

Health and wellbeing of children and young people

A manifesto from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health - Scotland

Foreword

The 2021 Scottish Parliamentary election represents an important opportunity to advocate for the health and wellbeing of children and young people. It is true that the landscape in which the polls will take place for the next mandate is like no other due to the COVID 19 pandemic.

While most children and teenagers do not become seriously ill with COVID 19, the pandemic response has impacted on their rights across education, the services they rely upon and their overall physical, mental and emotional wellbeing with some of our most vulnerable at the sharp end of this. The much welcome United Nations Convention

on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Bill once enshrined will mean children's rights are legally protected and future MSPs, Ministers and policy makers will be bound by this.

As paediatricians we call on the incoming Scottish Government to make child health and wellbeing a national priority.



Dr Mairi Stark,
Officer for Scotland
Royal College of Paediatrics
and Child Health



Introduction

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) has over 19,500 members in the UK and internationally and sets standards for professional and postgraduate education. We work to transform child health through knowledge, research and expertise, to improve the health and wellbeing of infants, children and young people across the world.

Children and young people's voice is at the heart of everything we do. Guided by the UNCRC, the RCPCH &Us Network facilitates children and young people to have their voices heard in decisions that affect them (Article 12) and work with them to help shape services so they have the best healthcare possible (Article 24).

The RCPCH draw upon the expertise of our members and the voice of children and young people to inform policy and practice and advocate for children's health to be at the centre of policy making. We want to see the next Scottish Government afford child health and wellbeing the highest level priority. This is particularly important as we navigate the complexities of the pandemic, the effects of which will have been felt by every child and young person in Scotland.

We call on the incoming Scottish Government to make child health a national priority in the next mandate and to take a range of actions across four main themes:

1. Mental Health

Our *State of Child Health 2020 Report* identified that in 2018 the suicide rate for young people aged 15-24 was 15.1% per 100,000 in Scotland.¹ Early intervention for mental health problems is key to reducing the damage caused by them. Paediatricians are particularly concerned about the detriment to the mental health of our children and young people as an unintended consequence of the response to the COVID 19 pandemic.

We call on the incoming Scottish Government to:

- **Deliver the targets in the Mental Health Strategy: 2017-2027.² This should include introducing community-based therapies for all children and young people, as well as family therapy to address all levels of mental health needs; routinely collecting prevalence data of mental health conditions in children and young people and; committing to providing 24/7 crisis support services.**

1 RCPCH (2020) State of Child Health 2020; Scotland, available at:

<https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/nations/scotland/>

2 Scottish Government (2017) *Mental Health Strategy: 2017-2027*, available at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/mental-health-strategy-2017-2027/pages/2/>

Children and young people told us they want:

“Mentors in school”

“Confidence boost through employment opportunities”

“Someone to talk to, there for me, not alone”

“Children and young people need someone to talk to, to remind them that they are not alone”

RCPCH &Us Voice Bank 2020 (Scotland)

2. Healthy weight

Our *State of Child Health 2020 Report* identified that in 2018/19 22.4% of our 4-5-year olds were recorded as either overweight or obese with the most deprived children 1.7 times more likely to be obese than the least deprived. The COVID 19 pandemic has restricted our children and young people’s access to play, exercise and leisure and the National Child Measurement Programme has been paused in many cases due to school closures.³

We call on the incoming Scottish Government to:

Ensure every effort is afforded to achieving the target of halving childhood obesity by 2030 in *A Healthier Future – Scotland’s Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan*⁴ through a range of actions including; providing funding for Local Authorities to maintain and expand on current sports and leisure facilities available for children and young people and recovering and expanding the National Child Measurement Programme.

Children and young people told us:

“Children and young people need to know about moderation, portion size and eating enough fruit and veg. “We need to have freedom of choice and not feel lectured on what to eat”

“The price difference between crisps and a fruit pot is 70p”

RCPCH &Us Voice Bank 2020 (Scotland)

3 Public Health Scotland (December 2020) *Primary 1 Body Mass Index (BMI) statistics Scotland; School year 2019-20*, available at: <https://beta.isdscotland.org/find-publications-and-data/population-health/child-health/primary-1-body-mass-index-bmi-statistics-scotland/>

4 Scottish Government (2018) *A Healthier Future – Scotland’s Diet & Healthy Weight Delivery Plan*, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/healthier-future-scotlands-diet-healthy-weight-delivery-plan/>

3. Child health inequalities and poverty

Our *State of Child Health 2020 Report* identified that in 2017/18, 24% of children in Scotland were living in poverty after housing costs. Inequality and poverty is associated with adverse health, development, educational and long-term social outcomes. The response to COVID 19 pandemic is pushing more families in to poverty so it is essential that a targeted, coordinated response to ameliorate the impact is prioritised to enable children and young people to thrive.

We call on the incoming Scottish Government to:

Appropriately resource and fund the measures set out in the *Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017* and associated delivery plan/s to work toward enabling the interim and 2030 targets to be met. Progress reports should include the meaningful views of children and young people.

Children and young people told us:

“In all of this, we need to remember that not everyone has enough money to afford to have a healthy, balanced diet”

“It’s part of our children’s rights to be helping adults to make decisions about services that can help us”

RCPCH &Us Voice Bank 2020 (Scotland)

4. Universal services

Infants, children, young people and families should have equitable access to cross-sector services, resources, advice and support within the local community to support their health and wellbeing as well as timely access to high quality children’s services. Demand for services often outstrips capacity and paediatricians are concerned that this will get worse due to reduced access to services during the response to the pandemic.

We call on the incoming Scottish Government to:

- Provide long-term, stable funding for community-based services for children young people and their families in the next mandate.
- Provide resources for Local Authorities to implement measures to ensure that all children’s service providers fully integrate the *Getting it right for every child principles*⁵ into the provision they offer.
- Provide renewed investment in services for children and families which support the child’s school readiness.

5 Scottish Government (2006) *Getting it Right for Every Child*, available at: <https://www.gov.scot/policies/girfec/>

Children and young people told us:

- **Hospitals of the future:**

“Make sure under 18s stay separated from adults on wards”

“Make it easier to get access to paediatric care”

- **Health care of the future:**

“Make health advice more accessible”

“More money on child healthcare”

“Better pay for nurses and doctors”

“More employment opportunities in the NHS”

RCPCH &Us Voice Bank 2020 (Scotland)

About us

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health is leading the way in children’s health.

Our College is the home of paediatrics in the UK and the professional body which sets and maintains standards for the education and training of all doctors working in paediatrics and child health.

We are an evidence-driven body and charity, working to improve the quality of medical practice for children in hospital and in the community. We work with children, young people and their families to inform our ideas, our training and our practice.

We are committed to an NHS that remains true to its founding principles – comprehensive, free at the point of care with equal access for all.

For more information on issues raised in this document, please contact:

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