

‘Levelling up’ public health at the 2020 Spending Review

Covid-19 has shone a light on our chronically underfunded public health system in England and, as the Government prepares to announce its spending plans for the next year, amplifies the case for investment.

The public health grant has steadily been whittled down – in 2015, the Budget announced a £200m cut to the public health grant, followed by a further real-terms cut averaging 3.9% each year (until 2020/21) in the 2015 Spending Review.

Local authorities have made efficiencies through better commissioning and reforms, but cuts have consequences on frontline prevention services, such as drugs and alcohol treatment, sexual health services, public mental health, early years support, weight management and stop smoking services. These cuts have damaged the public health leadership and capacity needed to create healthy places, tackle health inequalities and control COVID-19.

Cuts to local public health are a false economy. Unless we boost local public health funding, our health and care system will remain locked in a ‘treatment’ approach, which is neither sustainable nor protects the health of the population as it should. Years of disinvestment in public health has left our nation, and particularly the most vulnerable communities, at risk – the pandemic has only highlighted how deep the cracks run.

It will simply not be possible to increase health life expectancy, reduce health inequalities and both manage and recover from COVID-19 if local public health teams cannot provide vital public health and preventative functions and services.

Valuing public health means investing in public health. After five years of cuts to public health – and facing a long recovery period from the pandemic - we urge the Government to do just that and increase funding for local public health in England.

If not now, then when?

Signed by:

Action on Smoking and Health
Alcohol Change UK
Alcohol Health Alliance UK
Alzheimer’s Research UK
Association of Directors of Public Health
Asthma UK and British Lung Foundation
BASHH (British Association for Sexual Health and HIV)
British Dental Association
British Dietetic Association
British Heart Foundation
British HIV Association (BHIVA)
Brook
Cancer Research UK
Centre for Mental Health
Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
Children’s Liver Disease Foundation
Collective Voice

County Councils Network
Diabetes UK
Faculty of Public Health
Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare
First Steps Nutrition
Food Active
Fresh (Making Smoking History)
Health Action Campaign
Henry
Institute of Health Promotion and Education
Institute of Health Visiting
Kidney Research UK
Local Government Association
Mental Health First Aid England
Mental Health Foundation
Mind
National AIDS Trust
National Kidney Federation
National Voices
Northern Health Science Alliance
Obesity Health Alliance
Patients Association
Positive East
Release
Royal College of Nursing
School and Public Health Nurses Association
SMMGP
Society and College of Radiographers
Terrence Higgins Trust
UK Association for the Study of Obesity (ASO)
Versus Arthritis
World Cancer Research Fund UK