

## **AYPH response to Labour Party consultation into prevention, early intervention and better public services consultation**

The Association for Young People's Health (AYPH) works to better understand and meet the health and wellbeing needs of 10-25 year olds across the UK. We welcome the opportunity to feed into the Labour party's Policy Forum to raise the profile of young people and ensure their needs are met within future Labour party policy priorities. Our response has been submitted to the policy commission exploring 'public services that work from the start', though expect there to be relevant points across the different commissions.

### **Prevention must include young people**

Government action is necessary to ensure the specific needs of young people aged 10-25 are understood and prioritised within public health and prevention strategies. Often young people are overlooked within policies or frameworks that are either all-age or focused on the early-years of life, despite adolescence being a key period of development.

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. 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](#). Nearly a [quarter \(23.4%\) of young people aged 10-11 are classified as obese](#). 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.

We support calls to prioritise community based initiatives to further the prevention agenda. There are a number of successful models of combined youth work and primary health services<sup>1,2</sup>. These complement wider calls to [Fund the Hubs](#) to provide early access to mental health and wellbeing support for young people in their local communities.

We also support efforts to ensure the prevention agenda is embedded within schools and education settings, where young people spend much of their time. It is important that there are whole-school approaches to promoting positive mental health and wider healthy lifestyles. PSHE, SRE and health education are vitally important for embedding prevention into the curriculum and for shaping young people's understanding of health and wellbeing.

### **Dedicated focus on health inequalities**

At AYPH, we have developed a suite of [resources to increase understanding of young people's experiences of health inequalities](#). 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

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<sup>1</sup> The Well Centre: <https://www.thewellcentre.org/>

<sup>2</sup> Healthspot: <https://wearespotlight.com/news/health-spot-has-landed/>

in the least deprived areas. We know that Covid-19 and the cost of living crisis have exposed [worsening inequality](#) among young people, with rising poverty rates. The number of secondary school pupils on [Free School Meals has increased from 12.4% in 2018 to 20.9% in 2022](#).

There are specific groups of young people who are more likely to experience inequalities and may require targeted interventions. These include ethnic minority young people, care experienced young people, LGBTQ+ young people and homeless young people – although this list is not exhaustive. At AYPH, we have heard from young people from ethnic minority backgrounds who shared with us their [everyday experiences of racism and micro-aggressions](#), which at times prevent them from leading healthy lives. We have also written on the topic of [young women's health inequalities](#).

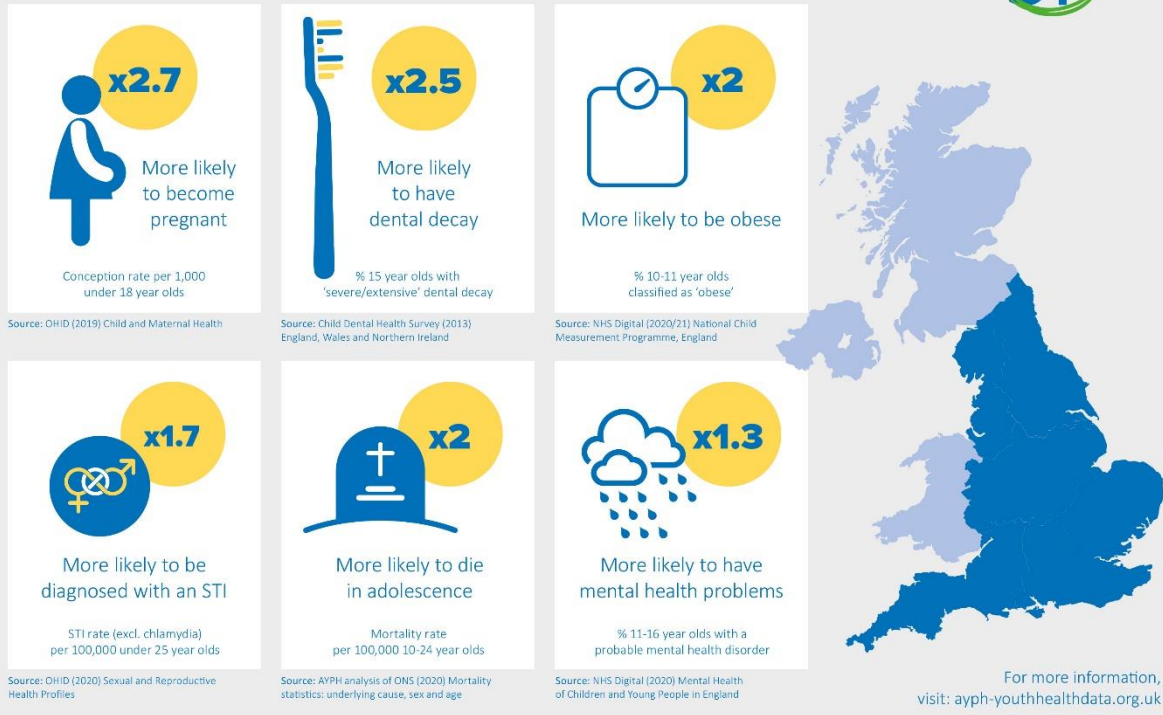
[Prevention in adolescence](#) is key to reducing inequalities and all young people have the right to lead healthy lives. We know that many of the drivers of young people's health and the causes of health inequalities lie outside of health - funding the NHS alone won't provide a solution to reducing young people's health inequalities. Alongside the [Inequalities in Health Alliance](#), we call for a national strategy to reduce health inequalities. It is important that the focus is on addressing the wider determinants of health (e.g. education, employment, housing), rather than encouraging action through individual lifestyle changes.

### **Increase funding for public health services**

Many of the services that support young people sit within Local Authority public health teams. This includes sexual health services, the national child measurement programme in secondary schools, smoking cessation services, alcohol and drug misuse services and violence reduction units. It is clear that public health teams play a vital role in young people's health promotion. Currently, [the public health grant is £1 billion lower \(in real terms per capita\) than it was in 2015/16](#). Reductions in funding have been [higher in the poorest areas of the country](#), negatively affecting health inequalities. Levels need to be restored if we are serious about tackling young people's growing health inequalities. There must be long term investment so that local authorities can effectively plan ahead for the future.

Youth clubs provide an invaluable service where young people develop trusting relationships with professionals and can directly support young people to engage with health services. They provide protective environments that encourage positive wellbeing among young people. Significant drops in funding for youth services between 2010/11 and 2018/19 led to the [closure of 750 youth centres](#). Due to Covid-19, [83% of youth organisations have reported a decrease in income](#), threatening the ability for other services to remain open. Research from UK Youth has found that [for every £1 the government invests in youth work, the benefit to the taxpayer is between £3.20 and £6.40](#).

Compared to young people who live in the least deprived areas in England, young people who live in the most deprived areas are:



### 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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