

Every child deserves a **Healthy Start**



CAMPAIGN STATEMENT October 2026

Two outdated rules are locking families out of a vital scheme built to help children thrive. Twenty years on, it's time for the Labour Government to fix this.

100+ ORGANISATIONS HAVE JOINED THE CAMPAIGN →

Campaign ask

As organisations working to support children - including charities, academics, health bodies, education bodies, industry, local authorities and other experts - we are joining together to **call on Government to expand the Healthy Start scheme to all pregnant women and children under five on Universal Credit** so that every child gets the Healthy Start in life that they deserve.

How to support

Support on social media by liking and sharing our video:

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Supporters, continued

PAGE 2 →



Supporters, continued

PAGE 3



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jo Frost".

Jo Frost
Global Family Expert

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Emma Thompson".

Dame Emma Thompson
Actor and
Food Foundation Ambassador

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall".

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall
Chef and Food Campaigner



Why Healthy Start?

Twenty years ago, the Labour government introduced Healthy Start to help families on low incomes afford fruit, vegetables, milk and vitamins in pregnancy and a child's earliest years. **It's one of the best tools we have** for giving babies and young children the healthiest possible start in life.

But two rules are locking families out. Universal Credit households only qualify if they earn under £408 a month. And support stops when a child turns four leaving a gap before they start school and can access Free School Meals.

This currently leaves **750,000 pregnant women and children missing out.** With food prices up 39% since 2021 and the cost of living crisis continuing to leave many unable to afford the essentials, it matters more than ever.

Government have already shown this gap can close. From September 2026, Free School Meals have been expanded to reach every child in a Universal Credit household.

Now we need the same for Healthy Start: **Government must extend support to all pregnant women and children under 5 on Universal Credit.**

Supporting children to get a nutritious start in life has numerous benefits:

- 1 Poverty & cost of living:** Food is often the first thing a squeezed household cuts. Healthy Start ring-fences spending on nutrition at exactly the moment family budgets are tightest providing targeted, practical relief from the cost of living.
- 2 Health & the NHS:** Large numbers of children are already experiencing obesity and dental decay by the time they start school with children from more deprived backgrounds disproportionately affected but helping more families afford nutritious food their children can help prevent this. And better nutrition in pregnancy and early childhood lowers the long-term risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes and heart disease - prevention that costs far less than treating it later on an already stretched NHS.
- 3 Education & early years:** Nutrition in the first years of life shapes the brain development children rely on to succeed academically at school and give them the best start in life.
- 4 Environment & farming:** Healthy Start spending goes towards fruit, vegetables and pulses like beans. Meeting more of that demand from British growers supports UK farmers, while shifting the nation's diet in a more sustainable direction.
- 5 The economy:** Expanding Healthy Start to all families on Universal Credit would deliver a return on investment of £2.36 for every £1 spent - a £7.7 billion gain over 10 years as a result of the reductions in food insecurity, increased household disposable income, and wider economic gains.



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