

# Speak up for child health in parliament

## Why your voice is vital

The UK has some of the worst child health outcomes in Europe, child health inequalities continue to widen and our child health services are stretched to breaking point. As MP you can change this and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH), with 23,000 members across the UK and internationally is here to help.

## How RCPCH can help

We can help with **detailed policy briefings** ahead of parliamentary debates or questions and offer **guidance and advice** on questions on child health nationally or locally. This briefings sets out key facts and stats across our policy priority areas. To find out more or to request support please email [public.affairs@rcpch.ac.uk](mailto:public.affairs@rcpch.ac.uk).

## Our policy-change priorities:

- 1** Building stronger child health services and supporting the child health workforce
- 2** Prioritising public health, prevention and early intervention and reducing health inequalities
- 3** Ensuring robust child protection and safeguarding

## The state of child health today and why we need your help...

We need...

### 1 A fair funding framework for child health services

A chronic underinvestment in children's health services means paediatric waiting lists have grown at 2x the rate of adult waiting lists over the last two years.

KEY FACTS

Integrated Care Boards **spend less than 1% of their budgets on children and young people's mental health** but spend 13 times more on adult mental health services<sup>1</sup>.

We need...

### 2 Enough paediatricians for the future and to support those working today

Paediatricians are under immense pressure bringing down NHS waiting lists while caring for growing numbers of children with complex needs.

KEY FACTS

**UK paediatric workforce numbers fall behind similar countries by up to 40%**, while the number of children on the paediatric waiting list has increased by 68% since 2021<sup>2</sup>.

We need...

### 3 To eradicate child poverty across the UK

Child poverty impacts across the life course; including health. 30% of children live in poverty in the UK. Infants in the most deprived areas are twice as likely to die in infancy as those in the least deprived.

KEY FACTS

**Children living in poverty are significantly more likely to require hospital admission** and were 72% more likely than other children to be diagnosed with a long-term illness<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> LGA, 2023. <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/bright-futures/bright-futures-camhs/child-and-adolescent-mental-health-and>

<sup>2</sup> NHSE Referral to Treatment (RTT) waiting times data, January 2024

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/child-health-inequalities-position-statement>

# 4

We need...

## A renewed focus on prevention of ill health in childhood

Prevention is better than cure, but prevention in childhood is better and easier than prevention in adulthood.

KEY FACTS

In 2022/3 **obesity prevalence in year 6** (22.7%) was more than twice as high as in reception (9.2%)<sup>4</sup>.

# 5

We need...

## A Clean Air Act

Air pollution is the number one environmental threat to public health, and children are especially vulnerable. UK air pollution targets fall significantly short of World Health Organisation recommendations.

KEY FACTS

In 2017-19, an estimated 7% of paediatric **asthma admissions in London were linked to spikes in air pollution**.

# 6

We need...

## A complete ban on disposable e-cigarettes

There is a disproportionate use of disposable e-cigarettes amongst children impacting their health and the environment.

KEY FACTS

The proportion of 11-17-year-olds in the UK reporting to be **current vape users doubled** from 3.3% in 2021 to 7.6% in 2023. 69% of young vapers used disposable e-cigarettes in 2023, up from 7.6% in 2021<sup>5</sup>.

# 7

We need...

## Health services equipped to address child mental health

Childhood mental health problems are common and are increasing. 85% of mental health providers say they are now struggling to keep up with demand<sup>6</sup>.

KEY FACTS

**Almost one in five children aged 7 – 17 has a probable mental disorder** which is a 50% increase from one in nine in 2017<sup>7</sup>.

# 8

We need...

## Action on climate change with children at the centre

Climate change poses an existential threat to the health and wellbeing of children and young people now and in the future.

KEY FACTS

A recent survey found that 73% of 16-24-year-olds reported the **climate crisis was having a negative effect of their mental health**<sup>8</sup>.

# 9

We need...

## An asylum system that upholds children's rights

Every child has the right to be protected from harm whether they are born in the UK or have come to seek refuge.

KEY FACTS

In 2022, over **850 children were wrongly assessed to be adults** by border officials. They were sent to adult accommodation leaving them without local authority support and vulnerable to exploitation<sup>9</sup>.

# 10

We need...

## To end physical punishment

In England and Northern Ireland, children are the only group of people not fully protected in law from physical assault.

KEY FACTS

Children who experience physical punishment are **2.3 times more likely to go on to experience significant harm** through more serious forms of physical abuse. A simple legal change could end this<sup>10</sup>.

### About RCPCH

RCPCH is the membership body for paediatricians and we have over 23,000 members across the UK and internationally. We are responsible for education, training and setting professional standards and informing research and policy. 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.

Find out more at: [www.rcpch.ac.uk](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk)

4 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/national-child-measurement-programme/2022-23-school-year>

5 <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/policy-briefing-vaping-young-people>

6 NHS Providers. Children and young people's mental health services survey. 2021 <https://nhsproviders.org/media/691473/nhs-providers-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-services-survey-appendix.pdf>

7 NHS Digital. Mental Health of Children and Young People in England 2022 - follow up to the 2017 survey. 2022 <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2022-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>

8 <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/child-health-inequalities-climate-change-uk-position-statement>

9 <https://refugeechildrensconsortium.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/RMCC-IMB-HoL-Report-Stage-Age-Assessments-June-23.pdf>

10 [https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-05/rcpch-equal-protection-from-assault\\_quick-read-2024-v1-2.pdf](https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2024-05/rcpch-equal-protection-from-assault_quick-read-2024-v1-2.pdf)