



**We call on all political parties to commit to transforming support for children and their families in the first 1001 days of life**

**Specifically, we would like to see all parties commit to the following actions, if elected:**

**Make children a priority from conception onwards**

- Develop an ambitious cross-government strategy for improving outcomes for all children, beginning at (or even before) conception.
- Appoint a cabinet-level Children's Minister accountable for driving the delivery of this strategy, supported by a cross-government cabinet committee.
- Ensure all relevant government departments use the levers available to them<sup>1</sup> to encourage local services to make babies and children a priority and to incentivise and enable partnership working at a local level.

**Invest in the "age of opportunity"**

- Ensure there is improved, long-term funding for universal, targeted and specialised public and voluntary sector services which can support the important relationships between parents and their children in the first 1001 days of life. This includes, but is not limited to, services such as health visiting, Family Nurse Partnership and specialised parent-infant relationship services.
- Ensure there is a well-trained workforce to deliver these services with the capacity, capability and skill mix to support children, parents and families during the first 1001 days. This includes investing in workforce development where necessary.
- Hold local commissioners to account for the quality and sufficiency of services for children and families from conception to age two in their area, including health visiting and CAMHS provision.

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<sup>1</sup> Levers might include guidance, funding streams, accountability mechanisms and performance indicators.

## The Case for Action

1.4 million children in the UK are currently aged two and under (with more still to be born). These children are the most vulnerable members of our society and the easiest to ignore. But we ignore them at our peril. They are our future: their wellbeing and development lays the foundations for future outcomes. Investment in babies' emotional wellbeing is investment in the physical and mental health of the next generation, and the future of our communities, society and the economy.

Research shows us that what happens in the first 1001 days of a child's life, from conception to age two, is key to enabling that child to survive and thrive<sup>i</sup>. Children's brains develop fastest and are at their most adaptable in the womb and early years of life. This is when the foundations are laid for later development. By supporting early development, we have the opportunity to put children on a positive developmental trajectory, better able to take advantage of other opportunities that lie ahead. Conversely, if babies have a difficult start it can have pervasive effects on multiple domains of child development<sup>ii</sup>, with later impacts on education, employment and adult relationships. Early traumatic experiences are associated with an increased risk of a wide range of poor physical and mental health outcomes<sup>iii</sup>, including major public health issues such as depression, cancer and dementia, with costs to individuals, families, communities and the public purse<sup>iv</sup>.

"The period from pregnancy to age 3 is when children are most susceptible to environmental influences. Investing in this period is one of the most efficient and effective ways to help eliminate extreme poverty and inequality, boost shared prosperity, and create the human capital needed for economies to diversify and grow." <sup>v</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unicef, World Bank and World Health Organisation Nurturing Care Framework.

Economists have shown that money spent on interventions in early life brings the greatest dividends<sup>vi</sup>. It is relatively easier and more effective to act early, rather than pick up the pieces when problems occur <sup>vii</sup>. Effective early action also leads to accumulated savings by preventing other services being required later in the child's life, and improves the child and family's participation in the economy

"Investing in early childhood development is good for everyone – governments, businesses, communities, parents and caregivers, and most of all, babies and young children. It is also the right thing to do, helping every child realize the right to survive and thrive. And investing in ECD is cost effective: For every \$1 spent on early childhood development interventions, the return on investment can be as high as \$13." <sup>v</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Unicef, World Bank and World Health Organisation Nurturing Care Framework.

Despite the incredible importance of the first 1001 days, babies are often forgotten about and easily ignored. Whilst children from birth to age two should receive an equal – or even a greater share – of attention, spending and service provision, they often miss out. Huge numbers of services for the youngest children have been cut in the last decade.

- Funding allocated to local authorities for early intervention **fell by 64%** between 2010 and 2017<sup>viii</sup>
- Figures suggest that **over 1000** Children's Centres have closed since 2009<sup>viii</sup>
- There has been a **30% reduction** in health visitors in England's NHS between 2015 and 2019<sup>ix</sup>
- The Health Select Committee found "**significant variation** in the way that local areas prioritise and support families in the first 1000 days"<sup>x</sup>
- **65% of families** in England are not formally seeing a health visitor at all after their baby is eight weeks old. If they do have a face-to-face contact, they may be seeing other early years workers with less training in identifying relevant risks<sup>x</sup>.
- In **42% of Clinical Commissioning Group** (CCG) areas in England CAMHS services do not accept referrals for children aged two and under. Even where services might -on paper - accept referrals, many do not actually see many children in this age range<sup>xi</sup>.
- At its peak in 2016, the Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) was delivered in 132 local authorities in England, and is currently reportedly **delivered in 77**<sup>x</sup>
- Government's approaches to children's mental health, obesity and even childcare focus more on interventions **after age two** than earlier in the first 1000 days<sup>x</sup>
- Public spending in the United Kingdom increases proportionately **as children get older** <sup>xii</sup>

**The next Government must invest in our future, by giving every child a strong foundation in the earliest years of life.**

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<sup>i</sup> <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/inbrief-the-foundations-of-lifelong-health/>

<sup>ii</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2005/2014). *Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper No. 3.*

<sup>iii</sup> Hambrick et al (2019) <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnbeh.2019.00183/full>

<sup>iv</sup> National Scientific Council on the Developing Child (2005/2014). *Excessive Stress Disrupts the Architecture of the Developing Brain: Working Paper No. 3. Updated Edition.* From [www.developingchild.harvard.edu](http://www.developingchild.harvard.edu).

<sup>v</sup> Unicef, World Bank and World Health Organisation Nurturing Care Framework.

<sup>vi</sup> <https://heckmanequation.org/>

<sup>vii</sup> Early Intervention Foundation (2016) The Cost of Late Intervention <https://www.eif.org.uk/files/pdf/cost-of-late-intervention-2016.pdf>

<sup>viii</sup> Smith, G., Sylva, E., Smith, T., Sammons, P., & Omonigho, A. (2018). Stop Start: Survival, decline or closure. *Children's centres in England.*

<sup>ix</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-workforce-statistics/april-2019#summary>

<sup>x</sup> House of Commons Health and Social Care Select Committee (2019) First 1000 days of life Thirteenth Report of Session 2017–19

<sup>xi</sup> Parent Infant Partnership UK (2019) *Rare Jewels*

<sup>xii</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 'Doing better for Families', 27 April 2011