

Tim Loughton M.P.  
East Worthing and Shoreham



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

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

14 February 2019

Dear Matt

**INCLUSION OF EARLY RELATIONSHIPS IN THE PREVENTION GREEN PAPER**

I understand that officials in your Department have begun work on the Prevention Green Paper and therefore felt it timely to remind you of the strong case to take a life-course approach to prevention which recognises the critical importance of the first 1001 days of life from conception to age 2.

As Chair of the 'Conception to Age 2' and 'Children's' All-Party Parliamentary Groups and a long-term champion of children and families, I very much welcome your personal commitment to prevention and early intervention. I was heartened to see some recognition of the importance of early experiences in the *Prevention is Better than Cure* policy paper.

There is incredibly strong evidence, as I'm sure you are aware, that children who experience early adversity have a greater likelihood of going on to suffer from the poor health outcomes. The Prevention Green Paper is likely to focus on this problem including mental illness, drinking, smoking, heart disease and type 2 diabetes. There is also growing evidence from long-term follow up studies of early intervention programmes in the USA, that effective interventions with families in the earlier years of life have long-term health benefits for both mothers and their children.

The research shows us that whilst exposure to stressors or adversity in early life can have long-term negative impacts, a strong, stable relationship with a responsive parent or other caregiver can be hugely protective. Such relationships nurture early brain development, which lays the foundations for the child's social, emotional and cognitive development and later health and wellbeing. As the National Scientific Council on the Developing Child in America stated, "*Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development.*"

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The East Worthing and Shoreham Constituency includes  
Coombes, Fishersgate, Kingston Buci, Lancing, Shoreham, Sompting, Southwick,  
and the eastern wards of Worthing: Broadwater, Gaisford, Offington and Selden.

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Supporting early relationships between babies and their parents gives children the best start in life, putting them on a positive developmental trajectory. It also makes economic sense. As you have recognised, whilst the impacts of early adversity can generally be overcome, late intervention is often both harder and more costly. Nobel economist James Heckman has shown that money spent on interventions in the first 1001 days bring the greatest dividends.

Children develop fastest in the womb and early years of life, which is why early experiences make such a big difference. If their emotional environment causes a baby to feel unsafe or fearful, this can lead to 'toxic' stress, which disrupts both brain and physical development. Early toxic stress is associated with a wider range of poor physical and mental health outcomes, with costs to individuals, families, communities and the public purse. Conversely, nurturing relationships help babies to become more resilient and improve later outcomes.

There is a compelling case that the Government's strategy for preventing mental and physical health problems should take a life-course approach, paying particular attention to tackling adversity and supporting relationships in early life. Should you or your officials wish to explore this issue and the underlying evidence base in more detail, I would be very happy to bring together leading academics and practitioners for a joint meeting.

It offers a 'double whammy' for both children and for Government; the prospect of better balanced and healthy children starting their journey through school and life and succeeding better as a result and the significant financial saving from not having to fund the consequences of continuing to get it wrong.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'li', with a long horizontal line underneath it.

***Tim Loughton MP***