

Sent via email to: firstminister@gov.scot

15 November 2022

Dear First Minister,

As paediatricians, we are deeply concerned by growing child health inequalities in Scotland and write to urge you to ensure the commitments within the Child Poverty Act are appropriately funded and resourced, to enable the child poverty targets to be met.

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 health outcomes. These include low birth weight, poor physical health, and mental health problems.

The impacts of growing up in poverty are significant and follow a child through their life course. An individual child's health is inevitably influenced by the world and environment around them, not only by the quality of care they receive from the health system, but also by the services they are able to access and by their family's lifestyle.

This is not a new phenomenon. Health inequality and poverty were pressing matters pre-pandemic. However, COVID-19, rising costs of living and lengthening waiting times are exacerbating the problem and further impacting the lives of children.

We recognise the Scottish Government's commitment to tackling poverty and we welcomed the confirmed increase of the Scottish Child Payment to £25 per week as well as the commitment to double the final Bridging Payment, which will make a considerable difference to low-income families. We were also pleased to hear that families with children up to the age of 16, who until now have been reliant on the Bridging Payments, will also be able to apply for the Scottish Child Payment from November.

These are welcome commitments to support those most affected during this time of financial hardship and reinforce your Government's commitment to tackling child poverty. However, only by tackling the causes of poverty, can we begin to improve health inequalities. We therefore urge you to:

- Action all measures contained in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act and ensure these actions are appropriately resourced and funded, enabling the interim (2023/24) and 2030/31 targets to be met on time.
- Provide greater detail on how the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan 2022-26 will contribute to improving the health and wellbeing of children and young people living in poverty.
- Provide long-term, stable funding for community-based services to support children, young people and their families and provide early intervention services.

Your Government has the opportunity to shift the dial on children's life chances in Scotland – we urge you to seize it.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mairi Stark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and 'S'.

Dr Mairi Stark
RCPCH Officer for Scotland
and 136 members of the child health workforce