



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maggie Throup MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Vaccines and Public Health*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

PO-1410315

Kath Dalmeny
Chief Executive, Sustain
By email to: kath@sustainweb.org

6 September 2022

Dear Ms Dalmeny,

Thank you for your correspondence of 24 June on behalf of your co-signatory, Ms Anna Taylor, Executive Director of The Food Foundation, about Healthy Start. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I am grateful to you for raising your concerns.

As you will know, the Government is committed to the Healthy Start scheme and we are aware of how important it is to pregnant women and families from very low-income households.

Eligibility for the Healthy Start scheme is kept under continuous review and aligns closely with other benefits across Government. The department has committed to consult on Healthy Start and No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) and this will be published in due course. There are no plans to expand Healthy Start eligibility for those who are not subject to NRPF.

With regard to increasing uptake to the scheme, the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA) has led the work to digitise the Healthy Start scheme on behalf of the department. Following the launch of the digitised scheme in 2021, there have been over 384,800 successful applications, with over 134,000 of these coming from those who were not previously in receipt of Healthy Start. The NHSBSA aim to increase Healthy Start uptake by 75 per cent by the end of March 2023, is on track to being met, compared to the previous paper voucher scheme.

The department and NHSBSA will continue to work closely with the Department for Work and Pensions to obtain the relevant uptake data as quickly as possible. Uptake data will be published on the NHS Healthy Start website, which can found at www.healthystart.nhs.uk, as soon as it is available. Furthermore, the department will continue to actively engage retailers on the Healthy Start scheme about the support they might be able to offer.

The NHSBSA continues to work with its partners on service improvements, to make the user experience as simple as possible. Any issues that are reported by users and healthcare professionals are investigated fully. The NHSBSA appreciates that the NHS Healthy Start scheme has several differences since it moved from paper vouchers to a prepaid card. Therefore, all feedback is valued and is used to drive improvement, as well as further educate users on how to get the best from the scheme. In response to the

increased calls to the contact centre, the NHSBSA have increased capacity to manage demand which has resulted in a significantly reduced wait time to get through to an agent.

Families in receipt of Healthy Start vouchers and were rejected from the scheme due to technical issues were directly invited, from September 2021, to apply for a prepaid card. This included, but was not limited to, three invitation letters and two leaflets. Previous paper voucher beneficiaries who are now on the digital scheme would only be entitled to a back-payment if they were eligible, received an unsuccessful application response, and have made a reasonable effort to alert the NHSBSA to this.

With regard to Healthy Start payments, in April 2021 the value of Healthy Start payments increased to £4.25 which provided additional support to pregnant women and families on lower incomes to make healthier food choices. Increasing the value of Healthy Start payments in line with rising food prices will continue to be kept under continuous review.

The *Levelling Up White Paper* committed the department to the publication of a *Healthy Disparities White Paper*. We will provide further details on timings and plans in due course.

I hope this response is helpful and I would be grateful if you would share it with your co-signatory.

Yours ever,



MAGGIE THROUP MP