diets of infants and young children. Our recommendations include to:

- Appoint a leader and develop a strategy on maternal, infant and young child nutrition
- Ensure better measurement and population surveillance of nutritional status in the early years
- Invest in universal breastfeeding support
- Strengthen and enforce regulations on the composition, labelling and marketing of formula and commercially-produced foods and drinks aimed at infants and young children
- Protect and expand universal health visiting services

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Room 3.04, The Food Exchange, New Covent Garden Market, London SW8 5EL. Email: Vicky@firststepsnutrition.org
Trustees: Professor Amy Brown, Dr Vicky Thomas, Anna Rosier, Marjon Willers, Rob Percival, Dr Marko Kerac
Director: Dr Victoria Sibson



- Review and refresh the Healthy Start Scheme and increase the payment amount
- Make food and drink standards for early years settings mandatory

We believe that such actions are urgently needed to better enable families to feed their babies and young children optimally, and would leverage health benefits including the prevention of obesity.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Vicky Sibson, Director, First Steps Nutrition Trust
Anna Taylor, Executive Director, The Food Foundation
Alison Morton, Executive Director, Institute of Health Visiting
Gill Walton, CEO, Royal College of Midwives
Ben Reynolds, Deputy CEO, Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming
Patti Rundall, Policy Director, Baby Milk Action
Eleanor Campbell, Chair, Association of Breastfeeding Mothers
June O'Sullivan, CEO, London Early Years Foundation
Helen Gray and Clare Meynell, Joint Coordinators, World Breastfeeding Trends Initiative UK
Fran Bernhardt, Coordinator, Children's Food Campaign
Katharine Jenner, Director, Action on Salt and Sugar
Professor Marion Hetherington, University of Leeds
Professor Amy Brown, Swansea University
Kate Oldridge-Turner, Head of Policy and Public Affairs, World Cancer Research Fund
Dr Natalie Shenker, Cofounder Human Milk Foundation, UKRI FLF Imperial College London
Rebecca Sunter, Programme Director Childhood Obesity, Impact on Urban Health
Professor Janet Cade, University of Leeds
Ali Morpeth, WHO Collaborating Centre, University of Leeds
Dr Ilana Levene, Hospital Infant Feeding Network
Dr Vicky Thomas, Hospital Infant Feeding Network
Dr Gabrielle Colleran, Breastfeeding For Doctors
Dr Robyn Powell, Breastfeeding For Doctors
Dr Sofia Reynolds, Breastfeeding For Doctors
Ayala Ochert, Director, Better Breastfeeding

[1] NHS Digital. 2021. National Child Measurement Programme, England 2020/21 School Year. [Online] Available at: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/national-child-measurement-programme/2020-21-school-year>

[2] PHE. 2020. National Diet and Nutrition Survey: Results from years 9 to 11 (2016 to 2017 and 2018 to 2019). [Online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ndns-results-from-years-9-to-11-2016-to-2017-and-2018-to-2019>

[3] Obesity Health Alliance. 2021. Turning the Tide: A 10-year Healthy Weight Strategy. [Online] Available at: <https://obesityhealthalliance.org.uk/turning-the-tide-strategy/>

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