

News links from July 2021

Our Working Groups are underway

July saw the first of four Working Groups launched by The Children First Alliance. The groups, the first of which addresses **Early Years**, will produce comprehensive policy blueprints for Government action to halt and then reverse the serious damaging trends in the health and wellbeing of children and young people both pre- and post-Covid.

The second group - addressing the Physical Health of Children - will be launched at a Zoom meeting on **7 September**. [Please contact us](#) if you would like to participate.

The National Food Strategy

The [National Food Strategy](#) was published in July with four main objectives proposed:

- *escaping the junk food cycle to protect the NHS*
 - *reducing diet-related inequality*
- *making the best use of Britain's land and protecting the environment*
- *creating a long-term shift in UK food culture.*

[Read the Plan](#) [See Recommendations](#)

The launch of the Plan was widely reported in the media, with much attention being paid to the proposal of a **Sugar and Salt Reformulation Tax** to incentivise manufacturers to reduce levels in their products. Read more from [Daily Mail](#), [The Guardian](#) and [BBC News](#).

[The Food Foundation](#) welcomed the proposals. Read their detailed response [here](#).

The Government has six months to respond to the Plan.

Eating Disorders

There has been almost a doubling of young people hospitalised with eating disorders in England during the pandemic: 3,200 in the past year.

Services are struggling to keep up with the demand and the waiting list has tripled to 1,500. [Read more here.](#)

Obesity

Adults and children with obesity in England can now be referred to new weight management services provided by the [NHS Digital Weight Management Programme](#), launched in July. The programme supports adults living with obesity who also have a diagnosis of diabetes or hypertension or both, to manage their weight and improve their health.

Read the House of Commons Library's briefing on Obesity [here](#).

Early Years Commission Recommendations

A new report from the [Early Years Commission](#) puts forward a number of recommendations to transform the lives of our youngest children, including a significant shake up in parental leave rights and major support for the youngest children and their parents as part of the government's 'levelling up' response post-Covid-19.

The Commission was set up to explore how to improve services for children from conception to age five and comes at a time when the spotlight is on policy to support the youngest children. It aligns with the work of Andrea Leadsom's review [Start for Life](#), and other early years commentary.

[Download the report](#)

The Digital World

Discussion continued in July about how to make the internet safe for children. The [5Rights Foundation](#) reported on the ways that web design leads to children being targeted on the internet simply by clicking links: [read more here](#).

[Internet Matters](#) commissioned a study into how we define digital wellbeing in families: [read the results here](#).

Is it possible anyway to make the internet safe for children? A Guardian [podcast](#) and Observer [article](#) discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the ways this could be achieved.

A comprehensive list of links to a wide range of reactions to the [draft online safety bill](#) was published in July by the [House of Commons Library](#). Responses from organisations, charities, NGOs and the media can be found [here](#).

Childcare

Childcare was in the news in July due to a mix of parents returning to the office and the end of the school term. A [TUC Survey](#) found that two thirds of working mothers don't have enough childcare for school holidays and called on the Government to take action. There was also bad news for parents of younger children: more than 11,000 places have been lost through nursery closures. [Read more.](#)

Read the [House of Commons Library briefing](#) on the financial support available for childcare costs.

Children “in care”

The [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) was set up in 2015 because of serious concerns that some organisations had failed and were continuing to fail to protect children from sexual abuse. In July 2021 they reported on children in the care of Lambeth Council.

The appalling and shameful findings are [here](#).

Mental Health

The Covid pandemic continued to take its toll on the mental health of children and young people, with the [Guardian reporting](#) that an increase in youth violence, brought on by pandemic frustrations, has already started and is predicted to erupt over the summer.

Vicky Ford MP, Children and Families Minister, wrote a letter of thanks to all schools in mid July and set out some of the resources that will be available to them from September. [Read more here](#). Separately, the effectiveness of school-based interventions was reviewed by the [Early Intervention Foundation](#).

[Mind](#)'s latest report "[Not Making the Grade](#)" found that young people aren't getting the mental health support they need. 96% of respondents said their mental health had affected their schoolwork at some point, and [The British Psychological Society](#) presented [a survey](#) that found that over 30% of young people's mental health was much worse than before. According to an Observer [report](#), parents are not getting the necessary help even after a child attempts suicide. The increase in demand has led to a surge of self-funded patients, with private psychiatrists reporting a tripling of numbers and a worsening in the severity and complexity of conditions. [Read more](#).

[The Centre for Mental Health](#) reported that the pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in mental health in the UK: those with pre-existing mental illness, young people, women and some racialised communities are among the most likely to experience worse mental health impacts. However, longstanding limitations in mental health research mean that the necessary evidence to inform responses to the population's starkly unequal mental health needs just isn't there, and worsened inequality in mental health outcomes in the UK will be the result if these weaknesses are not addressed. [Read more here](#).