

The Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0EU

30 September 2022

Dear Secretary of State

We are writing to you as members of the Inequalities in Health Alliance (IHA) to welcome you to your new role as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. Your appointment comes at a critical moment in our efforts to tackle health inequality, and while we understand you will have much to do, reducing the avoidable differences in health across the population must be a priority.

Before COVID-19, health inequalities were estimated to cost the UK £31bn to £33bn. The health inequalities that were exacerbated by the pandemic now risk being further engrained if bold, ambitious action is not taken quickly.

A healthy population is central to economic growth. We urge you to maintain the commitment to publishing the Health Disparities White Paper by the end of this year.

The IHA's over 200 member organisations represent patients, communities, doctors, nurses, psychologists, public health and social care professionals, dentists, pharmacists, academics, local authorities and others. They have seen first-hand how the physical and mental health of people of all ages is shaped by their environment.

The cost-of-living crisis is yet another reminder of this. Polling published by the Royal College of Physicians in May 2022 found that 55% of people felt their health had been negatively affected by the rising cost of living, with the increasing costs of heating (84%), food (78%) and transport (46%) reported as the top three factors. The health concerns surrounding the recent rise in energy bills again shows the link between people's circumstances and their health.

We were pleased to see government announce a Health Disparities White Paper earlier this year, signalling that the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) would work with the 'whole of government to consider health disparities at each stage at which they arise, from the wider determinants of health, to the behavioural factors that influence health, to the health services that people access and receive.'

As your Department rightly set out in 'Our Plan for Patients', a lot of poor health is preventable. But while a crucial part of the picture, focussing on individual behaviours and access to services alone will not be enough to close the almost 20-year gap in healthy life expectancy that exists in England between those from the least and most deprived communities.

To prevent ill health in the first place, action needs to be taken on issues such as poor housing, lack of educational opportunity, child poverty, the commercial determinants of health (such as the availability of tobacco and marketing of alcohol), communities and place, employment, racism and discrimination, transport and air pollution.

Without a cross-government focus on these issues, the DHSC and NHS will be left in the ultimately unsustainable position of trying to treat illness created by the environments people live in. We need to end this cycle and tackle the social determinants of health that present a barrier to good health for so many.

That is why the over 200 member organisations of the Inequalities in Health Alliance are clear that the Health Disparities White Paper must be delivered with a clear commitment to cross-government action, including a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities. A cross-government strategy would be a significant step forward in reducing health inequalities in the UK, which so often start in childhood, and in the long-term provide savings to the NHS and the wider economy by reducing avoidable illness. More than a third of people aged 25 to 64 are economically inactive due to long-term sickness or disability in places with the lowest healthy life expectancy in England.

The government must recommit to narrowing the gap in healthy life expectancy between areas where it is highest and lowest by 2030. Delivering the Health Disparities White Paper by the end of 2022 as planned is a significant opportunity to commit to clear, cross-government action and reform our approach to improving the health of the nation. We urge you to seize it.

