



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria St  
London  
SW1H 0EU

14 June 2023

Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to urge you to automatically enrol every family eligible for the NHS Healthy Start Scheme.

The Healthy Start Scheme is a lifeline for many pregnant women and families with young children, providing access to healthy fruit, vegetables, milk and vitamins which are vital to a child's development, mental health and physical health.

But too many families are missing out as uptake across England, Wales and Northern Ireland in March of this year was a pitiful 64 per cent with some areas facing uptake as low as 50 per cent. It is calculated this equates to over 200,000 babies, children and pregnant mothers missing out on £53 million worth of nutritious food.

Last year, the Government set itself a target to reach 75 per cent of those eligible by the end of March 2023 but missed that target by 11 per cent. In contrast, the equivalent scheme in Scotland reached 88 per cent uptake.

The ongoing cost-of-living crisis saw the percentage of households with children living in food poverty almost double last year, to nearly 4 million. Worryingly, 27 per cent of households with a child under the age of 4 experienced food insecurity in January 2023.

Food inflation is pushing families to the edge with baby formula increasing by 12.5 per cent, whole milk by over 26 per cent and vegetables by nearly 20 per cent over the past year. With the average weekly Healthy Start payment for households being £7.86, this could be the difference between a child having a healthy and nutritious meal or not.

The Government knows which families are missing out on the scheme but is failing to come up with a solution to ensure they are registered.

The proposed Healthy Start Scheme Bill, which has received cross party support, would widen take-up through automatic enrolment to reach those who do not know they are eligible. This way, families could opt-out of the scheme if they wish.



We would urge you to consider adopting the proposals included in the Bill to ensure that every child has the best possible start in life.

Yours sincerely,

**Emma Lewell-Buck MP**  
**Member of Parliament for South Shields**

#### **Members of Parliament**

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Andrew Western MP  
Apsana Begum MP  
Mr Ben Bradshaw MP  
Ben Lake MP  
Caroline Lucas MP  
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#### **Organisations**

Action for Children  
Action on Salt  
Action on Sugar  
Alexandra Rose Charity  
British Dental Association  
Christians Against Poverty  
Church Action on Poverty  
Feed UK  
Feeding Britain  
First Steps Nutrition Trust  
Food Foundation  
Food Sense Wales  
Health Equity North  
Health Inequalities Group

Independent Food Aid Network  
Institute of Health Visiting  
Kidney Disease UK  
Magic Breakfast  
Mumsnet  
North East Child Poverty Commission  
Obesity Health Alliance  
Royal College of Midwives  
Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health  
Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming  
The Big Issue  
The UK Committee for UNICEF (UNICEF UK)  
Which?