



**Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London SW1A 2AA**

2 October 2024

Dear Prime Minister,

Every year in this country thousands of babies are born into precarious circumstances, in need of care and support to achieve their potential.

Repeated studies have shown that the early years are crucial for healthy development, and services such as the Start for Life programme and its predecessor Sure Start nurture parents and their babies during this time.

But without urgent government action, **there is a risk of current funding for Start for Life disappearing after April 2025.**

The programme helps ensure the emotional and physical wellbeing of babies is supported, with specialist services including parent-infant relationship teams, breastfeeding support programmes and the bringing together of other services through Family Hubs. With funding set to end soon, countless families are uncertain where they will turn for help.

Our survey of local authorities and clinical leaders found **unanimous support** for the Start for Life programme. Research has consistently shown that early intervention yields long-term benefits for children, families and society.

According to government estimates, at least 10% of babies are living in fear and distress—at risk of 'disorganised attachment'. By supporting vulnerable babies in their first 1,001 days, we can prevent a host of future challenges, from mental health issues to poor educational outcomes.

**Now is the time for your government to act.**

We urge you to extend the Start for Life programme beyond 2025. We ask for a national roll-out so that the programme can extend its reach to all English local authorities and in turn many more vulnerable babies, parents and carers.

As the Children's Charities Coalition points out, early intervention spending has dropped by 44% since 2022, while spending on late intervention services increased by 57%. This is unsustainable and leads to higher long-term costs.

A recent analysis commissioned by The Royal Foundation Centre for Early Childhood estimates that prioritising early childhood development could add **£45.5 billion** annually to the UK economy. Inadequate early years support costs England over **£16 billion annually.**

The Start for Life programme has already shown strong cost-effectiveness. For every **£1** invested in parent-infant teams, **£13.18** is saved across multiple sectors, including health, social care, and education. Investing **£100m** in perinatal mental health and parent-infant support will address the estimated **£8.1 billion** long-term costs of perinatal mental health problems.

Therefore, we also recommend an additional **£70.7 million over the next three years** to ensure that every local authority can develop at least one parent-infant team, reaching 23,600 vulnerable babies annually by 2027/28. And to allocate **£78m** annually so that all local authorities provide high-quality breastfeeding support.

If the government fails to act, the consequences will be devastating. The loss of these services will leave vulnerable babies at risk and place an even greater burden on an already overstretched NHS and social care system.

In correspondence with our campaign, both the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and the Secretary of State for Education have acknowledged the significance of the Start for Life programme. And in its election manifesto, Labour committed to giving everyone the best start in life.

By protecting and expanding the Start for Life programme, you can ensure that every baby in England gets the best possible start in life and meet your own ambitious goal of raising the healthiest generation of children ever.

We urge you to act swiftly and decisively to secure Start for Life's future.

Yours sincerely,



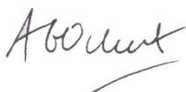
Keith Reed, Chief Executive, Parent-Infant Foundation



Anna Feuchtwang, Chief Executive, National Children's Bureau



Peter Grigg, Chief Executive, Home-Start UK



Ayala Ochert, Director of Better Breastfeeding, on behalf of the Breastfeeding Alliance