

New focus on babies' and children's health as review launches

- Early Years Health Adviser Andrea Leadsom MP to lead new review commissioned by the Prime Minister into improving health outcomes of babies and young children
- The review will consider the barriers that impact on early-years development, including social and emotional factors and early childhood experiences
- The review's findings will inform the government's 'levelling up' agenda

Led by Early Years Health Adviser Andrea Leadsom MP, the review will look at reducing inequalities in young children from birth to age 2-and-a-half, aiming to ensure every baby is given the best possible start in life.

The first 1,000 days of childhood are critical for development, and have a significant impact on physical health, mental health and opportunity throughout life.

However, children living in households in the lowest socio-economic groups have significantly worse health outcomes than other children. These can be caused by stress and smoking in pregnancy, as well as communication problems due to language inequalities.

The review is part of the government's commitment to levelling up the country and helping every child reach their full potential.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

All parents aspire to provide their children with the best possible start in life and this government is committed to ensuring that no child is left behind.

Everybody should have a solid foundation on which to build their health and this review will look to reduce the barriers and improve early childhood experiences.

We are determined to level up the opportunities for children, no matter where they come from or grow up.

Early Years Health Adviser Andrea Leadsom MP said:

Ensuring that every baby has the best start in life is my passion in politics and I am delighted to be asked by the Prime Minister to chair a review of early-years services on behalf of the government.

Infant mental health is about more than babies. It's about improving our whole lives and striving for better outcomes that

have a profound effect from cradle to grave.

The review will seek to show how to reduce disparities in low birth weight, social and emotional development in early years, and reduce impacts of vulnerability and adverse childhood experiences in this stage of life.

Research from NHS England suggests that 1 in 5 mums and 1 in 10 dads experience mental health problems during pregnancy and after birth. Pregnancy can often be a trigger for domestic abuse, with between 15% and 30% of domestic violence cases starting during this time.

Understanding lessons learned from COVID-19, including minimising the risks from the pandemic to very young children, and better using technology, the government will work with academics, health professionals and other experts to identify policies and services that will improve the outcomes for vulnerable babies, children and their families.

Health Minister Jo Churchill said:

Most babies are born healthy and enjoy a safe and nurturing childhood. We know the first 1,000 days of a child's life is critical, providing a solid foundation as children for growth and development throughout their lives.

However, some do not have the same advantages. We want to remove barriers so that all babies and young children are supported and nurtured to be ready for school and ready for life.

This review will help ensure every child has an opportunity to thrive, regardless of their background and achieve their potential. We look forward to receiving Andrea Leadsom MP's recommendations.

As part of the next phase of the review, Andrea Leadsom MP will be engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. These include independent academic experts, maternity and children's specialists, leading commissioners, service providers and professionals, and parliamentarians.

Building on conclusions from the Inter-Ministerial Group on Early Years Family Support, Andrea Leadsom MP is expected to submit her findings and policy recommendations from the first phase of the Review into Early Years Health in January 2021. This will contribute to the government's vision for excellence in early-years health.

In July 2019, the government launched the green paper [Advancing our health: prevention in the 2020s](#). This made a commitment to support parents and modernise the Healthy Child Programme to enable effective services to those who are in need.

The government is investing more than £3.6 billion in 2020 to 2021 on free early-education entitlements, helping parents to work more flexibly and

supporting children's early development. This includes:

- the universal offer for every 3 and 4-year-old of 15 hours per week of early education, as well as for the most deprived 2-year-olds
- our 30 hours offer for working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds

The government is also investing in early-years organisations to help them boost disadvantaged children's development, with grants targeted at improving outcomes for young children at risk of falling behind by age 5, and for those with special educational needs.