



The future of public health – giving every child the best start in life

The Government is currently preparing options to restructure Public Health England (PHE). As experts in the early years, we are particularly concerned with the crucial support that PHE provides for babies, young children and families through the Healthy Child Programme. We believe the Government should use this opportunity to set out a new and ambitious plan for public health that will give every child the best start in life.

The pandemic has highlighted increasing inequalities and worsening outcomes for children. It has transformed pregnancy, childbirth and infancy, with many parents and carers struggling without the support of family, friends and services. For families already lacking support or living in poverty these pressures have become even more intense. A stronger approach to public health can help the Government achieve its vision of levelling-up the country and preventing illness in later life.

In this document, we set out what Government must put in place to improve the health of babies, children and their families across England to enable a happy

healthy childhood. This is not a detailed description of a particular organisational structure, but we will be testing the Government's proposals on whether they deliver on this vision.

- **A clear offer for families:** Every family should be entitled to a clear, universal offer of support through a modernised Healthy Child Programme, with additional targeted interventions for those who need it. It must be evidence-based and informed by the best insights from families and professionals. Every family should understand what support is available to them during this important life stage.
- **Sufficient funding and resources:** To ensure that the Healthy Child Programme is a reality for all families in all places in England, there must be sufficient funding and resources in the system. This includes sufficient resources for local services, and for national and regional activity to support and challenge local systems to improve their local offer and deliver the Healthy Child Programme in full.

- **A focus on quality:** There must be a focus on strengthening quality across the system to ensure that services are accessible and impactful for all families who need support. This includes monitoring and evaluating services to understand impact and offering support and guidance to commissioners and providers to improve the quality of their work.
- **Responsive to families:** Families' voices must be central to our public health system. At a local level, this means professionals working with families and communities to plan and commission services. At national level, this requires a direct understanding of families' views and experiences when developing and implementing policy.
- **Part of a workforce strategy:** Families need personalised support from practitioners with the skills to sensitively work alongside them and identify often hidden need. In order for families to all receive a consistent and high-quality service, there must be the right level of staffing from well-trained professionals. Workforce strategy and planning must be closely integrated with other parts of the public health system.
- **Integrated at national and local level:** Families need to receive joined-up services that can respond to their needs. There must be integration at every level of the system. This includes a strategic, cross-government approach to policy development and setting national priorities. Local commissioners and providers should be enabled and incentivised to work together to ensure families receive joined-up support. Efficient and consistent data sharing must support this integration.
- **Strong leadership:** None of this will happen by accident and we need clear, concerted leadership. In Westminster and Whitehall, and at a local level, there must be clarity and transparency about who is leading efforts to give every child the best start in life and where accountability for delivery sits.
- **Based on evidence:** Both national policy and local delivery should be informed by expertise, data and research. There should be a role for independent experts who can provide honest, transparent advice and challenge to help to improve all levels of the public health delivery system and to inform decisions made by other public bodies which impact public health.