Yours sincerely

The Inequalities in Health Alliance

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| 1 Academy of Medical Royal Colleges | 28 British Fluoridation Society | 59 Covid Aid |
| 2 Action on Smoking and Health | 29 British Geriatrics Society | 60 C2 National Network of Connected Communities |
| 3 Alcohol Change UK | 30 British Heart Foundation | 61 Crisis |
| 4 Alcohol Health Alliance UK | 31 British Infection Association | 62 Crohn's & Colitis UK |
| 5 Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Alliance | 32 British Islamic Medical Association | 63 Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance |
| 6 Asian Breast Cancer Support Group | 33 British Medical Association | 64 Cystic Fibrosis Trust |
| 7 Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland | 34 British Nuclear Test Veterans Association | 65 Diabetes UK |
| 8 Association for Young People's Health | 35 British Pharmacological Society | 66 Doctors' Association UK |
| 9 Association of Ambulance Chief Executives | 36 British Psychological Society | 67 Doctors of the World UK |
| 10 Association of Anatomical Pathology Technology | 37 British Society for Allergy and Clinical Immunology | 68 Equality Trust |
| 11 Association of Cancer Physicians | 38 British Society for Haematology | 69 Faculty for Homeless and Inclusion Health |
| 12 Association of Directors of Public Health | 39 British Society for Immunology | 70 Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine |
| 13 Asthma + Lung UK | 40 British Society of Gastroenterology | 71 Faculty of Occupational Medicine |
| 14 Bedfordshire and Luton Fair Play | 41 British Society of Physical and Rehabilitation Medicine | 72 Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine |
| 15 Better Breastfeeding | 42 British Society for Rheumatology | 73 Faculty of Physician Associates |
| 16 Blood Pressure UK | 43 British Thoracic Society | 74 Faculty of Public Health |
| 17 Breaking Down Barriers | 44 Brook | 75 Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Health |
| 18 Breastfeeding Network | 45 Catalyst Health Solutions | 76 Faculty of Sport and Exercise Medicine |
| 19 British Association for Cytopathology | 46 Cancer Research UK | 77 Fairness Foundation |
| 20 British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition | 47 Centre for Ageing Better | 78 Feed |
| 21 British Association for Sexual Health and HIV | 48 Centre for Ethnic Health Research | 79 First Steps Nutrition Trust |
| 22 British Association for the Study of the Liver | 49 Centre for Health and Society, Aston University | 80 Gambling Education Network |
| 23 British Association of Audiovestibular Physicians | 50 Centre for Mental Health | 81 Groundswell |
| 24 British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy | 51 Centre for Perioperative Care | 82 Groundwork UK |
| 25 British Association of Dermatologists | 52 Changing Lives | 83 Growing Against Violence |
| 26 British Cardiovascular Society | 53 Chartered Society of Physiotherapy | 84 Health Action Campaign |
| 27 British Dietetic Association | 54 Citizens Advice Sheffield | 85 Healthworks |
| | 55 Clinical Genetics Society | 86 Health Creation Alliance |
| | 56 Collective Voice | 87 Health Equalities Group |
| | 57 College of Paramedics | 88 The Health Foundation |
| | 58 Consensus Action on Salt, Sugar and Health | 89 Herpes Viruses Association and Shingles Support Society |

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- 90 Human Milk Foundation
 - 91 Impact on Urban Health
 - 92 In2MedSchool
 - 93 Innovation Agency
 - 94 Institute of Alcohol Studies
 - 95 Institute of Health Equity
 - 96 Institute of Health Promotion and Education
 - 97 Intensive Care Society
 - 98 Just Fair
 - 99 Kidney Care UK
 - 100 Kidney Research UK
 - 101 Local Government Association
 - 102 Long Covid Kids
 - 103 Lupus UK
 - 104 Malnutrition Task Force
 - 105 Maternity Action
 - 106 Medact
 - 107 Mental Health Foundation
 - 108 Muslim Doctors Association and Allied Health Professionals CIC
 - 109 National Association of Link Workers
 - 110 National Axial Spondyloarthritis Society
 - 111 National Survivor User Network
 - 112 National Voices
 - 113 Nesta
 - 114 Newark Sports Association
 - 115 New Nicotine Alliance
 - 116 Neurological Alliance
 - 117 NHS Confederation
 - 118 NHS Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland ICB
 - 119 NHS Providers
 - 120 North Durham Patient Reference Group
 - 121 Northern Health Science Alliance
 - 122 People's Health Trust
 - 123 Pharmacist Cooperative
 - 124 Primary Care Respiratory Society
 - 125 Refugee Council
 - 126 Rethink Mental Illness
 - 127 Royal College of Anaesthetists
 - 128 Royal College of Emergency Medicine
 - 129 Royal College of General Practitioners
 - 130 Royal College of Midwives
 - 131 Royal College of Nursing
 - 132 Royal College of Occupational Therapists
 - 133 Royal College of Ophthalmologists
 - 134 Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health
 - 135 Royal College of Pathologists
 - 136 Royal College of Physicians
 - 137 Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh
 - 138 Royal College of Psychiatrists
 - 139 Royal College of Radiologists
 - 140 Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh
 - 141 Royal College of Surgeons England Faculty of Dental Surgery
 - 142 Royal College of Surgeons of England
 - 143 Royal Colleges of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
 - 144 Royal Pharmaceutical Society
 - 145 Royal Society for Public Health
 - 146 Royal Society of Medicine
 - 147 Runnymede Trust
 - 148 Scottish Health Action on Alcohol Problems
 - 149 SignHealth
 - 150 Society and College of Radiographers
 - 151 Society for Endocrinology
 - 152 Spinal Injuries Association
 - 153 Stroke Association
 - 154 Stronger People
 - 155 Town and Country Planning Association
 - 156 UK Health Alliance on Climate Change
 - 157 UK Lung Cancer Coalition
 - 158 Versus Arthritis