



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2nd November 2020

**50+ PUBLIC HEALTH DIRECTORS AND SECTOR EXPERTS WRITE LETTER TO CHANCELLOR
ENDORISING EXPANSION OF HEALTHY START SCHEME**

#ENDCHILDFOODPOVERTY CAMPAIGN

- **More than 50 public health directors, sector experts and healthcare professionals today sent a letter to Rishi Sunak calling on Government to allocate additional funding to the Healthy Start scheme which supports young mums and families.**
- **The ask is one of 3 key recommendations from the National Food Strategy and footballer Marcus Rashford's #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign, alongside expansion of Free School Meals and holiday food provision.**
- **Healthy Start scheme provides young pregnant women and low-income families with children under 4 free vitamins and food vouchers to purchase vegetables, fruit, and milk.**
- **The letter urges government to increase the value of the voucher to £4.25 a week. Despite inflation pushing up the cost of food prices, the value of Healthy Start vouchers has not increased since 2009.**
- **The letter is sent just days after Tesco announced a pledge to top up Healthy Start vouchers by £1 over winter. The letter urges the government to act as well as businesses.**

Monday 2nd November – Today a letter was sent to Rishi Sunak, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care from a coalition of senior healthcare professionals operating in Public Health, Civil Society, Academia and Local Government. The letter, with over 50 signatures, urges the Government to adopt a recommendation taken from the National Food Strategy about improving the Healthy Start scheme which provides pregnant women and low-

income families with children under 4 with free vitamins and food vouchers to purchase vegetables, fruit, and milk.

The recommendation is one of 3 key asks adopted by England footballer Marcus Rashford in his #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign. A national spotlight has been placed in the last few weeks on the issue of extending Free School Meals, and additional support for children outside of term time. However, sector experts and healthcare professionals are today reminding Government of the importance of the Healthy Start Scheme ask to the #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign. The letter makes the point that to really tackle issues around food insecurity and rising obesity rates, a focus needs to be put into early years support schemes. The letter points out that the value of the Healthy Start vouchers have not increased since 2009, despite inflation during this period pushing up the cost of food prices.

The specific ask in the letter is to put £115 million/year of additional funding towards improving the Healthy Start scheme by implementing the recommendations proposed in Part One of the National Food Strategy:

- Increase the value of Healthy Start vouchers to £4.25 per week
- Expand the scheme to every pregnant woman and household with children under four in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent benefits
- Fund a communications campaign costing £5 million

The letter coincides with the release of the latest [National Child Measurement Programme NHS report](#) which contains shocking findings and highlights growing health inequities in the UK, with children living in the most deprived areas now more than twice as likely to have obesity than those living in the least deprived areas. 13.3% of reception children living in the most deprived areas have obesity compared to 6.0% of those living in the least deprived areas – illustrating the importance of early years nutrition given that this disparity in obesity rates can already be seen so clearly by the time children start school aged 4 or 5.

The letter also coincides with an announcement from Tesco that they are going to [offer free fruit and vegetables to 500,00 families](#) this winter who use Healthy Start scheme. This is another example of a major retailer making a commitment to boost the scheme, with Iceland offering a similar promotion in September.

Last week the National Food Strategy have also published new evidence supporting the 3 recommendations which can be viewed [here](#).

Notes to Editor

Professor Russell Viner, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health said:

"As paediatricians we know the necessity of good nutrition for children and young people. Food insecurity is sadly part of life for too many children in the UK, and the pandemic has made this problem even more acute. We have a long winter ahead of us and ramping up funding for the Healthy Start scheme is an easy way to make a difference, quickly, where it's most urgently needed."

Caroline Bovey BEM RD, Chair, British Dietetic Association said:

"Healthy Start is an important means of improving the nutrition of families and in particular young children, at a point in their life where it will have a particularly significant impact. We know that even before COVID-19, many families were food insecure, but many more will have been made so by the pandemic. Healthy Start is an existing programme that can be strengthened easily and quickly and therefore have a rapid impact."

Marcus Rashford, Footballer said of Tesco's announcement:

"We all have a role to play in the community and I'm thrilled that another one of the Taskforce members has proactively stepped up to support our most vulnerable in their time of need. Increasing the value of the Healthy Start vouchers is a key ask of this Taskforce but in the true spirit of togetherness, and with true understanding of need, Tesco has not waited for action but, instead, has taken action. I'm extremely grateful as this move will make a big difference to the lives of nearly 500,000."

Henry Dimbleby, independent lead on National Food Strategy, said:

"The problem of food poverty is real and serious, and the pandemic is only increasing that pressure. That's why one of the recommendations of the National Food Strategy is for the government to increase the value of the Healthy Start Vouchers – a great way to help children get the fruit and vegetables they need to thrive. At such a critical time, it is wonderful news that Tesco is stepping in to help their customers directly."

Quotes from Healthy Start Voucher recipients

"£3.10 is not a lot, it's better than nothing of course, but a higher value would make a difference. If we had £4.25 a week from Healthy Start we could buy milk which would help, and more fruit and veg. It's enough for a week, but only for one child and I have three."

Carolina, Southwark

“I’ve had the vouchers for about a year and they’ve definitely made a difference to our family with what we can buy. Having the vouchers means when I go shopping I can buy more fruit and veg and make different meals. I can also give my children fruit for their snacks. We felt a big effect from the coronavirus and lockdown, everything changed completely, and it was harder to get what we needed.”

Bushra, Liverpool

“Without the Healthy Start vouchers we would be in a dilemma with what we can buy, we have to balance every decision. It’s painful to see your child crying when you know you can’t buy them the food they need. When the vouchers reduce after the child turns one it’s hard as they are eating more and you’ve got used to being able to give them what they want, but then we have to stop and so they get upset. The children want expensive food like strawberries, but we can’t always afford this.”

Zeid, Liverpool

ENDS

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Social Media

Twitter: @Food_Foundation

#EndChildFoodPoverty

#HealthyStart

#Right2Food

About the Food Foundation

The [Food Foundation](#) is a charity working to influence food policy and business practice, shaping a sustainable food system which makes healthy diets affordable and accessible for all. We work in partnership with researchers, campaigners, community bodies, industry, investors, government and citizens to galvanise the UK’s diverse agents of change, using surprising and inventive ideas to drive fundamental shifts in our food system. These efforts are based on the continual re-evaluation of opportunities for action, building and synthesising strong evidence, convening powerful coalitions, harnessing citizens’ voices and delivering impactful communications.

The Food Foundation is part of footballer Marcus Rashford's *Child Food Poverty Task Force*, and along with 20 charities and key names in the food industry is calling on Government to allocate sufficient budget to the three National Food Strategy recommendations, as part of an urgent recovery package for vulnerable families and their children this Autumn.

These are:

- Eligibility for Free School Meal (FSM) to be expanded to include every child (up to the age of 16) from a household where the parent or guardian is in receipt of Universal Credit (or equivalent benefits)
- Extend the Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) to all areas in England, so that summer holiday support is available to all children in receipt of Free School Meals.
- Increase the value of Healthy Start vouchers to £4.25 per week and expand the scheme to every pregnant woman and to all households with children under 4 where a parent or guardian is in receipt of Universal Credit or equivalent benefits.

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