

17 October 2022

Dear First Minister,

As paediatricians we are deeply concerned by growing child health inequalities in Wales and across the UK and write to urge you to commit to clear cross-government strategy to reduce child poverty and the child health inequalities it causes.

Health inequalities are the avoidable, unfair, and systemic differences in health outcomes between different groups of children and young people.

Evidence shows that poverty is a key driving factor of these inequalities. We know from our own practice that children living in poverty are more likely to have poor physical and mental health.

This is not just an issue of individual children's health, but the health of our nation. The impacts of poverty and child health inequalities will follow a child through their life. The issues we see today will impact the future health of our nation, our economic potential and will cost more to address in the future. COVID-19, rising costs of living and long waiting times are exacerbating the problem.

The Welsh Government has made a number of commitments that we welcome, including that of rolling out free school meals to all primary school children by 2024. We also note that reducing health inequalities is a core feature of Welsh Government policy across a range of policy areas, including its obesity strategy and plans for health and social care services. However, we lack a focussed and prominent strategy setting specific targets to reduce child poverty and unequal health outcomes. We therefore urge you to take the following steps:

- Acknowledge high child poverty rates, review existing programmes and publish a revised strategy to reduce child poverty
- Provide national targets to reduce child poverty rates, with clear accountability across Government.
- Working with your Ministers, expand the Children and Young People Plan so that future iterations form a comprehensive cross-departmental child health and wellbeing strategy that will address health inequalities and the impact of child poverty.

In Wales we have an opportunity to do things differently and improve our children's life chances – we urge you to seize it.

Yours sincerely,

Dr David Tuthill, Officer for Wales, RCPCH

Alongside 113 members of the child health workforce in Wales: