



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

22<sup>nd</sup> July 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

This week marks the end of many restrictions in England. Since March 2020, nearly one million babies have been born across the UK. Given everything that science tells us about the critical importance of the earliest years of life, our babies and toddlers must now be a priority for Government as we recover from the pandemic.

On 17th May, Jo Churchill stated that no assessment has been made of the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the development of children aged 2 years and under. But the evidence, and our experience, tells us that the pandemic has been difficult for many families, with impacts on a range of factors that significantly contribute to child development such as maternal mental health; parental conflict and domestic abuse; poverty, and access to stimulating activities including early learning and childcare.

As lockdown lifts, many of the challenges for families will continue. Indeed, some challenges – such as anxiety and isolation amongst pregnant women – may increase. And with many services still not operating at normal levels and many routine contacts having been missed, a worrying number of babies remain invisible to public services and the challenges facing them and their families remain unseen and unaddressed.

More than £3bn has been spent on mitigating the impact of the pandemic on older children, but nothing on those under two.

We very much hope that, as Secretary of State, you can end the “baby blindspot” in Government policy. Urgent action is needed now to address the impacts of the pandemic on babies and their families, and to ensure all our children have the best start in life.

We have included with this letter a set of Evidence Briefs that describe the moral, social and economic case for investing in the first 1001 days, and how action in this life stage is related to many other later physical and mental health outcomes.

Urgent action is now needed to ensure that babies’ health, wellbeing and safety is prioritised. The Government must act on its commitment to “ensuring that children have the best start in life”. The Best Start for Life document sets out a compelling vision, but ambitious investment and legislative changes are now needed to ensure that every family has access to a quality offer of services in their local area.



As Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, we hope that you will value and invest in support for families in the first 1001 days as a key way to improve the nations' health and wellbeing. There are three things that you can do right now to make a significant difference:

1. The upcoming Spending Review provides an important opportunity to invest public funds where they can make the biggest difference. It is time to put a stop to the chronic disinvestment in public health and children's services. We hope you can secure a good settlement for public health, alongside new investment in the workforce development and service provision needed to deliver the Best Start for Life vision.
2. The Health and Care Bill provides an opportunity to set out clear expectations that local partners will cooperate in order to improve outcomes and reducing inequalities for children in the first 1001 days and beyond. We look forward to working with you to ensure that new statutory duties in the Bill make sure that babies and children are prioritised in the new health and social care structures.
3. Over recent years, Public Health England has not had the powers, resources or mandate to intervene when local authorities disinvest in critical services like health visiting and fail to deliver even the most basic checks for our babies and young children. The creation of the new Office for Health Promotion provides an opportunity to change this, and we ask that you ensure that the Office can intervene when a local area is not delivering the Healthy Child Programme or is experiencing poor, declining, or unequal outcomes in the first 1001 days, providing additional support and resources where needed.

Giving our babies the best start in life can improve health and wellbeing for decades to come and have impacts on future generations. It may be early in your tenure as health secretary but, engaging in this agenda is a fantastic way to create a lasting legacy.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Yours sincerely,

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Director of Policy and Campaigns  
Action for Children

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CEO  
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