

## Prevention Inquiry Call for Proposals

### A dedicated focus on young people

Prevention of ill health starts in early life. Ensuring positive health outcomes in childhood and adolescence will result in healthier populations and outcomes across the life course. The World Health Organisation have identified a “triple dividend” from investing resources in adolescence by improving the health of young people in the present, enabling them to become healthy adults, and teaching them positive behaviours to pass on to future children and generations<sup>1</sup>.

It is imperative that the Health and Social Care Select Committee’s Inquiry into prevention has a strong focus on meeting the health and wellbeing needs of children and young people. At the Association for Young People’s Health (AYPH), young people are defined as those falling into the 10-25 age range. Many long term conditions are established during this period (such as asthma and diabetes) and health behaviours become embedded (such as sleep, diet and exercise).

Key issues that require early intervention during this period include mental health and obesity. Research has shown that 75% of mental health conditions are established before young people reach the age of 24<sup>2</sup>. Nearly a quarter (23.4%) of young people aged 10-11 are classified as obese<sup>3</sup>. We are storing up problems for our young people, society and health services if we do not take urgent action to tackle these public health concerns.

Government action is necessary to ensure the specific needs of this age group are understood and prioritised within prevention strategies. Often young people are overlooked within policies or frameworks that are either all-age or focused on the early-years of life. Funding should prioritise community based initiatives to develop youth friendly healthcare services. There are a number of successful models of combined youth work and primary health services<sup>4,5</sup>. These complement wider calls to Fund the Hubs<sup>6</sup> to provide early access to mental health and wellbeing support for young people in their local communities. Youth Access’ YIACS model offers wellbeing and counselling support for young people across the UK<sup>7</sup>. Further resource and investment is needed to support these initiatives. Currently funding is directed towards meeting the increasing pressures in acute care, as many young people reach services at crisis level with no or limited previous access to support.

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation (2018) *Adolescent Health: The Missing Population in Universal Health Coverage*. Switzerland: WHO.

<sup>2</sup> Kessler, R.C. et al. (2005) ‘Lifetime prevalence and age-of-onset distributions of DSM-IV disorders in the national comorbidity survey replication’, *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 62(6), pp.593-602.

<sup>3</sup> Baker, C. (2023) *Research briefing: Obesity statistics*. UK Government: House of Commons Library.

<sup>4</sup> The Well Centre: <https://www.thewellcentre.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Healthspot: <https://wearespotlight.com/news/health-spot-has-landed/>

<sup>6</sup> Fund the Hubs: <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/campaigns/children-and-young-people-s-mental-health/fund-the-hubs/>

<sup>7</sup> Youth Access YIACS model: <https://www.youthaccess.org.uk/our-network/what-yiacs>

### **A dedicated focus on health inequalities**

Health inequalities are the avoidable and unfair differences in health outcomes between individuals or groups within society<sup>8</sup>. Inequalities in health are embedded in adolescence - young people living in the most deprived areas of England are two times more likely to be obese and 1.3 times more likely to have a diagnosed mental health disorder, in comparison to young people living in the least deprived areas<sup>9</sup>. These inequalities are preventable and all young people have the right to lead healthy lives.

The Inquiry must focus on young people's health inequalities, including increasing understanding of how the issue affects this age group and developing solutions to take action to reduce health inequalities. There are specific groups of young people who are more likely to experience inequalities and may require targeted interventions and support. These include ethnic minority young people, care experienced young people, LGBTQ+ young people and homeless young people – although this list is not exhaustive.

Health inequalities are caused by structural and systemic economic inequalities within society, which requires Government action to solve. It is important that the Inquiry focuses on addressing the wider determinants of health, rather than encouraging action through individual lifestyle changes. A potential priority area for the Inquiry is in creating healthy environments for young people, including increased provision of safe spaces and green places, suitable housing, meaningful employment opportunities and supportive education environments. As a member of the Inequalities in Health Alliance (IHA) we support calls for a cross-government strategy to reduce health inequalities<sup>10</sup>. This approach recognises that inequalities are caused by a range of varied factors and so health and social care cannot be solely responsible for tackling the issue. At AYPH we have developed a suite of resources to increase understanding of young people's experiences of health inequalities<sup>11</sup>. Our work has included speaking to young people from socio-economically deprived communities across the UK<sup>12</sup>, which informed the development of a toolkit for young people and lesson plans for teachers to better understand how inequality affects young people and what actions can be taken to reduce them<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> NHS England (2023) "What are healthcare inequalities?" [Available online at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/national-healthcare-inequalities-improvement-programme/what-are-healthcare-inequalities/>]

<sup>9</sup> AYPH (2022) Youth Health Data Hub [Available online at: <https://ayph-youthhealthdata.org.uk/health-inequalities/>]

<sup>10</sup> Inequalities in Health Alliance: <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/inequalities-health-alliance>

<sup>11</sup> AYPH health inequalities resources: <https://ayph.org.uk/ayphs-health-inequalities-programme-2/>

<sup>12</sup> Fairbrother, H. et al. (2022) "It all kind of links really": Young people's perspectives on the relationship between socioeconomic circumstances and health', *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(6), pp.3679.

<sup>13</sup> AYPH health inequalities toolkit and PSHE lesson plans: <https://ayph.org.uk/a-fair-and-equal-opportunity-to-enjoy-good-health/>

### About AYPH

The Association for Young People's Health works to understand and meet the particular health and wellbeing needs of 10-25 year olds.

We want all young people to have the best possible health and equal access to high quality youth friendly services.

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